

The New Negro:
Harry T. Burleigh and Black Art Music
in Jim Crow New York (1890s - 1930s)



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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

Hilary Term, 2025

Acknowledgements

While it is normal to thank family for their support during the long process of thesis writing, my family and I faced particular obstacles along the way. My husband, Steven, who passed away in 2019, was a stalwart champion of my journey working on Burleigh. While grieving, Covid descended on us, adding further challenges. Through it all, though, my children continued to trust my calling and encouraged me toward the finish line.

I am dubious whether I could have finished without the kindness and mentoring of my supervisor, Dr. Mara L. Keire, a faithful friend, truthful reader, editor, and mentor. Ultimately her pastoral care shepherded me through the darkness of grief, and when I felt I had lost my way she gently guided me back on track. I leaned heavily on her belief in me and my project when I could not see a way forward.

Dr. Jean E. Snyder, Burleigh's biographer, has become a close friend and mentor. She freely shared resources from her archive that would otherwise have been unavailable to me. More significantly, she believed that my particular perspective brought increased depth and understanding to the impact of Burleigh's life and work on American culture.

To my many dear friends who lifted me up when I was low, hugged me when I needed it, and cheered me on, I am grateful beyond words for your kindness, generosity, and sharing your deep emotional and spiritual nourishment during this long process of finding my voice and confidence for this unorthodox journey.

Harry, wherever you are, I hope this work brings more awareness of your beautiful music. And in this disturbing and dangerous time in American history, may your words of hope find new resonance "that eventually deliverance from all that hinders and oppresses the soul will come, and man – every man – will be free." May music foster, as you hoped, justice, equity, and recognition of one another as fellow beloved members of the human family.

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¹ Merton Robert Aborn, *The Influence on American Musical Culture of Dvořák’s Sojourn in America* (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1965. University Microfilms, Ann Arbor), 247.

² *Ibid.*, 266.

³ “Complete Program of W. T. Talbert.”

⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Farewell Concert of Sissieretta Jones, the Black Patti” (Carnegie Hall, June 15, 1892), CH1325933, Carnegie Hall Archives, Programs Collection.

⁵ “A Sable Surprise,” in *World’s Fair Puck* (Keppler & Schwarzmann, 1893), 7–8.

⁶ St. George’s Episcopal Church, “St. George’s Men’s Club Minstrel Show,” February 21, 1909, February 7, 1907, February 20, 1908, December 10, 1909, 1911, 10.

⁷ Jean E. Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance* (University of Illinois Press, 2016), 205.

⁸ Harry T. Burleigh, Portrait; Mary B. Talbert Photograph Collection, n.d., Photograph., n.d., T35, Folder 12. Buffalo History Museum.

⁹ Harry T. Burleigh, “Deep River, Old Negro Melody” (G. Ricordi & Co., 1917), M1671.D, Notated Music, Music Division, Library of Congress Burleigh.

¹⁰ “Musical America,” *Musical America*, 1917, 43.

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¹¹ Harry T. Burleigh, "My Trips Abroad 1908–1937," unpublished, n.d. VF 2020.334, Burleigh Memorial Center, Mercyhurst," 56–7.

¹² "New York Passenger and Crew Lists."

¹³ Harry T. Burleigh, "In Christ There Is No East Nor West" (American Tract Society, 1940) LOC, 1617.B, Box E-L, Folder I.

Short Abstract

This thesis examines how the singer and composer Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949) became the first Black American to sustain a successful career within the White art music establishment. As such, he was a central figure in the first freeborn, educated generation of African American culturemakers at the dawn of the twentieth century whose contribution is underestimated and invisible to White historical imagination. This thesis argues Burleigh's impact on American music in the first decades of the century prepared the ground for the creative flourishing of the Harlem Renaissance. My research builds on biographical scholarship of New York figures during this period and prioritizes the Black Press, the best chroniclers of his career.

Burleigh built a stable career by agilely securing many income streams by earning the respect and support of various White gatekeepers and institutions. Though a singer by vocation, eventually a compositional career became his most enduring legacy. Deeply influenced by German and German-trained musicians who dominated musical institutions, their *Bildung* philosophy shaped his approach to "the divine art" of music-making.

After obtaining financial security as a founding member of ASCAP, Burleigh's crafted, complex art songs became the repertoire of leading White concert singers. During World War I, when German-language *Lieder* was shunned, Burleigh's significant intervention in American art music was the Negro art song spiritual. This fresh repertoire materially assisted the careers of rising leading Black concert singers. Burleigh's popular and financial success inspired composers and literary figures in the Harlem Renaissance to bring Black voices and narratives into their art. As his career wound down, Burleigh was an elder statesman and mentor in this period to those carrying forward his liberatory effort to center Black culture and history in American musical literature.

Extended Abstract

In the long freedom struggle of Black Americans at the turn of the 20th century, pursuing an artistic life had particular impediments. White people had a proprietary sense of what form Black art should and ought not to take. Black participation in minstrelsy, for example, was acceptable, but not Black Shakespearean or opera singers competing on ground considered the purview of Whites. Additionally, White folks were gatekeepers of most artistic institutions.

Black artists faced additional White exclusionist policies that led to financial inequity. So they innovated to satisfy their artistic goals while creating what appealed to White publishers, impresarios, and consumers. As James Weldon Johnson wrote in his 1928 essay, “The Dilemma of the Negro Author,” no one could succeed artistically by ignoring nine-tenths of the American audience. White America held economic power to buy what Black artists performed and produced.

“An Uplifted Voice: Harry T. Burleigh and the Music of Freedom in Jim Crow New York” examines this financial conundrum Burleigh faced in pursuit of an artistic life: how to navigate White supremacist exclusion and inequity to build a financially viable career. This thesis argues Burleigh was the first Black American to have a successful and sustained career within the White art music industry through a combination of surpassing musical talent, teachability, language facility, collegiality, savoir-faire, and relentless work ethic.

These qualities engendered powerful friends in the industry and enabled Burleigh’s fluidity through barriers others found insuperable. These White supporters opened doors for patronage, concertizing, and publishing over time yielding financial sustainability. That security enabled him to remain in art music even as many of his talented and highly trained Black colleagues left the field for popular music and musical theatre to make a living. His staying power in the White art music industry, combined with his brilliant musicianship,

made him an influential figure in American music in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Burleigh was not the first qualified Black musician to break into White art music. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century singers, composers, conductors, and instrumentalists of African descent in Europe and America are too numerous to mention here. Many carved out unique niches or had particular talents that enabled them to pursue art music. However, none had Burleigh's breadth, length, and influence through his insider status within the White art music industry.

This thesis also argues that while the Harlem Renaissance is anchored in American historical imagination as the first vibrant African American arts movement, Burleigh was part of a previous generation that laid new artistic foundations by disengaging their cultural production from the stigma and constraints of minstrelsy. His circle of gifted, creative Black artists debated, collaborated, and renovated old musical genres, like art song, or created new expressive genres in popular music, musical theatre, comedy, ragtime, and stride piano. They further solidified the central Black music as integral to American music.

This integration was not a foregone conclusion, however. Burleigh was central to the fiery debate over the centrality of Black music to American music when the Bohemian composer Antonin Dvořák, arrived in 1892 as Director of New York's National Conservatory. Burleigh and Dvořák became close friends due initially to the composer's interest in Black folk music as a source for American nationalist music. Burleigh's relationship with Dvořák is often the one aspect of Burleigh's long career that is well-known.

However, a major contribution of this thesis is the discovery of Burleigh's presence in White music culture because it illuminates how profoundly German and German-trained musicians influenced the young singer during his career formation. They dominated the faculty at the National Conservatory, filled the seats in major orchestras, and were

gatekeepers at publishing houses, performance spaces, and music criticism and journalism at a key moment in his career formation.

As a result, around tables of German restaurants, cafés, and beer halls, Burleigh imbibed nineteenth-century German philosophy, *Bildung*, that influenced his creative production. *Bildung* held that one might achieve a life of aesthetic grace by immersive, intellectual engagement with literature, art, and music. Only then might an artist produce art touching something universal about the human condition and experience. Such art achieved the power to influence and uplift culture and individuals which comported with the concepts of Black racial ideology at the turn of the century. Black Americans were responsible for “uplifting” the race through their accomplishments and service. Burleigh’s career, however, first required economic stability to continue and have such an impact.

A unique composition of background, institutions, and networks empowered Burleigh’s financial sustainability and attendant rise in American art music. *Chapter One* considers Burleigh’s educated, free-born family in Erie, Pennsylvania, who prepared him practically, educationally, religiously, and socially to interact confidently with New York’s leading figures in the White music industry when he arrived in 1892. *Chapter Two* demonstrates how the National Conservatory’s founder, the cultural entrepreneur Jeannette Thurber, created an equitable, inclusive space where Burleigh was welcomed and thrived. His family’s education, love of and training in music, strong work ethic, and work for wealthy Erie families readied Burleigh to win him the respect of the faculty respect, several of whom became lifelong friends. His charm, attractiveness, and personability also earned him the support of wealthy Black Brooklynites who supported his early singing career in New York City through their salons, churches, and social clubs.

Chapters *Three* and *Four* cover Burleigh’s well-known tutoring of Dvořák in Black music and history. But this thesis adds fresh insight into their close friendship. They wandered the city together, eating and drinking in German establishments with New York’s

music aristocracy. Around the tables of German cafés, Burleigh met White gatekeepers of New York art music establishments. Their admiration of Burleigh's talent and work ethic opened performance and publishing doors, which he was eager to enter. These opportunities created a bedrock of financial stability that enabled him to stay in the art music he trained for and loved.

Chapter Five considers how Burleigh's only direct civil rights action of his career in 1895 influenced his strategy of political engagement. After critique from both sides of the color line, he chose to express his politics through his art in the future. This choice was also likely colored by his seminal patronage position, discussed in *Chapter Six*. Burleigh was the first African American soloist in a vested, White church choir. Furthermore, this choir was in the poshest White church in New York, St. George's Episcopal, led by an influential, progressive public figure, William S. Rainsford, and its commanding Warden of the Vestry, financier J. P. Morgan. Hired in 1894, a position he held for fifty-two years, Burleigh immediately became a nationally known race exemplar of Black accomplishment. The post increased his financial stability by providing his first steady income source. St. George's connections also secured his concertizing career as he performed in Gilded Age aristocrats' salons, clubs, and summer homes. He leveraged these relationships to open doors for fellow Black performers in art music, ragtime, and popular music.

Chapter Seven looks at the relational and financial pressure attending Burleigh's marriage in 1898 to a young, aspiring entertainer, Louise Alston, which began with their unplanned pregnancy. Needing additional income streams to support his new family shifted the trajectory and choices of Burleigh's career. Between the emotional and financial strain of the precipitous union and the inherent tension of working mainly in White spaces, Burleigh desperately needed fellowship to sustain him. *Chapter Eight* illuminates Burleigh participation in creating a vibrant Black café culture centered at the Black-owned Marshall Hotel. Artists who migrated from around the country found comradery and joy as they exchanged ideas

and argued over musical aesthetics and commercial strategies. This effervescent, creative space gave Burleigh a much-needed supportive community, and in turn they benefitted from his music mastery and connections to White patrons.

Chapters Nine and Ten analyze Burleigh's compositional career using the most extensive data collection yet of his music. Layered with his relationships, personal events, and institutions he was engaged with, it becomes clear why his compositions modulated as opportunities arose, market forces changed, and his artistry production increasingly evolved to be more musically sophisticated.

Chapter Eleven is a coda to things at the end of Burleigh's career: the death of *Bildung* idealism, the dissolution of family, and his disillusionment with the White church. An aspect of Burleigh's compositional career previously unknown to scholars is discussed in *Chapter Twelve*: Burleigh's orchestration of some of his spirituals and art songs. Burleigh's use of this musical form is a logical extension of Germanic influences and musical commitments. The rediscovery of these orchestrations is an unprecedented contribution to Burleigh's studies which enables cultural Harlem Renaissance scholars to reconsider Burleigh's impact on and mentorship of the next generation of art musicians who created orchestral work, such as Margaret Bonds, Florence Price, William Grant Still, and William Dawson. Their career struggle for equity and inclusion in art music was lightened somewhat because of the path Burleigh forged in the industry.

Introduction

The singer, composer, music editor, and intellectual, Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949), was the first Black American to build and sustain a successful career in the White art music in the United States. This thesis traces the means and manner of this accomplishment. However, it also engages with how Burleigh conceptualized his contribution, and that of his fellow New York musicians of this period in the first decades of the twentieth century. Burleigh began as a young, baritone, art music singer, but over time he became integral to American music as a composer and intellectual. Burleigh's world provides much-needed reevaluation because it evidences the link between intellectual and cultural production of late nineteenth century with that of the literary movement of Harlem Renaissance and the art music literary movement which concurred and continued beyond 1935 into at least the 1950s. This thesis situates Burleigh as a bridge between two centuries and three generations and an architect of Black modernity.

Burleigh's accomplishments

Burleigh career successes and subsequent national celebrity shone brightly from the end of the late nineteenth century until he died in 1949. As a singer, Burleigh earned two decades-long sacred music singing positions in two of the wealthiest, White congregations in turn-of-the-century New York. He sang regularly at appearances with renowned Black artists and political figures. He concertised in the mansions of the White Four Hundred up and down Fifth and Park Avenue, at their summer manors on Long Island and in Newport, as well as in the lavish homes of Brooklyn's Black elites.

As an early twentieth century composer, Burleigh was well-respected and reviewed by New York's major music critics and publications whose works were performed by some of the most well-known concert singers of the period – both Black and White. Because of his exceptional musicianship, Burleigh was hired in 1911 as music editor for the revered Italian

music publisher G. Ricordi, a position he held for over thirty years. In 1914 he was a founding member of a groundbreaking musical rights organisation, the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP).

Burleigh's compositional output was prodigious. What follows is an incomplete list as copies of some of his compositions remain elusive. Burleigh oeuvre consists of 125 art songs including 3 song cycles; he co-authored 2 anthologies with major White New York music critics; he wrote instrumental pieces for violin and for piano; he composed 102 art songs spirituals, 21 pieces of choral music, and at least 9 orchestral arrangements of his art songs and spirituals. Assessment of his oeuvre shows him committed to nineteenth century European musical forms. But Burleigh used Black cultural and musical sensibilities to modernize American art music through integrating the Negro spirituals.

Burleigh's contributions were intellectual as well as musical. He tirelessly advocated for the value and beauty of Black American folk music and the music being created and performed by his fellow Black musicians. He supported Black musical and educational institutions where he spoke and sang to historicise and advocate for Black art music. Burleigh taught and mentored many aspiring Black art musicians including famous concert singers Roland Hayes, Marian Anderson, Carol Brice, and Paul Robeson.

In 1917 Burleigh was the third recipient of the Springarn Medal awarded for "the highest achievement by an American Negro in the preceding year or years" by the NAACP. He received honorary doctorates from Atlanta University in 1918 and from Howard University in 1920. In 1929, he received the Harmon Foundation award for distinguished achievement in the field of music.

In his lifetime, Burleigh was well-known in popular culture for his art song spirituals. He sang regularly on the radio and was covered at length in Black and White press including *Vogue* and *The New Yorker*. He was a friend of Fiorella Laguardia and appeared on the mayor's weekly live radio show.

The ironic invisibility of a highly visible Burleigh

In 2004 the *Black Music Research Journal* carried an article by musicologist Dr. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. titled “The Invisibility and Fame of Harry T. Burleigh: Retrospect and Prospect.” Floyd elucidates some reasons why Burleigh is vastly unremembered despite his celebrity as a major cultural figure. Therefore, this thesis does recuperative work to redress this deficit. However, it goes further to illuminate the impact this lacuna had on understanding Burleigh’s cultural and intellectual significance to the long nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth.

Recovering Burleigh’s story resituates him as a cultural and intellectual bridge figure connecting four generations, that of: Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington in the late nineteenth century, W. E. B. Du Bois and the Marshall Circle of creatives at turn of the twentieth century, the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s, and the generation of Black art music composers of the 1930s to 1960s. From the late nineteenth century Burleigh embodied racial uplift but nuanced it with the German philosophy of *Bildung*. Informed by his Americanized Black *Bildung*, Burleigh composed music to engender racial rapprochement during the era of Jim Crow segregation and racial terror. Then, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Burleigh radically modernized the European music modality of art song by integrating it Black Americans’ sacred music and narratives created under enslavement. His art song spirituals then pointed the way for Harlem Renaissance writers to intervene in European literary forms - the novel, short story, and poetry - as Burleigh had in European-informed music literature. Finally, the generation of Black art music composers, born at the turn of the twentieth century, were later able to realize Burleigh’s dream of creating larger orchestral works. They were beholden to him for making a path for them to do so, as he brokered many opportunities for Black musicians’ education, publication, and performance in various eco-systems within the White art music industry. He also secured protection of their musical rights by co-founding ASCAP. Finally, many of these composers believed

Burleigh's credo that Black art music offered healing for the harms of White supremacy. Finally, he empowered this generation with his exemplification that Black-composed art music stood equal to its White contemporaries despite the White industry's resistance to that reality.

At least in some measure, their resistance was due to what I call *music transliteration*. Black art music expressed a powerful sense of liberation from suffering. But White listeners *transliterated* these emotions to signify their own sense of alienation and a longing for freedom. This altered exchange disengaged White folks from deep identification with the horrors of enslavement and the racial terror of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Instead, they made it about their own spiritual or emotional journey. This neutered the power of Black composers to evoke a shared humanity between White Americans and their fellow citizens harmed by the legally imposed and culturally reified color line.

Yet Floyd discerned the later cultural invisibility of Burleigh despite the extraordinary visibility of Burleigh in his lifetime. Burleigh is not alone in being little remembered. Indeed, his circle of New York musicians at the turn of the twentieth century largely suffered the same fate due to the paucity of archives which valued and retained their presence. This is why the work of the musicologist Dr. Jean E. Snyder was an important intervention in recovering Burleigh and his network in the period. Her seminal work, *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance*, appeared in 2016, and is the gold standard in Burleigh studies. As a scholar in western Pennsylvania, she was uniquely able to research his life in Erie and the Midwest. I am indebted to her work throughout this thesis and draw heavily on her research for my first chapter on his life in Erie before he moved to New York City in 1892.¹⁴

¹⁴Snyder, Jean E. 2016. *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance*. University of Illinois Press.

Before Dr. Snyder's foundational work, the first chronicler of Burleigh's life and career was Anne Key Simpson, a musician, not a historian. Her work, *Hard Trials*, published in 1990, contains many factual errors. However, the strength of her account is the access she had to people with living memory of Burleigh, particularly at St. George's. Her interviews with those close to Burleigh, as his career wound down, provide the most intimate insights into his work life, habits, fears, and delights.¹⁵

Adding further challenge to any durable cultural imagination is Burleigh's relatively thin archival presence considering the fame during his lifetime. Given the archives of Black Americans are historically marginalized and underfunded, institutions and archives represent only that which decision-makers choose to preserve when they organize their collections. Archives do not represent reality. Instead, they represent what scholar Verne Harris called "a sliver of social memory," depending on the entities and agenda of those collecting them.¹⁶

One might reasonably imagine archives replete with his letters, photos, programs, speeches, etc. But the major institutions in which he worked retain little if any echo of his presence, though Burleigh's cultural ubiquity should vibrantly ring out from the archive. The records of the National Conservatory were lost after being consigned to a barn in upstate New York and are lost. According to a retired rector of St. George's Episcopal Church, fans largely pilfered the unlocked archive room for many years. Temple Emanu-El relocated to a new building after Burleigh's tenure and likely discarded much material before the move. They now limit access to their archives and claim no pertinent records.¹⁷

G. Ricordi, the New York publisher who hired Burleigh, would have been another critical source of documents. But following the death of the managing director, George

¹⁵ Simpson, Anne Key. 1990. *Hard Trials: The Life and Music of Harry T. Burleigh*. Composers of North America, no. 8. Scarecrow Press.

¹⁶ Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002): 63–86.

¹⁷ Emanuel Rubin, "Jeannette Meyers Thurber and the National Conservatory of Music," *American Music* 8, no. 3 (1990): 294. Author's conversation with Dr. Thomas Pike, Rector Emeritus, St. George's Church, 15 December 2017. Conversation with Cantor Mo Glazer, Temple Emanu-El, 17 March 2019.

Maxwell in 1931, who founded the New York office, the firm lingered briefly before it was subsumed by another publishing firm. No records are known to have migrated with this sale. The musicologist John Graziano believes their papers were likely put out on the curb of 43rd Street when the offices closed. Even the founding documents of ASCAP, housed in the Library of Congress' off-site storage, remain unprocessed despite many requests to make them available. Finally, according to the family, Burleigh's son Alston put Burleigh's personal archives and the contents of his Bronx apartment in storage. A fire there then destroyed all Burleigh's meticulously kept day books, diaries, photos, music manuscripts, vast library, and his prolific correspondence.¹⁸

One bright spot in Burleigh's archival vanishing act was the personal connection Dr. Jean E. Snyder enjoyed with the Burleigh family while researching her book. That connection, sadly, no longer exists, and further assistance from the family is at a standstill. Dr. Snyder presumes the family possesses more primary documents but is unwilling or unable to share them with researchers now.

Thankfully, many more Black newspapers, magazines, and journals have been digitized since Dr. Snyder's 2016 biography. They provide a roadmap to Burleigh's performances, networks, and travel. Digital platforms are inevitably linked to the dynamics of race and power. Much material remains undiscovered or unavailable online.

One archival mercy is Burleigh's prolific music publishing, which produced many copies of his compositions. These continue to circulate, though most are his spiritual arrangements. To remediate the relative inaccessibility of his art song scores, in 2023 Videmus, Inc. republished a collection of over forty of his most popular art songs, some of which had been out of print for decades. These are now available for performers and scholars along with three essays on his life and musical practices.

¹⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 346. Email to author from Dr. John Graziano, 12 January 2022.

The material culture of Burleigh's scores enabled musicologists to conduct robust scholarship, which has helped revive the memory of his contribution to American music. Drs. Eileen Southern, Sam A. Floyd, Jr., Wayne D. Shirley, Jean Snyder, and Horace J. Maxile, Jr., and many other musicologists have preserved his legacy through their teaching, performance, and scholarship. However, Burleigh studies have remained cloistered in the field of musicology rather than in broader historiography of his period.¹⁹

Another archival silence was of Burleigh's own choosing. Making a living by his famously evocative and warm baritone voice, he eschewed the early recording industry, because he felt it did not properly represent the singing voice by which made his living. The sole commercial recording of him singing occurred when George W. Broome, a longtime friend and fellow Toussaint L'Ouverture Club member, founded the short-lived record company Broome Special Phonograph. Burleigh made the only commercial recording of his career, his arrangement of "Go Down, Moses," on Broome's label.²⁰

Burleigh's voice was truly distinctive: described as "rich, mellow, pure" with "a special tone color for every emotion." But though it was powerful, rather than overwhelm audiences with volume, he used "not gradations of volume or changes in tempo, but tone quality," which situated him, according to one critic, "among the few great artists of the day." He used his voice to paint for audiences "every conceivable phase of human sentiment – idyllic love, tragedy, pathos, mystery, religious fervor, parental love, philosophic reflection, and rollicking humor." But other contemporaries agreed that the early recording technology did not represent his voice well. Harry T. Burleigh II's grandson said, "I never heard a record

¹⁹ Eileen Southern, "America's Black Composers of Classical Music," *Music Educators Journal* 62, no. 3 (1975): 46–59; Samuel A. Floyd, "On Harry T. Burleigh," unpublished manuscript, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, 2003; Samuel A. Floyd Jr., "The Invisibility and Fame of Harry T. Burleigh: Retrospect and Prospect on JSTOR," *Black Music Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (2004): 179–94; Wayne D. Shirley, "The Coming of 'Deep River,'" *American Music* 15, no. 4 (1997): 493–534; Jean E. Snyder, "Harry T. Burleigh, 'One of Erie's Most Popular Church Singers,'" *Black Music Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (2004): 195–225; Jean E. Snyder, "Harry T. Burleigh and the Creative Expression of Bi-Musicality: The Study of an African American Composer and the American Art Song" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1992); Horace J. Maxile, "Of Simple Forms and Firsts: On Francis Johnson and Harry Burleigh," in *Expanding the Canon* (Routledge, 2022).

²⁰ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 149.

that sounded like he sounded.” Since the inimitable quality of his voice was his most precious commodity, Burleigh’s virtual silence in the recording industry was a savvy and strategic career choice.²¹

In the face of Burleigh’s relative silence in surviving archives, this thesis uses what the cultural historian Sadiya Hartman called “critical fabulation,” a practice to create an informed, imaginative approach to fill lacunae. In her 2008 essay, “Venus in Two Acts,” Dr. Hartman proposed that limited archival research, critically read, can be augmented by “advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative.” By doing so, she proposed the scholar can “advance a series of speculative arguments and exploit the capacities of the subjunctive.”²²

There are moments in writing about Burleigh’s relationships or describing his performances when I make use of speculative narration to reinvigorate him into a living, breathing person rather than a flat, journalistic observation. In other aspects of his story, if there is sufficient evidence about some facet of Burleigh’s life or career, I feel entirely comfortable using critical fabulation to make more definitive conclusions which bringing coherence to his story.

Finally, the relative scarcity of recordings, photos, or videos of his work means that Burleigh’s contribution is frequently forgotten, since visual and aural remembrance provide memory hooks that signify the importance of a person’s life. The next generation of Black singers and composers enjoy more extensive recording and video archives that continue to keep their legacy alive and germane to the culture. Burleigh and his generation of friends and colleagues working in Black music struggle for recognition outside musicology and cultural history circles.

²¹ As cited in Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 149–50, 160.

²² Sadiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 10–12.

As a result, most Americans' historical and cultural imagination remains uninformed about the "product of their souls," as the scholar David Gilbert framed their contribution. For many, the Harlem Renaissance marked the ascent of Black aesthetic creativity in the twentieth century. Yet it was Burleigh and his New York musical circle who meticulously forged the intellectual and institutional path for the next two generations to pursue their dreams in literature and music.

Historiographical invisibility

To a large degree, lack of historiography about New York Black artistic community in the decades leading to the Harlem Renaissance has also contributed to Burleigh's relative invisibility in our time. When I pick up a book about the period, I immediately turn to the index. There I often find only passing reference to him as a composer or see him included only in list his musical contemporaries or find no reference to him at all. Cary D. Wintz's 1996 *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, makes no mention of Burleigh. And though New York was a dazzling place of cultural and intellectual work, he situates Washington as the nexus of that exchange. Jeffrey Aaron Snyder's 2018, *Making Black History - The Color Line, Culture, and Race in the Age of Jim Crow*, mentions him as a composer but only discusses the work of John and Frederick Work and Alain Locke on the spirituals.²³

Surely the anthology *Music in Black American Life 1600-1945* would highlight Burleigh's important musical interventions, however he appears only in a list of period composers and receives one footnote related to his student, ragtime composer and conductor James Reese Europe. The 2006 book *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem* contains not one mention of Burleigh and only contains one chapter related to music, the blues, despite the ubiquity of art music as part of Black life and cultural institutions in that period. Even Louis Henry Gates, Jr.'s massive 2007 *The New Negro, Readings on Race, Representation, and African*

²³ Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (Rice University, 1988); Jeffrey Aaron Snyder, *Making Black History: The Color Line, Culture, and Race in the Age of Jim Crow* (University of Georgia Press, 2018).

American Culture, 1892-1938, only lists Burleigh with other period composers yet ironically notes Burleigh is “well-known today.” Only David Gilbert’s 2015 *The Product of Our Souls, Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace*, properly situates Burleigh as intertwined with the various iterations of Black music at the time and the debates about Black musical development at the turn of the century.²⁴

These otherwise admirable works fail to make evident important historical details. First, that New York at the turn of twentieth century was a locus for Black musicians and intellectuals. Second, that art music was a central feature in Black life, not only in church but in salons, in home music-making, and in all kinds of civil and political contexts. Finally, Burleigh was not only a celebrity figure in Black life from his earliest days at the Conservatory and hiring at St. George’s. He was considered a master and leader in music and intellectual debate about Black representation in culture.

Personal positionality

My position as an older White woman needs noting, particularly as I only came to a more thorough understanding of White supremacy and Black history in middle age, when I returned to university to finish my undergraduate degree. My all-White public education of the 1970s did not include the breadth and weight of Black Americans’ history. When I returned to university in 2007, I realized how ignorant I was of the totality of American history. So, I started taking all the classes learn about Black history and culture. Learning of the damage done to the historical record by White historians, I endeavor to keep this thesis as free of White appropriation, White supremacy, and centering of me as its White. Yet, briefly, the story of how I came to this work is germane how I approach the topic.

²⁴ Laurie Christine Matheson, ed., *Music in Black American Life, 1600-1945: A University of Illinois Press Anthology*, Music in American Life Series (University of Illinois Press, 2022); Barbara McCaskill and Caroline Gebhard, eds., *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture, 1877-1919* (New York University Press, 2006); Gates, Henry Lewis Jr., ed., *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 301; David Gilbert, *The Product of Our Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

I first encountered Harry T. Burleigh in the early 2000s when our family attended St. George's Episcopal Church. The church played his music occasionally, but his hiring in 1894 was the most reiterated part of his story. In 2015, when attending my core class at Columbia, "Masterpieces of Western Music," I learned about the National Conservatory, Burleigh's relationship with Dvořák, and nationalist music. As a longtime New Yorker, I had the advantage of familiarity with the spaces where Burleigh and his cohort lived and worked.

As the first cultural historian to work on Burleigh, the geography of New York became a defining aspect of this thesis. The density of New York's built environment in the early part of his career created a geography generative for his relationships, collaborations, and networks. This confluence sparked my interest in how landscape, transportation, and proximity revealed the connections that shaped his career. So, the thesis delves into the neighborhoods, locations of the music industry, restaurants, and transportation patterns that determined where people met and dined, how they moved about, what they saw and heard in the cityscape, and the conditions that impacted where people lived, worked, and performed. This line of enquiry makes evident Burleigh's quotidian social interactions and the critical relationships that shaped the intellectual landscape of his long career.

Language

Since "language" can be a key tool for White supremacy to hide itself while inflicting harm on Black Americans, I have made several choices in this work. Taking the lead from Dr. Gwynne Kuhner Brown's new biography of the composer William L. Dawson, I also adhere to capitalizing White and Black throughout this thesis. Dr. Brown cites Nell Irving Painter, author of *The History of White People*, on this point: "We should capitalize 'White' to situate 'Whiteness' within the American ideology of race, within which 'Black,' but not 'White,' has been hypervisible as a group identity." Though the spelling in this thesis aligns with British English, I chose to retain spelling of "color" when using the phrase "color line," as it has particular cultural meaning in America. Finally, I use the terms African American and Black

Americans interchangeably. While I realize they are blunt and limited descriptives that have changed over time, they are still variously chosen forms of self-identification.²⁵

Second, I retain the use of the word “Negro,” which African Americans themselves chose to signify respect in a Jim Crow world. Burleigh believed “the Negro stands at the gates of human culture with hands laden with musical gifts.” And he saw Negro spirituals as “a powerful stimulus to the highest artistic development,” because they were “the only songs in America to conform to the scientific definition of folksongs.” In his 1922 letter to the NAACP, Burleigh argued that the Negro spiritual was equal to European folk music. Valuing Negro spirituals equally with their European counterparts acted as more than an intellectual argument: it staked a racial and historical claim about the foundational aspect of Black Americans' history and their contributions to building the wealth and culture of the nation.²⁶

Burleigh's Intellectual Trajectory of the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond

Scholars do not agree on the definition of the cultural American “long nineteenth century” I have sympathy with Dr. Tammy Kernodle’s assertion that twentieth century modernity began in 1914 when Scott Joplin came to New York hoping to publish, *Treemonisha*. His opera combined the musical sensibilities of ragtime with the tradition of European grand opera. It is the first American opera.²⁷

I prefer an end date of 1916, with similar cultural reasonings, because it marks the publication of Burleigh’s first art song spiritual, “Deep River.” Unlike Joplin’s opera which merged a European genre with Joplin’s narrative, Burleigh merged European art song and a Black musical tradition that vibrated with the voices and stories from three hundred years of their enslavement. Burleigh’s art songs spirituals reconceptualized the Negro spirituals as

²⁵ Gwynne Kuhner Brown, *William L. Dawson* (University of Illinois Press, 2024).

²⁶ Harry T. Burleigh, “Eminent Negro Musician Assails Misuse of Spirituals in Dance Tunes, H. T. Burleigh Urges Cooperation of Race in Preserving Musical Treasure,” NAACP, Press Release, November 10, 1922.

²⁷ Grateful for Dr. Kernodle’s perspective on modernism in Black art music in conversation with the author on May 19, 2025.

modern cultural objects. Thus, he thus turned the page of American art music to the twentieth century.

This modern innovation demonstrates Burleigh was an intellectual and musical bridge connecting three generations. Born in 1866 and educated in the first freeborn generation after the Civil War, he grew up amid post-Reconstruction Black political and racial strategies. The weight of racial representation was on his back to demonstrate erudition, talent, and good citizenship. This philosophy, often called racial uplift, codified in Booker T. Washington's 1900 book, *A New Negro*, was a discursive concept regarding Black American achievement since the end of the Civil War.²⁸

Coming after over two hundred and seventy-five years of enslavement, the historian Henry Louis Gates considers Washington's philosophy as "one of the most compelling stories of racial uplift that circulated throughout U.S. intellectual society, culture, and politics." Washington aimed to counter racial stereotypes, caricatures, and the political policies of White supremacy by presenting Black Americans as educated, dedicated to the nation, and deserving of full citizenship rights. Though subsequent generations would problematize its class and cultural issues, uplift ideology some Black intellectuals deemed this approach necessary to reconstruct public perception of Black Americans for their fellow White citizens during the era of lynching the retrenchment of Black civil rights after 1877.

In an extension of the basic argument forwarded in his so-called Atlanta Compromise speech from 1895, one of Booker T. Washington's themes in *A New Negro* focused on the promise Black industrial education institutions such as Tuskegee and Hampton. So it was with a certain irony that Washington recruited Burleigh – beginning that year – to perform for his summer Tuskegee fundraising trips to the northeastern states, because the singer was the antithesis of Black industrial training. Burleigh spoke and sang in

²⁸ Booker T. Washington et al., *A New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-to-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race* (American Publishing House, 1900).

five languages, (English, German, Italian, French, Latin and Hebrew) and was a graduate of and teacher at a conservatoire dedicated art music. For Washington these made him an exemplar of the New Negro despite his liberal education and lack of association with any Black industrial educational institution.

In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois, the Harvard and German-trained intellectual and cultural elitist famously, critiqued Washington's limited approach to education as insufficient for the "souls of Black folk," in his treatise of that name. Du Bois' believed Black folks deserved and wanted more than the provision of manual labour opportunities. They deserved access to liberal education, replete with the arts, to fulfil the deep needs and longings of the soul. Burleigh, as an educated, arts-loving musician from a striving middle-class family with a formerly enslaved grandfather as a central figure, he had a measure of sympathy with both men's positions. For though he moved in the highest art music circles in New York from the earliest years of his career, he never forgot the economic struggles of his family in his family in the Jim Crow conditions of Erie, Pennsylvania.

However, culturally and intellectually Burleigh shared more affinity with Du Bois. As this thesis makes clear, their devotion to opera, particularly that of Richard Wagner, formed a significant part of their vision about how Black Americans might impact American culture as forcefully as Wagner's work informed German identity. Yet while fundraising for Tuskegee with the most powerful Black man in America, Burleigh wrote to him about Du Bois' 1903 *Souls of Black Folk* saying, "Du Bois's work is purely personal while your work is general. You are for the masses while he pleads for the classes." Flattering the most powerful Black man in America at the time was perhaps sycophantic, but it was also canny, as Washington's patronage was priceless. Nevertheless, Du Bois' chapter headings powerfully resonated with Burleigh.²⁹

²⁹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 131.

Each chapter's twinned quotations of spirituals and canonical European poetry intrinsically argued for the cultural value of Black folk music. This deeply resonated with Burleigh not only from his family's joy singing this music and its signification to their history. As a student at the National Conservatory, Burleigh's friendship with its director, Antonín Dvořák, helped shape his personal and professional commitments in two significant ways. First, he invited his young friend into White music café culture where Burleigh ate, drank, and learned philosophy around the tables of German restaurants where all industry leaders of New Yorks of art music socialised. Second, after learning from Burleigh about the music and history of Black Americans in the spirituals, Dvořák caused a racial furore in 1893 when he famously asserted "the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called negro melodies." Burleigh commitments and sensibilities were definitively shaped by these social and musical influences. Hence the resonance for Burleigh with the centrality of spirituals in Du Bois' work and parity he makes with European literature.³⁰

In 1907 at Fisk University, the brothers John W. and Frederick J. Work published Folksongs of American Negro. Like Burleigh, they were deeply invested in collecting and arranging spirituals. Their preservation project to hunt, find, and document spirituals was also a destigmatising effort. Because the recently emancipated generation often despised this music because of its evocation of enslavement's shame and degradation. They also wanted to rescue spirituals from "the minstrel man who blacks up his face and throws the audience into convulsions of laughter," by parodying the music and its creators. The Works sought to instantiate the spirituals as the cultural riches of Black communal creation.

Washington's representation of self-sufficiency and achievement, the Work brothers' cultural preservation of Black music, and Du Bois' Germanic inclinations for the life of the mind and art for the soul flowed unevenly in Burleigh. In 1900, knowing the value of

³⁰ Douglas W. Shadle, *Antonín Dvořák's New World Symphony* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 98.

intellectual exchange within White music café culture of the Rialto neighbourhood, Burleigh was foundational to the creation of Black music café culture when the Black-owned Marshall Hotel opened in New York's segregated Tenderloin neighbourhood. The "Marshall Circle" consisted of artists employing Black, modern sensibilities in art music, musical theatre, comedy, popular song, poetry, and ragtime. As a community they thrived and changed the cultural landscape in New York just after the turn of the century.³¹

Burleigh had established all the necessary components for a storied composition career within his first fifteen years in New York. Connections with Dvořák's White café culture led publishing opportunities for his early compositions. At this point, due to Burleigh's education, erudition, and he held a unique position in the Marshall Circle. James Weldon Johnson said "Among us, however, it was as a master that [Burleigh] was held. He was the final authority on all questions in the theory and science of music. In this acceptance, both Cook and my brother, with their own very good musical training, always joined."³²

Yet Burleigh also needed this circle to support him. His work-a-day world was almost entirely in White spaces, so they provided him with necessary safety, comradeship, and playfulness. In turn, Burleigh opened the doors for many in this Black café culture of the Marshall Circle through his access to White performance spaces and publishing at G. Ricordi.³³

By 1916, supported by this circle of fellow cultural intellectuals, Burleigh had achieved artistic standing and economic security. Instead of resting on his compositional laurels and at the height of his creative power, he turned to create something new, risky, and thoroughly modern – the art song spiritual. Arranged in the Germanic form of the *lied* or art

³¹ Jonathan Daigle, "Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Marshall Circle: Racial Representation from Blackface to Black Naturalism," *African American Review* 43, no. 4 (2009): 633–54; The term "Marshall Circle" was coined by Daigle in this article.

³² James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (Penguin Books, 1990), 173–74.

³³ Members of the Marshall Circle published by G. Ricordi - art song composers James Weldon Johnson, J. Rosamond Johnson, and ragtime composers James Reese Europe, Will H. Dixon, and William H. Tyers.

song, he expanded this beloved genre to encompass the music of Black resistance and spiritual survival. Into American art song, Burleigh wrote Black Americans' history, perseverance, and faith in a God who comforted the oppressed and judged evil doers. Thus, he "desegregated" the art song genre.³⁴

Beginning in 1917, the back cover of all G. Ricordi collections of his spirituals carried Burleigh's intellectual "manifesto" regarding the spirituals. In it, Burleigh made a cogent argument about the nature of being human. First, spirituals expressed the inherent connectedness between people regardless of race. Second, spirituals warned of divine justice for those who ruptured human "brotherhood," as he termed it. Third, the spirituals' hope and faith offered a repair for the violent breach in human relationships due to White supremacy. Finally, and most radically, Burleigh argued spirituals offered deliverance and freedom, particularly for White folks who perpetuated White supremacy. Because in the spirituals, people might recognize the shared burden and beauty of being human – that they were spiritually and emotionally equal, and thus there was an opportunity to tear down the barriers that divided them and marred their humanity. Burleigh's spiritual had an enormous cultural impact, though they never actuated the spiritual healing Burleigh believed in and hoped for.

Because of their power, Burleigh stated many times he was committed to preserving the spirituals, which he believed were in danger of evaporating from both Black and White public consciousness. He was not alone in the assessment. During the first decades of the century, thinkers as diverse as the Work brothers at Fisk, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the White New York music critic Henry E. Krehbiel were all attentive to this possibility and engaged in their own preservation practices. It makes sense that Burleigh would use the tools of his

³⁴ *Lied*, a revered 19th century German musical form, were composed of short poetic texts and performed by a soloist with piano accompaniment. When *lied* crossed the Atlantic in the mid-nineteenth century, it became translated as "song" to appeal to non-German Americans. This thesis refers to them as "art songs" to differentiate them from popular music and situate them as "classical" or "art music."

trade as a lauded art song composer to instantiate them afresh in American historical imagination while he also asserted their value as a compositional source for Western art music. In his mind, this was not a bastardization of the original oral form but an assertion they were inextricable the growing American canon.

Burleigh ground-breaking cultural and intellectual contribution occurred before Harlem became a Black mecca. Midway in his career, a well-known artist, and national celebrity, Burleigh was in the crosshairs of Alain Locke, the intellectual midwife to the Harlem Renaissance. In 1925, Locke reinvigorated the title of Washington's *A New Negro* when he penned *The New Negro*. The Oxford and Harvard-educated Locke was invested promoting the Black literature writers like Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Neila Larsen, Jesse Fauset, and many others. These writers embraced the European cultural forms of the novel and poetics but infused it with a new realism of non-elite culture as the waves of the great Migration inundated the North.

The proletariat novels and poetics of Harlem writers reflected Locke's rallying cry of self-expression and self-determination from what proceeded them. Locke stated, "Whoever wishes to see the Negro in his essential traits, in the full perspective of his achievements and possibilities, must see the enlightenment of that self-portraiture which the present developments of the negro culture are offering." The "perspective" of this new literary turn was akin to the music project of Burleigh and the Marshall Circle – to clear the pollution of minstrelsy's racist dehumanisation minstrelsy from the hearts and minds of White America. *The New Negro* was less new than Locke asserted, or course.

The Harlem literary movement tread on the path of Black modernity which Burleigh and his circle manifested in music. they were just expanding art in new directions, as artists always aspire to do. The Black modernity of Burleigh and his circle was manifest in their creation of opera, theatre, popular music, comedy and art music which shook off the rags of

minstrelsy. But in some ways, it was Locke's intellectual job to situate the newer generation's literary contributions as wholly unique and thus make space for them.

Though Locke propagandized for a younger generation's cultural contributions, he knew well their iteration of Black artistry rested on the accomplishments of their elders. It was an old and effective strategy to create controversy to garner attention and the purchasing power of the White marketplace. Because Locke was keenly aware of the powerful interventions of Harry T. Burleigh and his circle in American cultural life through their musical contributions. Whereas Burleigh and his generation were keen to shape Black musical literature beginning in the 1890s, Locke and the Harlem movement were intent on doing the same for their literary contributions.

Thus, Locke moderated the tone of his 1936 book *The Negro and His Music*. He critiqued Burleigh's spiritual arrangements as "over-polishing these folk gems, but he also noted, "More than any single other person, Mr. Burleigh as arranger, composer and baritone soloist played the role of path-breaking ambassador of Negro music to the musically elect." This critique apparently applied not only to White audiences but to Black audiences who loved Burleigh's music and the host of Black singers who included his art song spirituals in their concert programs. Locke cast Burleigh's arrangements less authentic since, "his settings have overlaid the folk spirit with concert furbelows and alien florid adornments." Of course, like all music, spirituals never were static objects. Locke's argument about "authenticity" related more to situating the literary movement's proletariat sensibilities and aesthetics.³⁵

The context of Burleigh's contribution of art songs spirituals was also reckoning with minstrelsy's characterisation of Black folks. Each time a Black singer stepped before a White audience, they contended with the durable and degrading images, music, and physicality of White minstrel players. Later Black blackface minstrels, like Burleigh's friend, Bert Williams,

³⁵ Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music*, Bronze Booklet No.2 (The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), 119–20, 23.

cleverly subverted these tropes, but one might argue the taint of minstrelsy, the most popular form of entertainment in the nineteenth century, haunts Black performers still.

By setting the spirituals as art songs, Burleigh required traditional White art music performance. Tuxedoed and gowned singers performed seriously, with bodily stillness, their highly trained in vocal technique and repertoire. The clothes and quiet competency of Black concert singers was meant to subvert minstrelsy's shadows. For Burleigh's "New Negro" was an erudite practitioner of European high art.

Burleigh knew from his grandfather this was not how enslaved people sang as they worshipped in hush arbours or camp meetings. But art song spirituals served both as a modern music modality and a transient space where White listeners might glimpse transcendent reconciliation and Black singers could resist White supremacist America.

Representing Blackness in the Long Nineteenth Century

Burleigh's career would be extraordinary without the many impediments he faced in America's racial caste system. Many gifted Black composers and singers had preceded Burleigh, but none had succeeded in breaching the walls of the White art music industry so thoroughly and at so many levels. Burleigh's vocal talent, musicianship, and work ethic were prodigious, but the barrier of race still blocked his way.

Burleigh knew well that the social construct of Whiteness has always depended on the social construct Blackness. European Christian nations had to rationalize the plundering of resources and the violent subjugation of African people. By framing them as less than White Europeans, extraction of labour and resources were disguised as a God-ordained Christianizing mission. Yet the chattel slavery system in the United States problematized racial delineations. Living with their enslaved enabled and legally empowered "owners" to rape their enslaved women for pleasure, power, and profit. But the resulting mixed-race children destabilized strict racial and familial categories.

As one strategy to be “safe” from the taint of Blackness their mixed-race progeny confronted them with, White people invented mechanisms for racial “purity” which enabled them to retain political and cultural power. But as Edward Said argued, these “truth systems” were inherently unstable because “In human history there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, not matter how deeply they saturate society, and this is obviously what makes change possible, limits power...and hobbles that theory of power.” Burleigh hobbled the White power of exclusion and navigated dominant systems of power through negotiated Blackness.³⁶

*Burleigh Creates a World of Possibilities by Negotiating Blackness*³⁷

In the early twentieth century no Black American accomplished Burleigh’s critical and popular success in *all* the arenas of singing, composing, publishing, music rights protection. To do this, Burleigh had to create a world in which these contributions were possible. This involved negotiating his Blackness, with integrity, to make himself legible to White folks’ minds. He had to make himself a “safe” Black man to be heard at all.

He started with his surpassing vocal talent and artistry which he embodied while performing in the mode of European music literature. He worked to bolster his musical reputation with his personal presentation in clothing, language, and charm that destabilized White supremacist perceptions of a Black musician in the age of minstrelsy. Burleigh was erudite, well-spoken, and able to retain his equanimity while navigating the racism he inevitably encountered when working in White spaces. He did so while retaining the friendship and respect of his fellow Black musicians and community. Indeed, for them he became a bridge-builder between the two communities and thus a beacon of hope for what was possible to achieve as a Black man in a racially violent and segregated America.

³⁶ Quoted in Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (University of North Carolina, 2007), xii.

³⁷ Dr. Tammy Kernodle graciously lent the term “negotiated Blackness” to the author during our conversation on May 19, 2025.

Burleigh could have forged a reasonably successful vocal career within the Black, educated, midwestern, music-loving elites. But he clearly aspired to a broader and more robust career. When he arrived in New York as a scholarship student at the National Conservatory of the Music of America in 1892, he embodied a different Black consciousness than those escaping lynching, sharecropping, convict leasing, lynching, and all manner of racial violence below the Mason Dixon line. His family had Black middle-class social, spiritual, and economic identities and aspirations while navigating Jim Crow's reign.

To be sure, as a young singer, Burleigh was disinclined to overt political expression. He came to New York as an ambitious singer with a mission to build a concert performance career. But he also realized the need to access systems underpinning a vocal career in White New York and strategically negotiated his ascribed Blackness. As he entered those institutions of power, he effected change from within to pursue – for himself and others - not only his vocal career but an increasingly multi-faceted musical career.

Scholars of the long nineteenth century in representational art have argued that rigid racial perceptions were often mitigated by class, gender, and sexuality. Black folks seemed less threatening when these categories were legible to the White gaze. Burleigh transmitted himself as “safe” to White folks - who were the patrons, agents, publishers, and impresarios of the European music - by being a middle-class, heterosexual man. Burleigh was further aided by a being fair-skinned and mixed race, with an origin story of an educated, free born Midwesterner from a settler culture rather than from Southern agrarian culture. Additionally, Burleigh was handsome, well-dressed and spoken, literate, and charming. This negotiation needed both in White culture but also for wealthy Brooklyn's upper-class Black culture.³⁸

Burleigh represented a Blackness unfamiliar to many White folks in Manhattan. Because wealthy, elite Black Brooklynites of the late nineteenth century avoided the racist

³⁸ For as early streams of migrants fleeing the racial terrorism and economic violence of the rural South arrived in New York in the late nineteenth century, they were frequently poor, less educated and so perceived as a threat to social order.

insults of White interaction by largely restricting themselves to socializing in their luxurious homes and at Black social and civic institutions. Though grateful for the early concertising support from this community, Burleigh aspired to more. He dove into White spaces with the bravery and the abandon of one embodying a bold, Black consciousness, knowing the necessity of a White-facing representation if he wanted a lasting art music career. He yearned for the stages in White spaces, because this was where patronage could be attained, agents garnered, and relational networks built to sustain his career.

It is too simplistic to see this as fearful accommodation to the White gaze. Rather I situate his actions as Burleigh's strategic approach to building a career. He acquired the required professional assets for any art musician in the late nineteenth century. The culture of most art music performance was - and in many senses still is - multi-lingual, erudite, with performers who bear signifiers of wealth, such as evening gowns, jewels, white tie tuxedos and polished grooming even if they are economically struggling.

Therefore, a Black musician in the 1890s performing in White spaces who possessed these signifiers disrupted an unconscious and fatuous racial hierarchy. Burleigh's cultural, social, and musical skills grew out of his family's desires and hard-won achievements – the educational, musical, and sartorial accoutrements of Black middle-class life. Burleigh had agency. This cultured self-presentation was his inherited and preferred mode of being whether around White folks or not. His pursuit of these attributes readied Burleigh for his first encounter with the German-dominated system of music education at New York's National Conservatory of Music.

Having framed the racial power dynamics and his intellectual interlocutors on the spirituals, I turn to a brief overview of the story of his over five decades career and his New York. Burleigh's built his long and multi-faceted career across various spaces. So, his chronology is most legible through following the ecosystems he entered and influenced.

The beginning of the story - Burleigh's voice made the way

Burleigh could not have made his intellectual and cultural interventions without his extraordinary vocal talent and the character to make it in New York's competitive, Jim Crowed art music industry. Many gifted Black singers before him tried to break professionally into the White industry without success. Credit for Burleigh's triumph must be given to his family which prepared him musically and intellectually and taught him how to negotiate his Blackness with White churches and employers.

Burleigh's formerly enslaved maternal grandfather fought tenaciously for his own education and that of his descendants. Burleigh's maternal grandmother was a mixed-race woman who grounded the family's culture in gentility, manners, and social aspirations. Burleigh's childhood was filled with hard-work to attain and maintain a middle-class life, but it was also redolent with a love of music – spirituals from his grandfather and Western art music from his mother and aunt. His family worked across the color line for some of Erie's wealthiest family. His family modelled being teachable, as well-spoken and well-dressed as economically possible, hard-working, indefatigable in the face of racism and its economic inequities, and to sing the spirituals and other songs as comfort when these exigencies were angering and discouraging. These habits of mind and body were utterly necessary sustenance when Burleigh was a cultural migrant to New York in 1892 and informed his choices as a metropolitan career began to take shape.

*Ecosystems entered*³⁹

Musical ecosystems were essential to the art form. Here I position ecosystems as vibrant interdependence within dynamic personal and professional systems, in which one part of the system is inextricably reliant on others for each to thrive. While no musician creates or performs in isolation, it is also true that music patrons and publishing houses, for example, are entirely dependent on musicians. The music industry is an inherently interconnected and

³⁹ Dr. Stephen Tuffnell initially used the term "ecosystems" to describe the spheres of Burleigh's life and career in conversation with the author of May 19, 2025. I have augmented this term with my definition about the reciprocity inherent in Burleigh's ecosystems.

collaborative enterprise. Burleigh methodically gained access to one system at time and built on each success to earn access to additional ecosystems. As he established his reputation as a highly skilled musician with a dogged work ethic and the comradery and sociability to match, more ecosystems yielded to his persistent beating of his hands on their gates. Layering these ecosystems not only changed the trajectory of his career, but by working within these systems he affected change to them.

The National Conservatory was the foundational ecosystem in for Burleigh's New York career, because its faculty were well-known musicians connected to the art music industry. Through diligent application to his studies and his various jobs within the conservatory, Burleigh earned the trust and respect of those faculty. Many became eager to support his prodigious talent. As we shall see, Burleigh's relationship with the conservatory's director, Antonín Dvořák, influenced the course of American nationalist music.

The patronage of another ecosystem - Black Brooklyn - made it economically viable for Burleigh to survive his economically lean, early days in the city. Their luxurious homes were similar in status and sumptuousness as their White Gilded Aged counterparts in Manhattan. The Black elite chose to socialize within their homes and their civic and social institutions, and they strove for incremental changes within education. The Brooklyn elite hired him to concertise in these spaces. Burleigh's civil rights action of 1895 briefly challenged the politics of this self-segregated community.

White music café culture was a vibrant ecosystem it is seemingly unlikely to find Burleigh. Because in the 1890s, most New York's art musicians were German or German-trained, they replicated the European model of gathering around tables in restaurants for fellowship and fun as well as intellectual exchange and network building. Dvořák and other faculty invited Burleigh into this café culture which formed the heartbeat of the art music industry. Burleigh came to know and be known by wealthy patrons, powerful impresarios,

and influential music critics and publishers. This access was career gold for his young career. Doyens of the industry inspired and challenged him intellectually. The individuals socialising in this collegial space became career-defining figures in Burleigh's artistic career. Burleigh's presence also challenged racist views of minstrelsy.

With his entrée to music industry leaders in White music cafés, Burleigh earned an entrée to New York's music publishing ecosystem. The most respected firms began vying to publish his early ballads and then his more sophisticated art songs. Publication of his early works provided a much-needed additional economic security for his marriage in 1899 and the arrival of his son the same year. Several of these compositions were popular hits that richly rewarded the publishing firms. Burleigh's name began to gain recognition as a composer as well as singer.

As unlikely as it might seem in Jim Crow New York of the 1890s, the career-defining ecosystem for Burleigh was the wealthy, White church, St. George's Episcopal Church. Hired as their baritone soloist in 1894, Burleigh's negotiated Blackness along with the progressive perspective of its rector made this extraordinary opportunity possible. In his fifty-two years as their soloist, he was a valued musician and congregant by many. However, he also endured the psychic turmoil of representing a token of some of degraded racial standards and a token to others of their racial and political liberalism. Burleigh negotiated this fraught work environment because it grounded him financially with steady work to support his young family and gain concertising jobs from its affluent congregants.

For Burleigh, St. George's was also an ecosystem replete with patronage opportunities from White, music-loving New Yorkers. Because of his prodigious musical talent and the support of the church's famous rector, William S. Rainsford, and its Warden of the Vestry, J. P. Morgan, Burleigh began to concertise in home of the church's wealthy congregants. As a result, the White salon doors swung open for Burleigh along Fifth and Park Avenue and at the summer estates in Newport, Rhode Island and on Long Island.

Minstrelsy, the most popular form of entertainment for the previous sixty years, informed White imagination about Black musical performance. But Burleigh virtuosic singing of European repertoire in his polish concerts confounded White preconceptions. The income from these engagements substantially stabilized his career.

White music café culture in the Rialto neighbourhood began as the art music industry, like many businesses, followed the steady march northward in Manhattan. When the Black-owned Marshall Hotel opening in 1900, Burleigh was a bridge between the worlds of White and Black café cultures. Having experience the vibrant intellectual exchange of White music cafés Burleigh was foundation to the forming the “Marshall Circle,” filled with aspiring and creative Black musicians who migrated from across the country to New York the centre of popular culture.⁴⁰

His experience facilitated the intellectual and artistic wrestling of the Marshall Circle with their musical contribution to American culture. James Weldon Johnson wrote, “Among us, however, it was as a master that [Burleigh] was held. On all questions in the theory and science of music he was the final authority. In this acceptance, both Cook and my brother, with their own very good musical training, always joined... Some years later [Kurt Schindler] said to me that on a question in the theory of music he would accept Mr. Burleigh's decision as quickly as that of any other musician in New York.”⁴¹

The Marshall was a highly generative creative space where artists in the Marshall Circle innovated musical theatre, comedy, orchestral work, popular songwriting, and ragtime. Burleigh was central to the Black café culture which included luminaries such as Ernest Hogan, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Bob Cole, J. Rosamond Johnson and his brother James Weldon Johnson, Bert Williams, George Walker, James Reese Europe, and many others.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Daigle, “Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Marshall Circle: Racial Representation from Blackface to Black Naturalism,” *African American Review*, Volume 43, Number 4, Winter 2009: 633–54. The term “Marshall Circle” was coined from this 2009 journal article.

⁴¹ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 173–74.

Unfortunately, the Marshall closed in 1913, coinciding with the untimely death of many of the Circle's members. Burleigh never again experienced such a joyful and vibrant social group that coalesced to promote and support one another's artistic strivings.

As the Marshall Circle was coalescing in Black Bohemia, Burleigh publishing career gained momentum. Two of the most respected music critics in the New York press chose Burleigh as their partner in anthology projects out of respect for his superior musicianship. And articles about Burleigh's compositions began to appear in major music publications. As critics reviewed his growing body of work some placed him in the pantheon of revered American White composers. His perception as a leading American composer shifted White expectation about Black musicianship and erudition. It also challenged the industry's physis underpinnings of what composers were included was American and intrinsically argued for Black full political inclusion as well.

Though published by leading New York firms since the waning days of the nineteenth century, his compositional profile grew even more vaunted when in 1911 he was hired as music editor by European firm of G. Ricordi of Milan Italy. Burleigh worked a valued editor for Ricordi for over thirty years. In turn, the firm was well-recompensed by publishing Burleigh's masterwork art songs and then his highly popular art song spirituals. Many of the young composers of the Marshall Circle economically and reputationally benefitted, because Burleigh opened doors at Ricordi for their compositions to be published. Led by George Maxwell, the New York office established a reputation for vociferously protecting rights in America of their famous Italian opera composers, Verdi and Puccini.⁴²

In 1914, when a group of music composer and publishers contemplated forming a collective to protect their performance rights, it was therefore logical that Maxwell and G. Ricordi would be at the forefront of the organization. Burleigh became a founding member

⁴² Marshall Circle composers published by Ricordi include art song composers James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson and ragtime composers James Reese Europe, William H. Tyers, and Will H. Dixon,

of an ecosystem that changed the way the rights of composers were protected. ASCAP, the American Society Composers and Publishers, was established in 1914 to offer protection for the first time to the performance rights of musicians. As a highly visible and famous Black musician, Burleigh aided in bringing many musicians into the ASCAP fold which strengthened the collective. For many Black composers this support offered the first stability and viability of their composition careers.

Strategically waiting till his rights were protected by ASCAP, 1914 saw a flood of Burleigh's masterwork art songs come to market including his first art songs based on the music of the Negro spiritual. These compositions brought him increasingly into the ecosystem of White concert singers who vied to perform his art songs and rocketed his reputation as one of the leading composers of the day. Performance by White singers of both his art songs and art song spirituals made Burleigh more famous than ever, and due to ASCAP, he became a reasonably wealthy man. ASCAP also provided collective, legal representation for Black composers unable to prosecute those violating their performance rights. As we shall see, many a struggling Black composer was saved from of penury because of ASCAP.

Conceptual contributions:

Burleigh as a Bridge Figure

Burleigh was a bridge figure connecting three generations. His family in Erie and Black wealthy Brooklynites anchor him intellectual, cultural, and political in the nineteenth century where the hegemony of German culture held sway alongside the strategies of racial uplift. From the late 1890s to the outbreak of World War I, Burleigh and his Marshall Circle of cultural migrants to New York wrestled with new strategies to invade and infuse American culture with Black history, voices, and aesthetics. Therefore, they were the architects of Black modernity who made a path for the next generations of literary Harlem Renaissance movement, but also for the art music composers who flourished during and beyond the

traditional end date of 1935 for the Harlem Renaissance. Composer like Florence Price, William Grant Still, William Dawson, and Margaret Bonds were part of a flowering in music literature built on the path of Black modernity forged by Burleigh and his circle.

Turnkey

The concept of turnkey came from an interview with the contemporary jazz and opera composer Terrance Blanchard, who was the first Black American to have his opera performed by the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Like Burleigh, his talent and personal qualities made him a breakthrough figure; and then Blanchard carefully noted the efforts of talented musicians from Burleigh's era, such as Scott Joplin, William Grant Still, and H. Lawrence Freeman who were musically and creatively gifted but unable to get their symphonies or operas published and performed in White institutions. Blanchard said, "My name will always have an asterisk by it, because I may be the first, but I wasn't the first qualified." In a very "Burleighesque" sentiment, he said, "The main thing about my presence here is I can't be a token; I have to be a turnkey."⁴³

Initially, I thought of Burleigh as a gatekeeper however, the word "turnkey" better describes how his accomplishments created the path for many singers, composers, and musicians, by unlocking and swinging open doors to patronage, publishing, and performing. Having White patronage was an economic necessity for most aspiring African American artists in Burleigh's time, and it remains so today. White people and institutions retain the most resources for supporting the arts; but Burleigh gained a modicum of power by acting as a turnkey to open doors for fellow talented artists.

German high culture and Bildung

When Burleigh arrived for conservatory training in 1892, the faculty of the National Conservatory were the leading lights in New York art music. The Conservatory's

⁴³ "Terence Blanchard Wants to Be a Turnkey in the Opera World," *WashingtonPost.Com*, April 18, 2024.

brownstone buildings sat on the edge of the German immigrant area, Kleindeutschland, and in the heart of the Rialto area of 1890s Manhattan. All around it were art music institutions, performance spaces, publishing firms, and the restaurants and cafés central to the social life of the music industry insiders. Besides the convivial feasting and drinking, these German-run establishments provided a milieu to build networks, meet colleagues, and where business connections in the industry coalesced.

Through Burleigh's relationship with the Conservatory's director, the Bohemian composer Antonin Dvořák, he entered White music café culture – one of the most significant doors opened in his career. He met future music publishers and patrons around the dinner tables at Lüchow's and in the cigar-smoke-filled café of Fleischmann's, where German was the *lingua franca* of the industry, a language Burleigh quickly perfected in New York.

Arriving during the tenure of Anton Seidl, renowned conductor of the New York Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera, Burleigh was swept up in the Wagnerian fever that gripped New York at the time. Wagner became a life-long obsession for Burleigh. He also intuited in German high culture a roadmap for Black culture. Scholars Alex Ross and Kira Thurman are currently developing the study of “Black Wagnerism” to contextualize why many Black folks at the turn of the century were powerfully drawn to his works.

Initial concepts concern Wagner's use of myth and legends to representing the striving, suffering of the German people and their strength to overcome. Since the middle passage presented a historical lacuna for Black Americans in Burleigh's period, perhaps by developing similar material Black artists might mythologize the Black past to create legends in the present.

Writing of his experience that the 1936 Wagner Festival in Bayreuth German, which Burleigh also attended, Du Bois crystallized this feeling: “It is as though someone of us chose out of the wealth of African folklore a body of poetic material, and with music, scene,

and action, re-told for mankind the sufferings and triumphs and defeats of a people...Something in this world man must trust. Not everything – but Something.” For Du Bois and Burleigh, Wagner’s art offered transcendence, both individually and potentially for society as well.⁴⁴

According to Alex Ross, besides the overwhelming beauty of his music, Wagner listeners often experienced “a sense of their own future self somehow unfolding, a glimpse of future greatness.” The composer created a broad imaginary landscape in his opera which might signpost a path for Black cultural products to enact similarly empowering art which appealed to Burleigh and Du Bois as well as Alain Locke and Langston Hughes.⁴⁵

But in this thesis, I would like to go further and argue that the Wagner’s influence expanded beyond music to encompass its underlying philosophy of self-education, called *Bildung*, which served as a guiding force for his creative career. Burleigh came to understand *Bildung* as part of the intellectual underpinnings of Wagner and other great German composers. While not “taught” at the Conservatory, this philosophy was “caught” by Burleigh as he imbibed beer and bratwurst in White music café culture.

The roots *Bildung* stretch back to the late eighteenth century when German philosophers Johann Herder, Friedrich Schiller, and Johan Goethe. They were invested in a counterbalance to both the rationalist approach of the Enlightenment and the despotism and anarchy of the French Revolution. *Bildung*, an amorphous term, was a process, a journey of individual ennoblement through ethical and cultural cultivation. We find this reflected in the related word *bildungsroman*, initially a German literary genre - novel of education or formation - which the protagonist undergoes a journey of moral, emotional, and psychological transformation.

⁴⁴ W. E. B. DuBois, “Opera and the Negro Problem,” Forum of Fact & Opinion, *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), October 31, 1936.

⁴⁵ Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 271–76. See also podcast by Eric Weisbard, *Alex Ross and Kira Thurman on Afro-Wagnerism for Popular Music Books in Process Series*, 9/22/20, Popular Music Books in Process Series, September 22, 2020.

Bildung was both process and journey of individual and political formation. For if individuals who comprise a political entity commit to individual moral education and thus achieve cultivated, harmonious souls, only then might a just and harmonious republic be created. Lacking any English language equivalent the cultural historian, Jeremy Eichler, conveys *Bildung* as “the ideal of personal ennoblement through humanistic education, faith in the ability of literature, music, philosophy, and poetry to renovate the self, to shape one’s moral sensibilities, and to guide one toward a life of aesthetic grace.” For artists like Burleigh shaped by this philosophy, there was an onus to their artistic sensibilities in order to creating art which touched something universal in human experience and inspire individuals to their fullest and best humanity which, it was hypothesized, might similarly ennoble their society.

Spiritual transliteration

When art song spiritual took flight with Burleigh’s first composition, “Deep River,” in 1916, his art song spiritual became instantly popular with celebrity concert singers. Sixteen discrete spirituals were published in the years 1916-17 along with many variations for voice parts. Given the imprecatory nature of some lyrics from “Go Down, Moses,” “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,” and “Sinner Please Doan Let Dis Harve’ Pass,” it is curious these songs found emotional resonance with White audiences.

Scholars have wrestled with this conundrum. Jennifer Lynn Stoever’s 2016 *The Sonic Color Line* argues that White supremacy signified Blackness through the aural as well as the visual. And as skin colour became stigmatized and categories, so did what Black folks sounded like. On one hand, White systems heard the Black through the eardrum of minstrelsy. However, as Stoever also observed, when Black musicians performed in European modalities, with *bel canto* voices and formal performance practices, the aural lens of minstrelsy were disrupted momentarily.

To restabilize racial difference, Stoever wrote, White folks “naturalize[d] the notion of “the black voice” as more affective, truthful, and expressive than other voices, a musical

sound whose tones, timbre, rhythms, and cadences remained mired in the past and colored with the whipcrack of subjection.” The effect on White listeners was not a connection with the lived experience of enslavement portrayed in the spirituals but rather their emotional response was narrowed to racialised perception of Black folks as simpler and pathetic in their emotional register.⁴⁶

Jon Cruz’s *Culture on the Margins* further contributes to understanding of White reception of the spirituals by positing what he termed “ethnosympathy” which awakened White folks to the inner subjectivity of enslaved people through the music’s expression of shared human emotions like sorrow, joy, hope, and suffering. However, he also posited the term “disengaged engagement” to explain how White listeners could simultaneously experience Black subjectivity while divorcing it from the lived experience and political stakes of enslaved people.⁴⁷

To their contributions, I add “spiritual transliteration,” an additional layer of analysis about White reception of spirituals. There are many accounts of the emotions of weeping and sorrow as Burleigh sang spirituals, yet as Cruz observed this outpouring did little to disrupt White supremacist assumptions, politics, and practices. I propose that Burleigh’s White, majority Christian, audiences engaged in what I call “*spiritual transliteration*.” When his audience heard the words and music of enslaved people, they emotionally connected these sentiments onto their own spiritual journeys.

In other words, perception of Christian suffering, humiliation, loneliness, fear, as well as hope, joy, and faith became *spiritually transliterated* as their own Christian pilgrimage in a hostile and increasingly secular and unstable world during the First World War. For example, “Deep River” lyrics about “my home is over Jordan” evoked the promised land “where all is

⁴⁶ Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, “The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening,” in *The Sonic Color Line* (New York University Press, 2016).

⁴⁷ Cruz, Jon. *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation*. (Princeton University Press, 1999.) 3-5, 33.

bliss.” This might then have used to contextualize the daily suffering or perceived persecution of being a Christian with the hope of relief through prayer of divine intervention. Or this scale might have been expanded as longing for heaven where the trials and tribulations of living as a Christian in a hostile, secular world would finally be finished and their faithfulness rewarded with eternal bliss.

By transliterating the words of the original creators into spiritual comfort, it blurred the humanity enslaved people in the hush arbor or camp meetings who created this music by negating their lived experiences. Spiritualization also blunted the humanity of the White listeners, because their empathy was not triggered by the experience of enslaved people. Burleigh stated in his manifesto about the spirituals that believed the spiritual “breathes a hope, a faith in the ultimate *justice* and brotherhood of man” with the goal that “man – every man – will be free.” But those who spiritually transliterated actual human suffering into their own personal suffering were not able to experience freedom from the distortion of their humanity which came from inflicting - consciously or spiritually - the maliciousness and violence of White supremacy.

Conclusion

When Sam A. Floyd Jr. penned his 2004 article about Burleigh invisibility and fame, he rightly observed regarding Burleigh and generation:

Again, what a time that must have been! One would not know it, however, from the state of our current knowledge. Musically, the period 1895 to 1920 appears to have been richer than that of the Harlem Renaissance, that more famous event it helped create and which, ironically would eventually destroy it. In other words, the music and social mentality of the earlier period gave birth to the Harlem Renaissance and died in the delivery. And through it all, there was Harry T. Burleigh, whose hands metaphorically touched it all, in ways both large and small.

The work of this thesis seeks to remedy the deficit of knowledge not only about Burleigh’s music and career trajectory. It intends to make evident Burleigh’s inner spiritual, emotional, and intellectual life and thus to comprehend how he created a world in which he and other Black classical and popular musicians could work and flourish together. By

accomplishing that, he and his generation were the architects of Black modernity the Harlem Renaissance. But even further Burleigh's legacy of modernity leading to the Harlem Renaissance, and beyond, to the era of Black art music composers who fulfilled Burleigh's dream of creating orchestra music and symphonies.

In 1950, the year after Burleigh's death, one of those composers, William Grant Still, wrote an extensive article titled "Fifty Years of Progress in Music," which is a better analytical frame for assessing Burleigh's impact. Still, who was a towering figure himself in Black art music, considered Burleigh as "our of our most important pioneers." He believed Burleigh's life and work, in Still's estimation, "continued to inspire in this lifetime, [and] is paying dividends to us all today."⁴⁸

Kira Thurman argues in *Singing Like Germans* that the presence of Black musicians was always part of Europe's musical landscape "We simply had to listen" to notice, she admonished. To that I add that Burleigh is not *yet* perceived as an important cultural and intellectual figure outside of Black art music. But the long-underappreciated reach of Burleigh's legacy on generations of Black artists, writ large, is so evident, one need only look notice.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ William Grant Still, "Fifty Years of Progress in Music," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), November 11, 1950, Newspapers.com.

⁴⁹ Kira Thurman, *Singing like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Cornell University Press, 2021), 280.

Chapter 1

Erie Family Foundations

Introduction

Burleigh enjoyed the privilege of being freeborn in 1866. Even more unusual was his position as a second-generation freeborn – a freeborn son to a freeborn mother. His family struggled to survive and thrive under ante-bellum conditions and then the retrenchment of Reconstruction that enabled Jim Crow laws and customs to keep African Americans marginalized physically, economically, and politically. Burleigh grew up under Jim Crow's onerous regime but learned essential strategies for living as freely as possible from his family. Their commitments to education and economic security and their connections within various Black communities became the foundation of a creative career sustained for over fifty years in the White art music industry.⁵⁰

Gaining freedom

Though Burleigh and his mother before him were born free, his family's history of enslavement and abolitionism shaped his life and career. His biological father died when he was only six years old, so his maternal grandparents, Hamilton and Lucinda Waters, played a crucial role in imbuing Burleigh's young mind and heart with the love of education and the freedom struggle, as well as their work ethics, exercise of faith, and love of music. Burleigh's great-grandmother, Lovely Waters, was enslaved on a Maryland plantation when her youngest child, Hamilton Elzie Waters, was born around 1804 on the farm of James Tilghman in Princess Ann, Maryland. As rape of enslaved women was common practice,

⁵⁰ Despite his storied career, and despite musicologists examining and contextualizing his music, the details of Burleigh's life remained murky. That is, until Dr. Jean E. Snyder researched and wrote on Burleigh for forty years, publishing the first scholarly biography of Burleigh. For this chapter, therefore, I lean heavily on a particular strength in her work: Burleigh's life in the Midwest prior to his New York career.

Tilghman was Waters' putative father, particularly since Waters was described as having "a bright mulatto complexion." Lovely had three other children, two of whom had the surname Waters, but her oldest son, Henry, had the surname, Johnson. Nothing is known about her children Simon and Matilda Waters, but her two middle children were apparently not residents on the Tilghman farm. At some point, she was also separated from all but her youngest son.⁵¹

During enslavement, most African Americans had little or no access to literacy unless they were perilously self-taught. If discovered, they paid a high price for that knowledge, because literacy destabilized the master–enslaved relationship by offering a freedom of mind that might threaten enslavement of the body. Young Hamilton had a voracious and inquiring mind. But when Tilghman found his son hiding a spelling book under his shirt, he had his child whipped with seventy lashes for teaching himself to read. Undeterred, the punishment solidified Hamilton's commitment to education for himself and his descendants, a pursuit made more difficult due to early onset partial blindness.⁵²

That handicap, however, saved him from the brutality of field work. And perhaps because of his lack of utility as physical labourer, his father/enslaver Tilghman signed his manumission papers, setting the price for freedom at 50 dollars for Hamilton and 5 dollars for his mother. Hamilton's manumission papers reveal he "was of the age of twenty-nine years or thereabouts and able to work and gain a sufficient livelihood and maintenance," so he was likely hired out and able to retain some of his earnings. At age twenty-nine and after three years' labour, he was able to pay for a Certificate of Freedom, issued on April 13, 1835.

⁵¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 4–6. In the 1830s, Tilghman began "renting" his enslaved people to plantations in Mississippi, making it nearly impossible to search for Lovey's family during this time frame. Stephani Julecana Miller, "John Tilghman," *Eastern Shore's Africans, Melungeons and Native Americans*, May 4, 2017; United States Bureau of the Census, 1850 Population Schedule, entry for Henry Johnson, accessed July 27, 2026.

⁵² Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 4–6; Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 154–63.

Hamilton and his mother thus gained heretofore unimaginable abilities: to travel, to search for family, to seek further education, to find gainful employment, to marry freely, and to join their own freedom struggles with those of the larger community. Once free, their first order of business was to search for Lovely's three lost children. They were only able to find her eldest son, Hamilton's half-brother Henry Johnson, living with his family in Ithaca, New York. Born around 1790, also in Maryland, somehow Johnson was free and the minister of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church, an active underground railroad site.⁵³

New homes in the North

Waters' nephew, William F. Johnson, became a vital connection for Burleigh when he moved to New York in the 1890s. Also afflicted with early onset blindness, perhaps a congenital family impairment, Johnson was an educational, political, and charitable light in the free Black community in Weeksville, Brooklyn. By connecting his cousin to this community, Johnson was instrumental to Burleigh establishing his singing career in the city upon his arrival.⁵⁴

Only two years after being freed and settling in Ithaca, Lovey Waters died in 1837, without knowing the whereabouts of her other lost children. Shortly after his mother's death, Hamilton married Lucinda Duncanson. Her parents, a White Scottish immigrant and a First Tribes woman, raised their daughter with middle-class education and manners. As a result, her "dialect, conversation and manners revealed the good breeding and polish of the best society, among whom her early life was evidently spent." These attributes and values influenced subsequent generations' aspirations and opportunities.⁵⁵

Before she married Hamilton Waters, these social skills made possible Lucinda's position in the household of New York's Lieutenant Governor Enos Thompson Throop. In

⁵³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 4–5.

⁵⁴ "Rev. W. F. Johnson," *New York Age*, 1890.

⁵⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 4, 6; "Obituary of Hamilton E. Waters," *Christian Recorder*, 1877.

1829, when Governor Martin Van Buren left for Washington, Throop was appointed governor of New York. Lucinda was moved to work in the governor's mansion. She never imagined that in the future her grandson would sing for Governor Theodore Roosevelt, let alone that he would spend the night as the guest of the governor, as no segregated accommodation in the city was available.

Burleigh's mixed-race past was evident in his lighter complexion. Because of the prevalence of colorism, he enjoyed more ready acceptance and access to opportunities in both in the White and Black communities. While Lucinda also conferred many invisible, salubrious qualities in her family, light skin was a highly valuable, visible asset for her grandson.⁵⁶

It is unclear why, once they married, Hamilton and Lucinda moved from Ithaca to settle in the vibrant port city of Erie, Pennsylvania. Given the family's abolitionist convictions, the town's geographical importance to the Underground Railroad may have motivated their choice. By 1844, Erie was the endpoint of the Erie Canal Extension, which intersected major roads and five indigenous trails used by fugitives, connecting Lake Erie to the Mississippi River and the Deep South. Across the lake, Canada offered freedom to fugitive slaves.⁵⁷

Just as he had defied the prohibition against literacy, Hamilton continued subversive work by smuggling enslaved people to liberation. He worked for Robert Vosburgh, an African American barber, dry cleaner, and operator of Erie's Underground Railroad station. As a conductor, Hamilton undertook dangerous work, hiding escaped people from their human traffickers, because much of Erie did not support abolition in the 1830s. This surreptitious aspect of Hamilton's life was apparently hidden from Erie's anti-abolitionist

⁵⁶ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 5–7, 165.

⁵⁷ Switala, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, 101–8; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 7.

White citizenry. A local Erie publication called the Waters family “interesting and unobtrusive” – surely Hamilton’s aim while he participated in smuggling people to freedom.⁵⁸

Although Burleigh’s own liberation work occurred within the White music industry, his family history suggested creative ways to resist White supremacy. Later in life, Burleigh attributed many of his ideas to his family’s courageous struggle to create opportunities for freedom for their community.⁵⁹

Despite Hamilton’s poor vision, the 1850 census listed his occupation as cloth dyer. In the 1860s, as his vision continued to deteriorate, he became a town crier. By the time his grandsons came along, he added town lamplighter to his jobs, though he was nearly blind and needed his young grandson’s assistance.⁶⁰

Hamilton and Lucinda Waters had three daughters: Elizabeth, Burleigh’s mother, was born in 1838; Louisa in 1846; but their third daughter, Jane, born in 1851, did not survive childhood. White Erie citizens opposed Black homeownership, often with physical violence and legal opposition, Hamilton challenged these strictures by purchasing a piece of property to build his expanding family a home in “Jerusalem,” the city’s segregated neighbourhood. That same year, he furthered the protection of Erie’s Black community by co-founding the United Benevolent Equal Rights Society, a vigilance committee responsible for a broad range of community needs.⁶¹

Though Burleigh’s grandmother, Lucinda, died when he was one year old, her social skills and aesthetic sensibilities lived through her children. Though not wealthy, the family

⁵⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 7–8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8–9, 18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7; “Waters Family, 1850 U.S. Census,” FamilySearch, accessed July 27, 2025; “Hamilton Waters Family, United States Census, 1880,” FamilySearch, accessed July 27, 2025.

⁶¹ Sarah S. Thompson, *Journey From Jerusalem: An Illustrated Introduction to Erie’s African American History, 1795–1995*, with essay by Karen James (Erie County Historical Society, 1996), 2–3; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 9–12; “Waters Family,” 1850 U. S. Census.

ethos consisted of being literate, cultured, poised conversationally and socially, good humoured, and presenting oneself with all the elegance that middle-class income enabled. Scholar Imani Perry termed these values as “black formalism.” She distinguishes this from the “politics of respectability” which she regards as White-facing. For Black people in the late nineteenth-century rituals, Lucinda’s manner was related to the freedom of self-definition, the “codes of conduct and routine, dignified ways of doing and being” expressed within their homes, organizations, stages, and churches. This dignified sense of self aided Burleigh as he established his career.⁶²

Burleigh spent his first eleven years close to his grandfather Hamilton, until he died in 1877. As children, he and his older brother Reginald worked alongside their grandfather, helping him with his various jobs and leading him by hand to the Himrod Mission after church on Sundays. Burleigh recalled his grandfather’s example of dogged pursuit of education and liberation for his community, and his relentless work ethic. Toward the end of his career, Burleigh averred that his grandfather would have been proud of his achievement of singing in a White church for many years. An Erie journal article described Hamilton as “a person whose originality, versatility and patient toil in all the avenues of life then open to him, and of life then made him a favourite with some of our leading citizens, who soon discovered his competency and perfect reliability.” This description would aptly describe his grandson at the end of his fifty-two-year music career.⁶³

Centrality of education across the generations

In Erie, the Waters/Burleigh family exemplified commitment to education. As soon as Erie’s Himrod Mission opened, Hamilton pursued his education freely for the first time. It ran a daily school, as well as afternoon Sabbath School, which taught Bible study, reading, writing and math to Black male students, and was one of the few places in town where spirituals

⁶² Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 15–6; Perry, *May We Forever Stand*, 8–10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 15, 28.

were sung. Burleigh was also well-schooled by his grandfather in the Black liberation music created during enslavement, known as jubilee songs or spirituals. Communal singing at the Mission was a particular source of family joy, expressing belief in the work of earthly liberation and the hope of eternal homecoming.⁶⁴

But by 1846, unhappy with the all-White teaching staff and the prohibition against teaching women and girls, Hamilton and four others established the “Colored School” to “serve all people, sexes, conditions, colors and denomination.” Burleigh’s mother Elizabeth started at her father’s school, and then was fortunate enough to attend Allegheny Institute, a school with a classical curriculum for free Black Americans 130 miles away from Erie. Pursuing her education far from Erie, Elizabeth demonstrated bravery, as she travelled when the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 empowered White human traffickers to kidnap free Black people and send them South for sale. Any free-moving Black person was therefore in peril, demonstrating that Burleigh’s grandparents were also extraordinarily courageous when they sent their daughter over a hundred miles away to further her education.⁶⁵

Elizabeth attended one of the Institute’s first matriculating classes, to be educated “in the various branches of science, literature, and ancient and modern language.” She studied Greek, Latin, and French, discovering a facility for languages, in which her son would later excel. She also took classes in painting, music, drawing, writing, and mathematics. At her commencement, and as acknowledgement of her father’s past subjugation, she read her political essay on “American Institutions” and enslavement. For her, though, this fine classical education did not equate with vocational opportunity; but her son Harry benefited greatly from the education that she and his aunt Louisa achieve. He embraced their love of literature and languages, which became integral to his later career as a composer. His

⁶⁴ Ibid., 8, 11, 4. The Mission was established in 1839 by one of Erie’s leading White abolitionists, William Himrod, Sr, a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

⁶⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 12.

linguistic abilities to sing, speak, and write with ease in French, German, and Italian became essential to relationships during his years at the Conservatory. His family's passion for music later shaped his aspiration to be an art musician, despite the significant financial and education obstacles that Jim Crow threw in his way.⁶⁶

Elizabeth's family

After graduating from Allegheny in 1855, as said above, Elizabeth's classical education did not equate to vocational opportunity. The only teaching position available to her was at the Colored School, founded by her father, which did little to lessen the financial inequities her family faced. Nor did it protect her from violence; for "colored" schools were often virulently attacked to dissuade them from participation in the body politic.⁶⁷

Shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War, Elizabeth met Henry Thacker Burley, a recent migrant to Erie. (The family later changed their surname to the English spelling, "Burleigh.") On moving to Erie, Burley quickly became involved in abolitionism and civil rights efforts. After his appointment as Superintendent of the Colored School, he and Elizabeth Waters married in 1862. By September 1864, Burley had joined the U.S. Navy's fight in the Civil War. After surviving the war, he joined Erie's Equal Rights League, worked for a White banker, and then for the railroad to support his young family.⁶⁸

In 1866, the couple welcomed Henry Thacker Burleigh, known to the family as "Harry." He was the second oldest of four children, only three of whom survived to adulthood – the eldest son Reginald, Harry, and their younger daughter Eva. Tragedy struck in 1873, when Burleigh was seven years old. His father, a conductor on the Lake Shore Railway and Michigan Southern Railway, died age thirty-five of a heart attack.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 11, 15–18; Saul Sack, *History of Higher Education in Pennsylvania* (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1963), 167–68.

⁶⁷ Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 12–3.

⁶⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 21–2, 26.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 22, 26.

Elizabeth, now a young widow with three children, applied for an open teaching position in the Erie public schools. Burleigh recalled in a 1924 interview that though she was qualified to teach at “the first women’s seminary in the land,” when she applied for the job at Erie Public School No. 1 in 1872 “race prejudice was so rife at the time she was unsuccessful.” Instead, the school offered her the demeaning position of school janitress. As a widow with three children, she took the job to provide for her family. This was particularly bitter as her family was known for their dignity, elegance, erudition, and social graces, and to cap it all, Elizabeth was proficient in three languages and in the music arts.⁷⁰

While colorism meant that the family’s lighter complexions made acceptance easier in both the Black and White communities, pale skin, respectability, and academic abilities did not counterbalance the dominant ideology of White supremacy. Elizabeth found a way to use her intellect by teaching the largest Sunday Bible study group in the Erie area with her Greek version of the New Testament to hand. “She was a remarkable woman, intelligent and lofty, with a fixity of purpose from which she never deviated,” Burleigh recalled toward the end of his career. “I feel humble and proud if I have reflected a small degree of her nobility.”⁷¹

In 1875, three years after her husband’s sudden death, Elizabeth married John Elmendorf. He became the father figure that Burleigh remembered most. Like her first husband, he was a Civil War veteran. Soon Harry had two new half siblings. Bessie and Elzie Elmendorf, like Harry, were gifted musicians. Burleigh’s stepfather worked as a coachman for one of Erie’s wealthiest businessmen and eventually saved enough to start his own livery. Over the years Burleigh and his family worked for the wealthiest people in Erie, something that called upon all the resources of their family’s ethos to manage with dignity and

⁷⁰ Lester A. Walton, “Burleigh Honored,” *New York Age*, May 7, 1908.

⁷¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 17; Nora Holt, “St. George’s Fete Harry Burleigh, Soloist at Church for 50 Years,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 1944.

diplomacy. This provided critical preparation for his career in New York, largely for rich employers.⁷²

Strategy of work with dignity across the color line

For economic reasons, the Waters, Burleigh, and Elmendorf families held many jobs, because they also knew that White folks could endanger their lives and livelihood. Over the years Burleigh and his family worked for the wealthiest people in Erie, which speaks to their agility managing White employers' expectations and demands. Still, as a form of self-protection

Family influence

Burleigh's keen love of music began at home, where his grandfather had sung the plantation songs and spirituals from his enslavement childhood with "an exceptional melodious voice." Burleigh's mother, a pianist and fine singer, taught her son the love of European art music. But it was his aunt Louisa who believed he possessed musical ability beyond them all; she arranged for his first piano and vocal lessons. Aunt Louisa was also the one with whom Harry shared his most humiliating experiences, when "whiteboys' stings about his color made him feel that life was just absolutely unbearable." As a teenager, he began to imagine life as a singer. Aunt Louise "encouraged...in every way possible this secret ambition."⁷³

At great cost, the family engaged a British-born music teacher, George F. Brierly, who had trained at Worcester Cathedral, renowned for its choral singing. Brierly came to town as an organ tuner but stayed when he won the position of music director at Erie's First Methodist Church where Elizabeth Burleigh was teaching Sunday School. After high school, Burleigh, his mother, and his sister Eva were invited to join the Orpheus Society, an elite musical institution that was unusual for being integrated racially. Named for the Greek myth about a human whose singing influenced the gods, the Orpheus ensemble celebrated

⁷² Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 42, 50, 27. Walton, "Burleigh Honored."

⁷³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 42, 28, 34.

virtuosity in art music. The Burleigh family's inclusion attests to their musicianship and vocal talent.⁷⁴

Outside of church and the Orpheus Society, Burleigh experienced a wide variety of music. As a crossroads city and busy port, Erie was inundated with travelling minstrel shows, vaudeville, Uncle Tom shows, and spectacle performances, many of which used African American songs in various iterations. The success of the *bel canto* Fisk Jubilee Singers in the 1870s spawned many travelling jubilee troupes, and Burleigh's family heard the Hampton Singers in 1875 when he was nine years old. Likewise, the famous Hyer Sisters, soprano Anna and contralto Emma, the tenor Wallace King, and baritone John Luca all came through Erie on several occasions, perhaps inspiring the young Burleigh's desire for a concert career.

Burleigh's musical influences were tied to the family's Christianity, which was unusually broad in its ecumenicalism. The family attended St. James A. M. E. church, established in 1827, and the only Black church in Erie for forty years. During Burleigh's childhood, spirituals were scorned at St. James in favour of choral and instrumental music. For the early twentieth-century musicologist Maud Cuney-Hare, this repugnance was rooted in the music's too keen reminder of "the misfortunes of the race" and resentment because White folk who "wished to restrict Negro singers to folk song."⁷⁵

Since the small St. James congregation could not support a full-time pastor, the church lacked denominational authority for sacraments like marriage, baptism, and funerals. Therefore in 1869, Waters, his daughters Louisa and Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's first husband, Henry, joined the St. Paul's Episcopal Church, a predominantly White

⁷⁴ Ibid., 28, 49–50.

⁷⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 43–6; Sandra Graham, *Spirituals and Birth of Black Entertainment* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 200; Maud Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music* (Associated Publishers, 1936), 240. Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 43–6; Sandra Graham, *Spirituals and Birth of Black Entertainment*, (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 200; Maud Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, (Associated Publishers, 1936), 240.

congregation. Here they could receive the sacraments, although African American members were segregated to pews in the rear of the sanctuary. The music was available to all, however, so Burleigh was exposed to the White Christian church's long music tradition of the choral music of Byrd, Palestrina, Tallis, Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Brahms. The entire Burleigh family was baptized at St. Paul's, although the family's social life revolved around the Black congregation at St. James.⁷⁶

From these early experiences, Burleigh was always curious and open about the various faith expressions and practices. When he moved to New York he worked professionally in a White Episcopal church, but he also enjoyed visiting St. Patrick's Cathedral, St. Philip's Church in the Tenderloin district and then Harlem, and a variety of other denominational churches. He was generous with his vocal gifts for charitable causes in a wide variety of Black churches without regard to denominational distinctions.⁷⁷

Seeds of a singing career

In high school, Burleigh began trying to sing professionally. In 1885, at the age of nineteen, when St. Paul's Episcopal formed men's and boys' choirs, he was hired as a baritone chorister. He was also hired to sing on Fridays at the Reform Jewish Temple of Erie. He became well-versed in the liturgical and musical canons of the Episcopal and Presbyterian congregations, as well as mastering singing the Hebrew liturgy. Perhaps more importantly, Burleigh's early experiences in Erie prepared him to maintain multiple sacred music jobs in New York City for long periods.⁷⁸

Soon Erie's Park Presbyterian also hired Burleigh for their choir. Elizabeth Russell, a music patron and congregant, occasionally employed Harry's mother to serve at her musical soirées. At one musical evening, Burleigh recalled being so intent on hearing the Hungarian

⁷⁶ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 12, 24–5.

⁷⁷ "Harry Burleigh on Ballot For ASCAP Directorship," *New York Herald Tribune*, 1941.

⁷⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 47–8.

pianist Rafael Joseffy “at any cost” that he stood outside the window to hear “the great Joseffy in his fullest power.” Years later, when he arrived at the National Conservatory, Russell’s connections proved crucial for Burleigh’s audition process where Joseffy was one of his examiners. Burleigh may also have heard the Venezuelan pianist Teresa Carreño, a regular at Mrs. Russell’s. She too was on the Conservatory faculty when Burleigh arrived for his audition in 1891. These intricate webs of relationships facilitated Burleigh’s extraordinary ability to connect with some of New York’s most celebrated musicians soon after moving to the city.⁷⁹

Established as a professional sacred music singer, he also began appearing on programs sponsored by Clark Business College, where Burleigh augmented his high school courses with commercial skills. At Clark he learned stenography and perfected his beautiful handwriting. These skills led to administrative work in New York at the Conservatory, and a job as a meticulous copyist of musical scores for the orchestra librarian and for the school’s director, Antonin Dvořák. In Erie, he began to fulfil his “secret ambition” to be a singer. Soon after graduating in 1887, his singing engagements earned coverage in the popular Black-owned *Cleveland Gazette* newspaper, an indicator of the pride of his community.⁸⁰

Due to the limited employment opportunities for African Americans, and despite all the jobs his family worked, Harry could not afford conservatory training when he finished high school. Singing did not provide sufficient income. So, he took a job at the Erie Colby Piano Company where he practiced when off the clock. Thanks to his training at Clarke Business School, Burleigh moved from the piano store to the white-collar job of stenographer and bookkeeper at Erie’s Brown Folding Machine Company. Beside his three sacred music positions and these two jobs, after high school Burleigh worked summers

⁷⁹Ibid., 12–13, 43, 48, 50, 69; Henry Theophilus Finck, *My Adventures in the Golden Age of Music* (Da Capo Press, 1971), 285.

⁸⁰Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 30–1; “Burleigh Promoted,” *Cleveland Gazette*, 1890.

loading freight at the port and later working as a pantryman on lake steamers in and out of the port of Buffalo. Given his after-hours and weekend singing engagements, he endured long, exhausting weeks of work.⁸¹

In 1888, Burleigh briefly joined a troupe of singers. For about nine months he travelled with the New Orleans University Jubilee Singers. Riding on the tails of the spectacular success of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, this group advertised performing to raise funds for their school. Though he appeared inclined to continue with them, after a trip home he gave up his position. His family may have suspected something was amiss. A couple of years later, an article appeared saying the group was fraudulently raising funds by falsely claiming association with the University.⁸²

From 1888 to 1892, Burleigh built a recital career in the region's Black community. Working as his own manager, he tapped into the relational networks in nearby Buffalo, Cincinnati, and Cleveland. One of Harry's biggest champions in this period was the journalist H. C. Smith, founder and editor of the *Cleveland Gazette*. Beginning in 1890, the editor published twelve articles about "Erie's Promising Baritone." As a result of the *Gazette's* circulation, Burleigh's engagements multiplied among Black communities on the Great Lakes.⁸³

Buffalo, Cleveland, and Erie were only one hundred miles apart. Connected by busy train and steamer lines, they formed an important cultural nexus with strong ties to the East Coast. Rail travel enabled short day trips between the three cities, a resource Burleigh used advantageously to find new engagements. As Black elites throughout the region invested in

⁸¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 31, 55, 42: Graduating at the age of twenty-one perhaps indicates how his labour was needed for family income.

⁸² Ibid., 52; Lynn Abbott, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895* (University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 184.

⁸³ "Erie's Promising Baritone," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1890; "Harry T. Burleigh in Austinburg, OH," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1890; "About Women and Men," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1890; "Buffalo Briefs," *New York Age*, 1891; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 50.

Burleigh's future by sharing their social and professional capital, they facilitated his professional soloist career.⁸⁴

One family played a particularly pivotal role. The Talberts, one of the wealthiest African American families in Buffalo, developed a close relationship with Burleigh. In the autumn of 1891, Harry was the best man for William Talbert when he wed Mary Burnett in Oberlin, Ohio. Mary Burnett Talbert became a well-known national civil rights activist, and over the years her sociopolitical circle consisted of many people who had direct influence on Burleigh's life: Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells.⁸⁵

Like many of her educated peers, Mary was also a musician and music aficionado. The Talberts appreciated Burleigh's talent and saw him as an exemplar of racial achievement. They were keen to facilitate his growing career. Their paths would intersect in social, musical, and political settings for the next thirty years. Both Burleigh and Mary Talbert Burnett won the NAACP's prestigious Springarn Medal in 1917 and 1922, respectively, to honour "the man or woman of African descent and American citizenship who shall have made the highest achievement during the preceding year or years in any honorable field."⁸⁶

Immediately after William and Mary's marriage, William's younger brother entered the National Conservatory in New York in September of 1891. Walter "Thad" Talbert, an aspiring pianist, only stayed at the Conservatory a short time, but he became a powerfully connected musical ally for Burleigh. Thad alerted Harry to compete for scholarships which

⁸⁴ "Buffalo Briefs," *New York Age*, 1891.

⁸⁵ "Burleigh Guest of Talberts in Buffalo," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1891; "Mr. W. H. Talbert Married," *Buffalo Sunday Morning News*, 1891.

⁸⁶ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Springarn Medal," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 25, 2022.

Jeannette Thurber offered to qualified candidates. Burleigh travelled to New York in January of 1892 and won the conservatory scholarship that changed his life.⁸⁷

Networking among Black aristocrats in Brooklyn and Manhattan

When Burleigh arrived in New York, most elite Black Americans knew that Manhattan Island was unsafe, ever since the racial bloodshed of 1863, three decades earlier. Many fled across the harbour to Long Island, heading east with pursuers at their heels. However, in the Weeksville section of Brooklyn, some Black folks armed themselves and set out pickets to protect themselves and their property. James Weldon Johnson's autobiography, *Along This Way*, published in 1912, said that "Forty years before, there had been a general exodus of the better-off Negroes from Manhattan to Brooklyn. For some years still further back, there had been the steady lure of the better opportunity to buy homes on that side of the East River; but the Draft Riots in 1863 precipitated a wholesale migration."⁸⁸ This area grew into a prosperous African American enclave in the latter decades of nineteenth century. An increasing number of wealthy Black New Yorkers found a sense of safety in Brooklyn because it had more space for "physical safety, education, economic self-sufficiency, and political self-determination."⁸⁹

Burleigh's scholarship only covered tuition, but no living expenses. To survive he needed networks in New York. His mother and stepfather recognized how critical these people could be to his career, so after learning of the scholarship, Elizabeth and John travelled to Brooklyn. Doubtless part of their impetus for the trip was anxiety about their

⁸⁷ "Burleigh Guest of Talberts in Buffalo," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1891; "At the National Conservatory of Music," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1891; "Second Recital by W. T. Talbert," May 16, 1892, CH187932, Carnegie Hall Archives, Programs Collection.

⁸⁸ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 202: See also chapters 9, 10, and 16 in Barnet Schecter's *The Devil's Own Work* (Walker & Company, 2005) for more on the riots and post-riot Black migration.

⁸⁹ Judith Wellman, *Brooklyn's Promised Land: The Free Black Community of Weeksville* (New York University Press, 2014), 1-2.

son's safety on the island. They also recognized Harry's need to support himself to retain his tuition scholarship.⁹⁰

Seeking reassurance on both counts, they were keen to connect with Elizabeth's cousin, Reverend William F. Johnson, son of her uncle Henry Johnson. Like Burleigh's grandfather Hamilton, Johnson was afflicted with congenital, early onset blindness. He arrived from Ithaca in the 1850s to study at the Institute for the Blind in the Tenderloin district, an area of targeted violence during the Draft Riots. So, like many others Black Manhattanites, Johnson migrated to the Weeksville section of Brooklyn.

He established himself as an abolitionist speaker who appeared with well-known White reformers Henry Ward Beecher and Henry Highland Garnet. As a respected figure in the freedom struggle, Johnson was ideally positioned to give his cousin Burleigh entrée to the wealthy Black families who hosted music salons. The network in New York's Black Brooklyn became a critical financial and a relational network when Burleigh moved to the city. When Burleigh's parents visited Johnson after Burleigh won his scholarship, he threw them a large dinner party which included two major Brooklyn figures, the journalist T. Thomas Fortune and lawyer T. McCants Stewart, both of whom worked politically and philanthropically with Johnson. The gathering was a "who's who" of Brooklyn's Black bourgeoisie.⁹¹

Johnson enabled Burleigh's access to these "old money" families who became wealthy in the antebellum period. Though many relocated to Brooklyn after the riots, because many had work or business in Manhattan, they established Black clubs and churches in the Tenderloin district – a neighbourhood stretching northward from Twenty-Third Street into the Fifties on the island's west side. These institutions were safe places during Jim Crow prohibitions. They were also the nexus of charitable fundraising by clubs like the Society of

⁹⁰ Cuncy-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 325.

⁹¹ Lara Steensland Mullarkey, "In the Hands of Their Own: The Story of the Weeksville School 1840–1893" (PhD diss., Ed.D., Teachers College, Columbia University, 2012), *ProQuest*, 75–79; "Rev. W. F. Johnson"; *New York Age*; "An Anniversary Dinner," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1891.

the Sons of New York and a favourite Black elite church, St. Philip's Episcopal, both of which figured in Burleigh's early New York singing career.⁹²

Though his cousin Johnson made a small fortune in real estate, he augmented this with his magic lantern exhibitions. In 1870, he took over management of the Howard Colored Orphan Asylum, the institution attacked and razed during the riot. Johnson's political engagement, like his kin in Erie, centred on Black access to education. In the 1880s, he became embroiled in a fight for teacher integration in the public school system in the Weeksville area.

One of his close comrades was Philip A. White, who became wealthy in the 1840s as owner of a prosperous pharmacy business in Greenwich Village.⁹³ In acknowledgment of White's efforts fight for desegregation of Brooklyn's public schools, in 1883 Brooklyn Mayor Seth Low appointed White as the first African American to sit on a Board of Education. Despite White's appointment, school desegregation remained an intractable issue. Johnson and White joined forces with journalist T. Thomas Fortune and lawyer T. McCants Stewart to agitate for equitable Black education and employment of Black teachers. These men played a variety roles in Burleigh's early career development.⁹⁴

A revered figure amongst New York's Black bourgeoisie, Philip and his wife, Elizabeth, hosted "some of the most brilliant" events of the social season. For the striving, new Conservatory student, Burleigh appreciated Johnson's friendship with the Whites. Though White died in 1891, just before Harry entered the Conservatory, Elizabeth recognized the young baritone's talent. In November 1892, an article describes Burleigh

⁹² Willard E. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (University of Arkansas Press, 1990), 227–28; Roi Ottley, *New World A-Coming: Inside Black America* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), 169–70.

⁹³ "Its Good Work," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1890; "Weeksville in Commotion Again," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 1869; Mullarkey, "In the Hands of Their Own," 118–19; "Obituary—Philip A. White," *The Sun*, 1891; Meilan Solly, "Before There Was Streaming, the Victorians Had 'Magic Lanterns,'" *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 14, 2018: This technology, a precursor to photography and moving pictures, was a lucrative form of entertainment.

⁹⁴ Judith Kafka and Cici Matheny, "Racial Integration, White Appropriation, and School Choice: The Demise of the Colored Schools of Late Nineteenth Century Brooklyn," *Journal of Urban History*, (June 21, 2020) 118–20.

singing at her “magnificent and spacious” home at an evening of charades to benefit “some charitable race institution.” His performance was encored three times. Performing in White’s salon was the gold standard of approbation in New York’s Black high circles.⁹⁵

This recognition landed Burleigh his first steadily paying vocal positions in the African American church of St. Philip’s, where White was a head warden of the vestry. Founded in 1809, St. Philip’s grew out of the parish of Trinity Church. But because African American congregants faced inequality and racism from fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, they launched their own institution in the early 1800s – the “Free African Church of St. Philip.” When Burleigh arrived at the Conservatory in January 1892, St. Philip’s had moved into a building at 161 West 25th Street, the heart of the Tenderloin district, and was by then the wealthiest Black congregation in America.⁹⁶ With his hiring, Burleigh gained further prestige and visibility within New York’s Black bourgeois community. As St. Philip’s catered to affluent African Americans, Burleigh’s position with the men’s and boys’ choir, “the largest surpliced, Colored boy choir in the United States,” he ascended to the ecclesiastical and sacred music epicentre of the city’s Black elite society.⁹⁷

These wealthy African Americans drew distinctions between native-born New Yorkers, “old money,” and the newly rich whose attainments came during or after Reconstruction. They disregarded Burleigh’s modest background because of his cousin Johnson’s *bona fides* and because he possessed qualities the Black bourgeoisie valued. Just as their White counterparts enjoyed the consumption and patronage of art and culture on their own terms but also as signifiers of their status, so Burleigh’s musical virtuosity, complexion,

⁹⁵ “The Rounder’s Chat,” *Cleveland Gazette*, 1892; Mullarkey, “In the Hands of Their Own,” 118–19.

⁹⁶ “Philip A. White, Prominent Black Aristocrat of New York (1823–1891),” *Trailblazing Through Greenwich Village*, Macaulay Honors College, CUNY, accessed July 27, 2025; Kenneth T. Jackson, Lisa Keller, and Nancy Flood, eds., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (Yale University Press, 2010), 1142. The St. Philip association arises from the account in Christian scripture of the apostle Philip baptizing an Ethiopian eunuch who became a follower of Jesus.

⁹⁷ “A Colored Boy Choir,” *Allegheny County Democrat*, 1862.

and connection with Thurber's well-publicized school put him in good stead with the congregation.⁹⁸

Harry also benefited from his cousin's political and cultural ties in a material way. Johnson's seat on the board of the Brooklyn Literary Union enabled Harry's performance at the Union when it hosted Dr. John Mercer Langston, a former dean of Howard University Law School and Minister to Haiti. Johnson was also a member of the nominating committee for the Afro-American League, the first national civil rights organization. Membership of the League strengthened his friendship with its founder, T. Thomas Fortune, who ran the influential newspaper, *The New York Age*. Fortune's newspaper described Johnson as "practically a blind man, but he does more and better work than any man of the race in Brooklyn with unimpaired sight. He is the finest specimen of a race man all the way through anywhere [sic] to be found. He is into every race effort with voice and pen and purse." In the coming years, *The New York Age* covered Burleigh's career extensively as he ascended to fame. The ubiquity of the *Age* in Black homes raised his profile in New York and throughout the country. With the early patronage of Brooklyn's Black community, Burleigh was able to sustain himself economically in the first two years of his New York career.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Burleigh could not have been prepared for the challenges of building an art music career in America's largest city in 1892 without his family's economic strategies, work ethic, commitment to and love of education, and the stability of their Christian faith. A surfeit of light-skinned, talented musicians tried to carve out their careers in the city at the time, but his family's ethos contributed to his ability to connect relationally and professionally with key figures in the city, despite colorism and the color line.

⁹⁸ Carla A. Peterson, *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (Yale University Press, 2011), 321–22.

⁹⁹ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 248–49; "Women's Night in Brooklyn; Mrs. Coppin's Address Before the Literary Union," *The New York Age*, 1891; "Little Ages," *The New York Age*, 1890.

His grandfather Waters' legacy of freedom work provided a model for his children and grandchildren to defy White notions of what they could accomplish and where they belonged. Burleigh's lifelong pursuit of learning came from his grandfather's tenacious fight for literacy and education for his family and community. Perhaps most importantly, Burleigh learned from the creative and courageous way his grandparents and parents retained their dignity while maintaining good relations with their employers. He also learned how they achieved trust from their employers when racism posited Black people as inherently untrustworthy, or even criminal. This facility led to employment opportunities and respect from the White community, a great achievement in his early New York career.

There was another less apparent attribute he carried with him, which was joy. Without more archival evidence, we need to extrapolate from his family's life that they chose a joyous, optimistic, and good-humoured approach to their lives, never entirely deflated by the incessant racism that kept them economically, politically, and physically constrained. That joy was most evident when expressed through music – the joy of singing in the various churches they attended, the joy of working at Mrs. Russell's for proximity to music, the joy of home music-making, singing together to lighten their workload, and the joy of singing elaborate and exacting European music in church and with the Orpheus Society. Life appears to have sustained Burleigh and his family through musical expressiveness. The joy apparent in Burleigh's family music life was perhaps their most sustaining gift of all.

Chapter 2

Burleigh at the National Conservatory, 1892

Introduction

When Burleigh arrived from Erie in December 1891 to audition at the National Conservatory of the Music of America, his career trajectory was far from assured. Blessed with a warm baritone voice and a growing concertizing career in Black communities of the Midwest, his music career could have taken many paths. However, the founder's vision and commitments played a critical role in Burleigh's success.

Jeannette M. Thurber's National Conservatory provided professional training for American musicians with top-notch faculty, adhering to principles of Europe's highly respected conservatories, something unparalleled in this period. Equally unusual was her liberal admission policy: open to women, people with disabilities, and pupils of color. Several goals drove her approach. Thurber believed that the United States should have its own quality national institution to train American-born musicians to compete for spots in their national orchestras where German and German-trained musicians had a hegemony. Her secondary goal was that the Conservatory produce American composers making uniquely American music. Finally, Thurber saw her school as an investment in the country's culture. She provided tuition scholarships for talented individuals otherwise excluded because of lack of means.

For Burleigh, the opportunities, access, and goals of the Conservatory were out of reach without a scholarship. Even with one, his ability to gain enough work to support his living expenses was in question. He established a network for concertizing in the Midwest, but in New York Burleigh had to start anew to build his reputation and a retinue of supporters. However, his family was accustomed to working within the financial

precariousness engendered by American's racial caste system and developed a strategy to work agilely across the color line to secure multiple income streams. But Burleigh's inability to pay for the Conservatory was not the only challenge. He faced entrenched impediments to his chosen career path as a concert singer from the whole musical milieu.

At the end of the nineteenth century, most African American art musicians were employed in the vaudeville and minstrel show circuit. The popularity of the Fisk Jubilee Singers spawned many similar "jubilee" ensembles. While they performed to fundraise for Fisk, their imitators pursued commercial ends. This commercialization opened new performance outlets for classically trained singers. While these fresh opportunities were welcome, when White impresarios programmed, they wanted minstrelsy from Black performers, albeit now mixed with opera arias, as a spectacle for White audiences.¹⁰⁰

Burleigh performed for about nine months with New Orleans University Jubilee Singers but apparently found the repertoire and itinerant life wanting. That the National Conservatory was training Black singers according to their talent and inclination, to the standards of European conservatoires, provided an unprecedented opportunity.

In his first year, Burleigh focused on meeting the rigorous demands of his classes. As he tapped into family kinship networks in Brooklyn and found sympathetic friends and colleagues at the Conservatory, he pieced together an increasingly diverse group – both White and Black – who believed in his vocal abilities and musicianship. They opened doors which he eagerly entered. That synergy between his talent and his admirers quickly took Burleigh from being from an aspiring singer from a small Midwestern city to the very center of New York's White and Black monied elites, and from there onto the national stage.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Graham, "The Fisk Jubilee Singers," xiv, xv.

¹⁰¹ Brooklyn was not consolidated as part of New York City until 1898. For sake of brevity, "New York" stands throughout for "Manhattan," but also after 1898 to describe a consolidated city.

In these early years, Burleigh acquired the necessary skills to move fluidly within a racist system designed to marginalize him. With many champions, he began to build a sustainable, and ultimately a storied music career. A unique institution, founded by a unique White woman, set the stage.

Jeannette M. Thurber, cultural entrepreneur

The National Conservatory of the Music of America was founded in 1885 by Jeannette M. Thurber (1850–1946), an indefatigable, wealthy White music patron with a mission to provide a music education equivalent to European conservatories. As a teenager, Thurber attended the Paris Conservatoire which combined educational rigor with a deliberately French nationalist music spirit and was funded by the French state.¹⁰²

Upon her return in 1869, at the age of nineteen, she married Francis B. Thurber. The wealthy wholesale grocery merchant enthusiastically encouraged Jeannette to turn her hand to musical entrepreneurship. Thurber began by partnering with one of the country’s most recognized conductors, Theodore Thomas. The German-born conductor was musical director and conductor of the both the New York Philharmonic and his Theodore Thomas Orchestra and shared her interest in educating America’s listening culture.¹⁰³

Thurber sponsored Thomas’s orchestra to travel around the country, performing educational concerts geared to children aged eight to sixteen, the first of its kind in America. Both believed that musical education was central to a learned citizenry. The repertoire leaned so heavily on music of the renowned German composer Richard Wagner that some referred to them as the “Thomas/Wagner Festival.” Despite its success, the experience taught

¹⁰² Cecilia Dunoyer, “The Paris Conservatoire: Its Political and Musical Climate in the Nineteenth Century,” *American Music Teacher* 36, no. 1 (1986): 10–12.

¹⁰³ Aborn, *The Influence on American Musical Culture of Dvořák’s Sojourn in America*, 55

Jeannette that individual patronage was both exorbitant and severely limited as a methodology for sustained cultural development.¹⁰⁴

Early in the 1880s, informed by her own love of singing and opera, Thurber addressed the paucity of proper educational opportunity for young American singers, especially women. Even when singers did venture abroad for training, they often returned to America with no opportunities for a performance career. U.S. impresarios perceived Europeans as better trained and more desirable representatives of high German art, a view that permeated Americans' cultural imagination.¹⁰⁵

Thurber's commitment to singers, which was significant for Burleigh's future career, led to the formation of the American Opera Company. Unlike her previous venture with Thomas, American Opera pursued three radical ideals: to take opera out of the opera house and to the people; to educate American singers to a high level; and finally, for these singers to perform in English to make the music accessible and to encourage immigrants to speak the national language.¹⁰⁶

Thurber's stated objective was "not making money, but advancement of musical culture in America." In June 1885, the *New York Times* reported that "after four months' hard labor, [Thurber] had rallied eight established singers" for "cultivation of English operatic talent" and leased space at the Academy of Music for performances. Once she convinced other friends to patronize this endeavour, which she hoped to "elevate the musical interests of the whole country," the American Opera Company began to tour the country. Thurber wooed the press to gain support by stating her project was "national in scope."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America," *Media, Culture and Society* 4 (1982): 37–44; Rubin, "Jeannette Meyer Thurber 138–39; "They Meant Business," *Sunday Morning Star*, 1883.

¹⁰⁵ Kira Thurman, "The German Lied and the Songs of Black Volk," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (2014), 197; Katherine K. Preston, *Opera for the People* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 415, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Theophilus Finck, *Thirty Years of the National Conservatory of Music of America* (Legare Street Press, 2022), 15.

¹⁰⁷ "Gossip of the Stage"; "By and For Americans," *Democrat and Chronicle*, 1886.

In September 1885, Thurber gathered a virtual *Who's Who* of powerful allies at the elite watering hole, Delmonico's Restaurant, to incorporate an original American school of music education. She recruited William K. Vanderbilt and his wife, who was denied purchase of a box at the Academy of Music; August Belmont and his wife, who joined Vanderbilt in building the Metropolitan opera; and power brokers Andrew Carnegie and George M. Pullman, and William R. Grace, mayor of New York.¹⁰⁸

But the country's taste in opera music began shifting in the mid-1880s, in no small part due to Theodore Thomas's early partnership with Thurber that spread the "gospel" of Wagner. Then Anton Seidl, a young German conductor, arrived in 1885 to take the baton at the Metropolitan Opera House. A protégé of Wagner, Seidl moved the company away from Italian opera and toward a robust repertoire of German operas. His performances initiated a Wagnerian fever in New York. Thurber's English-language American Opera enterprise became an increasingly quixotic effort. Overambitious, underfunded, and largely mismanaged, within two years the American Opera Company failed quite spectacularly.¹⁰⁹

At this point, Jeannette Thurber decided to build a national Conservatory to train American musicians. Many people doubted whether Americans could produce music literature equal to their European cousins, but Thurber believed that the high value placed on European musicians came from their training at established national conservatories with a curriculum centred solely on European musical literature. For American musicians to produce their own musical canon, Thurber created a new institution in the United States.¹¹⁰

Ever agile in dealing with obstacles, she waited until the press tired of the sordid stories regarding lawsuits over the American Opera Company and no longer mentioned it

¹⁰⁸ Preston, *Opera for the People*, 422–27; "By and For Americans," *Democrat and Chronicle*, 1886

¹⁰⁹ Henry Theophilus Finck, *Anton Seidl, A Memorial by His Friends* (Scribner, 1899); Philipp Ther and Charlotte Hughes-Kreutzmüller, "Nationalizing Opera," in *Center Stage: Operatic Culture and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Central Europe* (Purdue University Press, 2014), 229–30; "Trouble in American Opera Company," *New York Times*, 1886.

¹¹⁰ Rubin, "Music for a Democracy," 156.

when speaking with reporters. Now she spoke only about the even more ambitious National Conservatory. Despite the loss of social capital amongst her early funders, others continued to believe in her vision and capability.¹¹¹

The National Conservatory opens

In 1885, at the age of forty-five, Jeannette Thurber founded the National Conservatory. She purchased two contiguous brownstones at 126-128 East 17th Street in the heart of the “Rialto” district, the center of musical and theatrical institutions and businesses in the city. Her location demonstrated her intent to impact the art music sector around Union Square and bordering the German neighbourhood of Kleindeutschland. Some industry aficionados saw this as “the first warble of American independence” from the monopoly of European conservatory-trained musicians. At this point, the seats in American orchestras were occupied predominantly by German-speaking and German-trained musicians. On the face of it, her Conservatory venture seemed as quixotic as her opera project.¹¹²

While many music organizations founded by women in the late nineteenth century were locally focused, Thurber’s vision was for a national institution centred in New York. She hoped to develop sister schools radiating out around the United States like spokes on a wheel. The school’s motto – “The greatest musical good for the greatest number” – illustrated her democratic sensibilities, which informed the Conservatory’s policies and directly impacted Burleigh. Thurber provided access to conservatoire training for artistically talented individuals, regardless of their ability to pay. Also unique was her broad, inclusive admissions policy.¹¹³

¹¹¹ “National Academy of Music.”

¹¹² Douglas W. Shadle, *Orchestrating the Nation: The Nineteenth-century American Symphonic Enterprise* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 273. “Rialto” is taken from the Italian word used for centuries to describe the financial and commercial area of Venice. The word entered vernacular usage in 1870s New York to designate the city’s first commercial theater area.

¹¹³ Locke and Barr, *Cultivating Music in America*, 27–8; Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (University of Illinois Press, 2005), 16; Aborn, *Influence on American Musical Culture*, 299.

Thurber's charm, charisma, and energy about the Conservatory convinced some oligarchs of the Gilded Age to back her plans. Even some backers who lost money on the American Opera Company followed Thurber into this alternative venture. Incorporation documents dated September 21, 1885 list as investors Mr. and Mrs. August Belmont, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Irvin, Jr., Andrew Carnegie, William K. Vanderbilt, and several robber baron families.¹¹⁴

Most of the people on her list of incorporators were considered the *nouveau riche* of the day, rather than the scions of inherited wealth. Rebuffed by New York's "old money" whose ante-bellum wealth built the venerable Academy of Music in 1854, the "new money" built their own music halls. Vanderbilt and Belmont collaborated to build the Metropolitan Opera House (1883), and Carnegie constructed the "Music Hall," soon referred to as Carnegie Hall (1891). The savvy Thurber, a *nouveau riche* herself, likely played up this social rivalry to make them amenable to her enterprise through its "high art" associations with national ambitions.

Thurber asked her trustees to contribute \$15,000 to \$20,000 annually. William Steinway, the piano manufacturer and music impresario, refused to be an incorporator of her newest venture, because his loans and guarantees to the American Opera Company were in arrears. But a national project did interest him sufficiently to lend her seed money, though Thurber ultimately bore most operating costs.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ "National Conservatory of Music," *Harper's Weekly*, 1890.

¹¹⁵ Aborn, *Influence on American Musical Culture*, 55, 69–70, 247. It is estimated that Thurber invested \$1,000,000 of her personal wealth in the Conservatory over her lifetime, a sum equal in today's terms to \$34,000,000. *The William Steinway Diary: 1861–1896* entries for December 12, 1885; December 30, 1885; January 19, 1886; and March 23, 1889, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, accessed July 27, 2025.

Figure 2.1 Incorporation of the National Conservatory, 1885

The National Conservatory of Music

OF AMERICA.

Nos. 126 & 128 East 17th Street, NEW YORK.

OFFICERS:

President, JEANNETTE M. THURBER.

Treasurer, RICHARD IRVIN, Jr.

Secretary, CHAS. INSLEY PARDEE, A. M.

INCORPORATORS:

Mrs. AUGUST BELMONT,

Mrs. RICHARD IRVIN, Jr.,

Mrs. WM. T. BLODGETT,

Mrs. F. B. THURBER,

Mrs. THOMAS W. WARD,

AUGUST BELMONT,

RICHARD IRVIN, Jr.,

ANDREW CARNEGIE,

HENRY G. MARQUAND,

WILLIAM G. CHOATE,

JESSE SELIGMAN,

JOSEPH W. DREXEL,

THEODORE THOMAS,

PARKE GODWIN,

FRANCIS B. THURBER,

WILLIAM R. GRACE,

WILLIAM K. VANDERBILT.

Founded for the benefit of Musical Talent in the United States, and conferring its benefits free upon all applicants sufficiently gifted to warrant the prosecution of a thorough course of studies and unable to pay for the same; and upon others of the requisite aptitude on the payment of a small fee.

THE COURSE

Embraces, as that of all European Conservatories of note, instruction in Singing, operatic and instrumental, Solfege, Stage Department, Flauto, Piano, Violin, Cello, Harmony, Counterpoint and Composition, French, Italian, History of Music, Chorus and Orchestral Classes, etc.

LIST OF PROFESSORS

Includes Monsieur Theophile Maury, Principal of Vocal Department, Mrs. Ashforth, Mr. Christian Parach; Messrs. Frenck, Parnelli, Decker and Parrot, Messrs. Klein and Finck, Mr. Rafael Jozoff, Misses Finny, Margules and Comstock, Messrs. Hunter and Winsler, Mr. Leopold Lichtenberg, Mr. Victor Herkeri, Mr. W. V. Holt, Messrs. Sené and Hibeyan, Signor Cimatti. Children's classes in Solfege are held bi-weekly; Mr. F. van der Stucken, Chorus Master and Leader of the Orchestra, holds weekly rehearsals.

THE NATIONAL CONSERVATORY IS THE ONLY MUSICAL INSTITUTE

In America in which the grand work of a thorough musical education is laid, and the structure afterward carried to completion. Its professors have been appointed without consideration of expense and wholly on their merits and reputation, and they form an

ADMIRABLE FACULTY

With no end in view but the impartment of knowledge and the consequent elevation of the public taste, with no other revenue than that contributed by lovers of music and the very small returns derived from the nominal tuition charged, and with no contribution whatever from talented candidates for admission unable to pay for high class tuition, it is believed that the National Conservatory addresses itself to all patriotic and music-loving Americans as a

NATIONAL ENTERPRISE

Of the utmost importance to the artistic future of the land.

The Semi-Annual Entrance Examinations will be held at 128 East 17th Street, on the following days:

Voice, Monday, January 6th, 1890, from 10 to 12 A. M., 1 to 5 and 8 to 10 P. M.

Piano, Tuesday, January 7th, from 10 to 12 A. M. and 2 to 5 P. M.

Violin and Cello, Wednesday, January 8th, from 2 to 5 and 8 to 10 P. M.

Chorus, Wednesday Evening, January 8th, from 8 to 10 o'clock.

Orchestra, Saturday Evening, January 12th, from 8 to 10 o'clock.

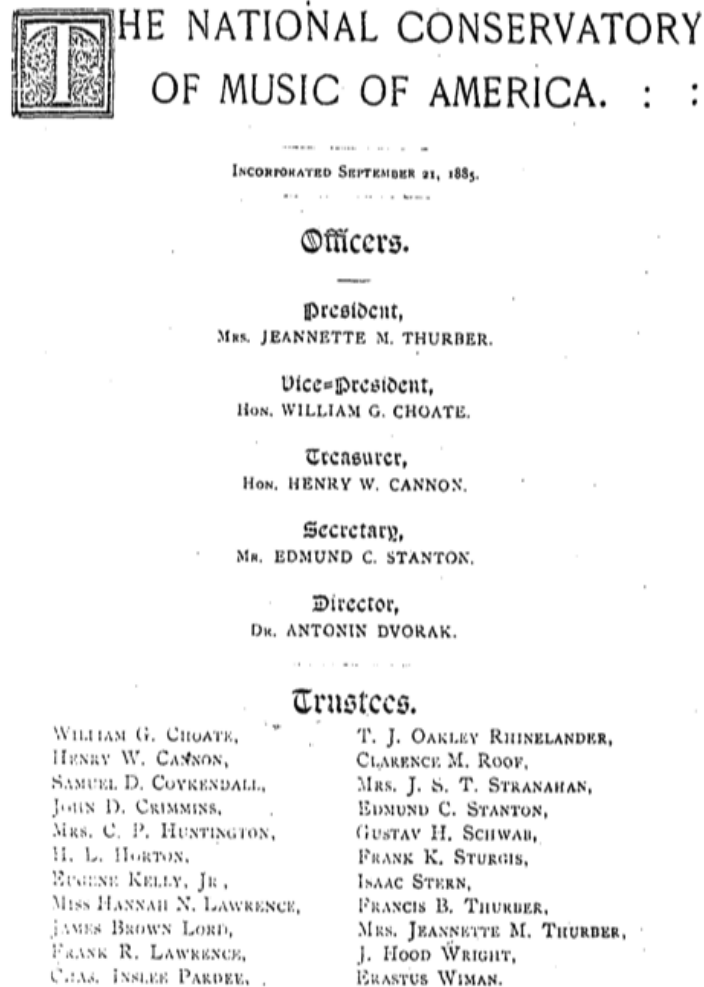
All communications to

CHAS. INSLEY PARDEE, A. M., Sec'y,

† Deceased.

126 & 128 E. 17th St., NEW YORK.

Figure 2.2 The Board of Trustees, 1892



With bolstered coffers, Thurber began to assemble talented instructors. From the mid-1880s to 1900 the Conservatory faculty included many of New York's most notable musicians. Part of the appeal for them was the novelty of teaching at an institution commensurate with the exacting standards of European conservatoires where they were trained. They also supported Thurber's vision of the Conservatory faculty nurturing and American musicians and nationalist music. At the end of 1889, she received their letter of material support:

Appreciating the efforts you have made to advance the art of music in America, and knowing how hard and successfully you are laboring to establish a United States conservatory which shall be truly national in character, and which has for its object the advancement of art and not pecuniary profit, we, the undersigned

professors of the National Conservatory of Music, desire to contribute our mite to its success, and to this end offer our services for a grand concert, the proceeds of which shall be devoted to the establishment of free scholarships. Hoping that you will approve and aid us by making the necessary arrangements, we remain, dear madame,

Very respectfully, Rafael Joseffy, Leopold B. Lichtenberg, Christian Fritsch, Theophile Manoury, Adèle Margulies, Jessie Pinney, Victor Herbert¹¹⁶

These faculty were leaders in their field. Most importantly for Burleigh, the vocal faculty – Emma Fursch-Madi and Christian Fritsch – though obscure to readers now, were top vocalists of the day with facility in French, Italian, and German.¹¹⁷

In 1891, as Thurber negotiated with the Czech composer, Antonin Dvořák, about the school's directorship, she situated the job in the most prestigious light. She advocated for and won a congressional charter for the National Conservatory which enabled the awarding of doctoral and honorary degrees. Congressmen praised her “noble exertion to advance music and art in this country.” Most importantly for her negotiations with Dvořák, Congress acknowledged her institution as “national” in scope. Thurber made her case believing that federal funding would follow this charter, because many European governments underwrote their conservatoires. But praise was all congressmen were offering. They never appropriated federal money to support the project, so funding remained a continual weakness of the whole enterprise.¹¹⁸

Inclusion at the Conservatory

Thurber's admission policy for students was unconventionally inclusive of women, people with special needs such as blind students, and crucially for Burleigh, African Americans. Since records of the Conservatory are non-extant, the number of Black students who entered before Burleigh did in January 1892 remains uncertain. Yet a review of the newspaper

¹¹⁶ Edward N. Waters, *Victor Herbert; A Life in Music* (Macmillan, 1955), 55; Finck, *My Adventures*, 275.

¹¹⁷ Nicolas Slonimsky, Laura Kuhn, and Dennis McIntire, “Fürsch-Madi (er), Emma or Emmy,” *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, Encyclopedia.com, accessed July 27, 2025; “Church Music in New York, What Some of the Best Singers Earn and What They Sing,” *The Sun*, 1887.

¹¹⁸ Majda Kallab Whitaker, “A Musicales for the Maestro Antonín Dvořák, Jeannette Thurber and the National Conservatory of Music of America,” *Nineteenth Century* (Fall 2017), 63–64.

sources indicates the first African American at the Conservatory was probably former Fisk Jubilee Singer, Harry P. Guy. Matriculating in 1890, Guy was a pupil of cellist and composer Victor Herbert. James Huneker, who taught Guy in his piano class, considered him “especially talented.” In early 1891, Guy was promoted to tutor, becoming the first African American teacher at the National Conservatory.¹¹⁹

Training outstanding students as teachers was one of Thurber’s strategies to reduce overhead and give classroom experience to promising musicians. Even her generous scheme was not sufficient for some young musicians to succeed. As an African American, Guy found it was economically prohibitive to have a successful compositional career in White art music industry. In 1895 he moved to Detroit, where he helped unionize Black musicians and produced ragtime compositions for Tin Pan Alley. The dates of Guy’s period at the Conservatory are not currently known, but he likely overlapped with Burleigh who matriculated in January 1892. If so, Guy’s economic struggles served as a cautionary tale about the fragility of an art music career for African Americans.¹²⁰

Thurber’s Conservatory was *the* place to become a truly American conservatoire-trained art musician. It had generous, inclusive admissions policies; its curriculum, if not its size, was commensurate with European schools; its celebrity faculty gave it the requisite *bona fides*; it offered tuition scholarships to qualified musicians. Even so, as Guy’s story demonstrates, an aspiring Black student needed additional income to launch a career from the doors of the Conservatory.

Burleigh joins the Conservatory

¹¹⁹Discography of American Historical Recordings, s.v. “Guy, Harry P.,” accessed August 1, 2025; Maurice Peress, *Dvořák to Duke Ellington* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 204, fn 11; “Fresh Ohio News,” *Cleveland Gazette*, August 16, 1890, 2.

¹²⁰ “At The National Conservatory of Music,” *Cleveland Gazette*, 1891; Neil Gould, *Victor Herbert: A Theatrical Life* (Fordham University Press, 2011), 53; Jon Milan, *Detroit: Ragtime and the Jazz Age* (Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 19–21.

In December 1891, hard work, talent, and a friend's recommendation brought Burleigh from Erie to the National Conservatory. To study there he needed a scholarship, and to obtain one, he needed to audition. Burleigh was familiar with auditioning: in addition to the many required by his early-career Midwestern performances, he was a vocalist in multiple Erie churches, the local Jewish temple, and local choirs which were all audition-only posts.

Burleigh knew that this audition held the possibility of shifting prospects for his vocal career entirely. A scholarship to New York's National Conservatory of Music of America connected students to wealthy patrons and musical innovators. Alone in an unfamiliar city with the weight of opportunity to be won or lost, the aspiring singer was under extraordinary pressure.

Burleigh found out he did not pass the vocal portion of the rigorous four-day exam. No doubt this was shocking, and he dreaded returning to his hometown, particularly after faltering in singing. In failure, however, Burleigh was resourceful and tenacious. He approached Frances Knapp MacDowell, registrar for the Conservatory, with whom he had a slight acquaintance. While McDowell was in Erie she attended Elizabeth Russell's music salon. Burleigh's mother, Elizabeth, who worked for Mrs. Russell's soirées, asked the hostess to let her son act as doorman, so he might hear the music. He recalled for Mrs. MacDowell that he was "the boy who some years ago had opened the door when Mme. Carreño played at Mrs. Russell's."¹²¹

After sharing what he called his "cherished longings," Burleigh gained her sympathy. Perhaps because she was the mother of the American musician, Edward MacDowell, she told him to return in a few days. After her advocacy for a second hearing, he passed his vocal

¹²¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 50–51. The Venezuelan pianist Teresa Carreño was the teacher of Mrs. MacDowell's son, composer Edward MacDowell.

audition and won the scholarship covering tuition. He was one of only four students out of two hundred applicants to gain entrance that semester.¹²²

Burleigh's interaction with Frances MacDowell foreshadowed his ability to cross the color line through a measure of talent, determination, charm, and verve. His ability to cultivate friendships made him a favourite with many fellow students and professors. Some of the connections formed in this period with industry leaders were lifelong. They opened important doors during his early New York career.

Burleigh joined the Artists' Course, which prepared singers for the professional concert and opera stage. Courses not often taught at other American conservatories at the time included solfeggio, elocution, language instruction, music theory and history, deportment, fencing. To obtain such comprehensive training elsewhere would necessitate study in Europe, something financially unattainable for him.¹²³

Keeping the wolf from the door

When Burleigh's mother was widowed with small children and poorly paid for her work, she "had trouble keeping the wolf from the door." Growing up with financial insecurity, Burleigh knew how to hustle to keep the "wolf" at bay. Though his letters, diaries, and daybooks appear to no longer exist, the Black press's coverage of his early New York career provides a window into how he sustained himself during these years. And he had many expenses to bear.¹²⁴

In a professional setting surrounded by celebrity musicians, Burleigh needed money for respectable attire. The Conservatory expected a proper wardrobe for the fortnightly concerts. The faculty essayed their students' "powers in carefully prepared representations," so they could "form estimates of their performer's worth." Already dealing with the obstacle

¹²² Ibid., 69; Finck, *My Adventures* 285; Walton, "Burleigh Honored."

¹²³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 67.

¹²⁴ Murray, "The Story of Harry T. Burleigh," 102.

of race, Burleigh knew meticulous personal presentation was necessary making clothes were a constant concern. One article claimed that Burleigh's mother "patched his shabby clothes" for the New York audition. "Shabby" was likely hyperbole, since they were a working, middle-class family. However, his clothes no doubt were less new or fashionable than those around him.¹²⁵

Early anxiety about affording appropriate clothes at the Conservatory perhaps accounts for Burleigh's later love of haberdashery after he attained a level of financial success. A close friend later in Burleigh's life described his sense of style and carriage as "a black David Niven in his distinguished approach to life." Given his fluid movement across the racially constructed communities, his "approach" was complex. While his style reflected personal preferences, it also made legible his professional position and acted as camouflage to resist the dehumanizing White gaze.¹²⁶

A condition on Burleigh's tuition scholarship caused additional anxiety— he had to complete his four years of coursework. Given his ambition to succeed, there was little doubt about his drive to finish. But fears regarding any unforeseen financial or familial situation that inhibited his completion must have plagued him. When contemplating his future career choices, he had to consider the possibility of repaying his scholarship at a cost of \$100 per semester.¹²⁷

The scholarship had one more condition: to "aid others as they had been aided." Scholarship recipients who earned over \$1,000 during the first five years of their professional careers needed to return one-quarter of their income to the Conservatory. Burleigh must

¹²⁵ Ibid.; G. H. Wilson, *The Musical Year-Book of the United States* 8 (Charles Hamilton, 1891), 144.

¹²⁶ Anne Key Simpson, *Hard Trials: The Life and Music of Harry T. Burleigh*, *Composers of North America*, no. 8 (Scarecrow Press, 1990), 198–99.

¹²⁷ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 68.

have wondered if he would ever earn that much. As he began his professional singing career, he probably calculated his potential indebtedness to the school.¹²⁸

Frances MacDowell continued as his ally. She hired him as clerk in the administration office. This position was not purely charitable: Burleigh was a true asset. His work ethic and sociability, in concert with the exquisite penmanship and stenography he refined at Clark Commercial College, contributed to the school's public-facing correspondence and circulars. Situated centrally in that office, he became a familiar face to all the faculty.¹²⁹

Because of his financial need, the Conservatory allowed Burleigh to sleep in the cold upper floor in exchange for work as janitor and handyman. Although relieved to save money, Burleigh must have considered the parallels between his situation and his mother's janitress work in Erie's public school. He quickly secured other posts: washing dishes in a nearby home and training several small church choirs, but the pay was "very meagre." Eventually he found singing engagements, but networking took time. Until then, he lived simply, tracked all his expenses, and went hungry.¹³⁰

While none of these first-semester jobs paid well, together they kept "the wolf from the door." Still, he was hungry during his initial months. In a 1924 interview he recalled watching the cakes being frosted through the windows of Dennett's Restaurant. Unable to afford anything, he later recalled taking "a toothpick from my pocket, use it as if I had eaten, draw on my imagination and walk down the street singing to myself. That happened more than once or twice." Solace in singing was how he and his family withstood the indignities and difficulties of living in America's racial caste system.

On his meagre budget, missing meals was one way to afford attending concerts, and Burleigh wanted to soak up all the music he could in his new city. Sometimes tickets were

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

gratis via Jeannette Thurber or a faculty member, so he quickly availed himself of the concert scene. After attending Adelina Patti's concert in January 1892, his first month in New York, he sent back a note to Erie critiquing her vocal range. If Burleigh wanted to continue attending concerts, or more importantly eat, he needed better paying work.¹³¹

In his first year at the Conservatory, Burleigh managed an extraordinary number of jobs simultaneously, a key feature of his financial success throughout his career. Even though New York in the 1890s was an economically unstable place for an aspiring Black singer, particularly in art music, Burleigh brought grit, persistence, energy, and the solace of singing to the challenging task of achieving financial stability to retain his place at the Conservatory.

Did Burleigh dare to imagine himself on the concert stages of New York? In the 1890s, it was inconceivable he could sing in White palaces of high vocal culture like the Academy of Music of the Metropolitan Opera. Only in 1955 did Burleigh's protégée, the contralto Marian Anderson, break the color line at the Metropolitan Opera House, followed a few weeks later by baritone Robert McFerrin. Burleigh would need to piece together any musical career from a variety of opportunities in the White and Black communities if he were to make a viable living with his voice.

Conservatory coursework and faculty

One benefit to living temporarily at the Conservatory was its proximity to Kleindeutschland just a few blocks to the south, home to many of the city's German immigrants. Burleigh found retail work in this neighbourhood where he reportedly "perfected himself in German and Italian." Both languages were essential for singing European repertoire.¹³²

Most of Burleigh's professors were German-speaking. Though other students may not have made the extra effort to master these languages, Burleigh knew that speaking the *lingua franca* of art music aided him professionally. Being a fluent German speaker also helped

¹³¹ Ibid., 61.

¹³² "Expressive Power of the Colored Race," *Werner's Voice Magazine*, (1901).

facilitate relations with the faculty, because he could communicate with nuance and precision.

Italian-born Romualdo Sapio, head of the opera department, organized his teaching according to “the modern school,” which incorporated the best Italian, French, and German methods into the curriculum. Sapio stressed “dramatic expression and distinct enunciation” in performance, something often lacking in American vocal instruction. To support his effort, Thurber hired an “expert in diction” who attended all vocal lessons “and was quick to interrupt students who mispronounced or slurred their words,” an asset unique to her conservatoire. Later reviews of Burleigh’s concertizing noted his exceptional ability in both dramatic rendering and precision of expression. This high standard informed his vocal coaching, which made him stand out among the many singers vying for students.¹³³

Other than Sapio, nearly all Conservatory faculty were German-born or German-trained musicians. German music and German-trained musicians definitively influenced Burleigh. They shaped his music education and his career trajectory, but they also influenced his philosophy on the role and responsibility of an artist to build national culture.

Burleigh’s vocal professor, Christian Fritsch, a well-known German tenor, was considered one of the best singers in New York at the time. A popular church singer, he held positions at St Patrick’s Cathedral and Temple-Emanu-El, both places where his student later sang. For many professional singers, sacred music posts offered steadier income, because they did not rely on the capricious whims of agents and impresarios.¹³⁴

Thurber insisted on methods used in European conservatoires. Fritsch taught Burleigh solfeggio – vocal exercises to teach pupils to “sing at difficult intervals, perfect time, and with ease and agility.” This was a vital skill for church singers who needed to sing

¹³³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 67: See also 149, 153 regarding these vocal qualities in Burleigh’s singing.

¹³⁴ “The Performers and Programs,” *St. Louis Dispatch*, 1878; “Music and Drama,” *The Buffalo Commercial*, 1883; Salvatore Basile, “Mammon vs. Cecilians (1879–1904),” chap. 2 in *Fifth Avenue Famous: The Extraordinary Story of Music at St. Patrick’s Cathedral* (Fordham University Press, 2010), 30; “Church Music in New York,” *The Sun*, 1887.

on sight the difficult harmonic parts of sacred compositions. In two years' time, this training aided Burleigh's successful audition for a soloist job at St George's Episcopal Church. That he won that post over of sixty other candidates illustrates his mastery of this training.¹³⁵

Burleigh took composition classes with American-born John White, an organist and composer. White studied composition in Germany and married Florence Schirmer, daughter of music publishing magnate G. Schirmer. While Burleigh was at the Conservatory, White also worked as organist at the Church of the Ascension until 1896, then returned to Germany for the rest of his life.¹³⁶

German-born Max Spicker took over Burleigh's counterpoint instruction from White, while he also held the post of music editor at G. Schirmer. Spicker probably assisted Burleigh in publishing his first compositions at Schirmer from 1898 to 1902. In 1900, Spicker, music director and cantor at Temple Emanu-El, hired Burleigh for the choir of the wealthiest synagogue in America of the period.¹³⁷

Rubin Goldmark and Burleigh began as Conservatory students around the same time. A promising composer, Goldmark won a coveted position in Dvořák's composition class. Later Burleigh studied counterpoint with Goldmark, which brought depth and complexity to his subsequent art song compositions. The lifelong friendship between the two likely contributed to the influence of Black and First Nation's music in Goldmark's orchestral compositions. His *Negro Rhapsody*, which premiered in 1923, was based on seven spirituals; they began to appear after early art song spirituals of Burleigh's hit the market in

¹³⁵ "National Conservatory of Music," *Harper's Weekly*, 969–70; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 215.

¹³⁶ John White, American-born organist and composer, taught composition at the National Conservatory of Music during Harry T. Burleigh's tenure. He studied in Germany and served as organist at the Church of the Ascension until 1896, after which he returned to Germany. He was married to Florence Schirmer, daughter of music publisher G. Schirmer; "1868 Henry Erben Pipe Organ," Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, New York City. See *Friends of the Erben Organ*.: Installed in 1868 at the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, the Erben organ is the last surviving large-scale pipe organ by Henry Erben, preserved in its original acoustic space.

¹³⁷ "Max Spicker, Composer, Dead," *New York Times*, 1912.

1916. Goldmark was well-aware of Dvořák's advocacy of the value of "negro melodies" to American musical composition.¹³⁸

Goldmark began integrating spirituals as themes in his work after Burleigh found success publishing his arrangements. The music of Goldmark's famous students, George Gershwin and Aaron Copeland, reflected continuing interest by White American composers in integrating Black music into orchestral composition. One must wonder what impact the popularity of Burleigh's spirituals had on these White composers.¹³⁹

Surrounded by some of most qualified musicians in New York at the time, Burleigh worked hard to earn their respect and to learn his craft. His professors spoke glowingly of his diligent application to his courses. Henry T. Finck was Burleigh's Music History professor, while working also as chief music critic for the *New York Evening Post* and *The Nation* magazine. He recalled Burleigh using his stenographic skills to take down his lectures verbatim.¹⁴⁰

Finck, like many professional musicians in 1890s New York, was a confirmed Wagnerite. After graduating from Harvard in 1876, Finck travelled to Germany in the 1870s, met Wagner, and attended the Bayreuth Festival. Wagnerites were plentiful at the Conservatory. Their hagiographic perspective of the composer had a lifelong impact on Burleigh's perspective on music and culture.¹⁴¹

Burleigh also played timpani and double bass for the German-trained, American-born conductor Frank Van der Stucken in the Conservatory orchestra. As part of the Sängerbund movement, which organized huge choruses of German male singers, and

¹³⁸ David Tomatz and Ryan Raul Bañagale, "Goldmark, Rubin," in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Hiroshi Garrett (Oxford University Press, 2013): Goldmark's orchestral work, *A Negro Rhapsody*, was written in 1919. Burleigh's first art song spirituals were published beginning in 1916.

¹³⁹ Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin* (University of California Press, 2006), 34–35.

¹⁴⁰ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 71, 253.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71; Richard Engeman, "Finck, Henry T.," in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Hiroshi Garrett (Oxford University Press, 2013).

conductor of the distinguished Arion Society, Stucken worked with many of New York's greatest singers. He valued Burleigh's musicianship highly enough to appoint him as orchestra librarian, a post Burleigh continued under the incoming director, Dvořák, in the autumn of 1892.¹⁴²

Burleigh was keenly aware of the racist assumptions about the lack of intellectual ability of African Americans and other racist tropes, so he strove to reflect his community well and to earn the respect of the faculty. As a Black singer, he must have doubted his ability to cross over into the White art music industry, since no one had yet achieved this on a sustained basis. But his talented Black antecedents did not have the benefit of Thurber's Conservatory to connect them with White industry insiders. Burleigh planned to make full use of these connections. His earnestness, his diligence to his studies, and his sociability earned him their regard.¹⁴³

Had Burleigh attended a conservatory in a different locale, such as the New England or Oberlin, his career would have been entirely different, largely because of the faculty that Thurber engaged. Many of the renowned musicians – Victor Herbert, Max Spicker, Horatio Parker, William Arms Fisher, and Rubin Goldmark – became Burleigh's lifelong friends and went out of their way to facilitate opportunities for him. Promoting a Black musician in the thoroughly White landscape of art music potentially imperiled their reputations. Their advocacy for Burleigh speaks not only to their friendship, but the respect Burleigh garnered from these White art music gatekeepers and their acknowledgement of Burleigh's reliability and capability. These relationships opened numerous opportunities for the young singer.

Concertizing at Carnegie

¹⁴²Michael Steinberg, "Stucken, Frank (Valentine) van der," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root (Oxford University Press, 2013), accessed July 27, 2025; Larry Wolz, "Van der Stucken, Frank Valentine," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, last modified August 1, 1995, accessed July 27, 2025. Note: Van der Stucken preceded Max Spicker as music director of Temple Emanu-El (1892–1895), per Wolz.

¹⁴³Rubin, "Music for a Democracy," 135; Jean E. Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance* (University of Illinois Press, 2016), 71.

Burleigh was developing a recital career with Black Brooklyn's bourgeoisie in the initial months of 1892. These appearances were in salons and other Black social and cultural spaces. He reasonably imagined the impediments to breaking through onto a major, White concert stage. Thad Talbert, an aspiring piano student at the Conservatory who made Burleigh aware of Thurber's scholarships, however fancied himself as an impresario and had the money to make things happen.

Talbert, from a wealthy Black family in Buffalo, New York, matriculated at the Conservatory the previous January in 1891. Able to afford renting a venue and hiring other singers, he was a rarity both as an African American and as a Conservatory student, well-connected to what the *Cleveland Gazette* called "New York's best people, who will patronize his recital."¹⁴⁴

Talbert and Burleigh were the second and third African American students matriculating in January 1891 and January 1892 respectively. Talbert, who entered as a keyboard scholar, was considered a spoiled, rich kid. By the end of his first year, he left in a fit of pique. Yet during Talbert's short time at the Conservatory, he produced an historic recital showcasing Burleigh's vocal talents to cosmopolitan audiences.¹⁴⁵

Burleigh performed the encore for Talbert's recital at Andrew Carnegie's new "Music Hall" on May 16, 1892. Appearing as the encore act, he sang the recitative "An des Rheines grünen Ufern" from German composer Ferdinand Gumbert's 1845 opera *Undine*, which showcased the power and lyricism of his voice. Burleigh's confidence singing in German was bolstered by increased fluency gained from his interactions in the Conservatory and his jobs in Kleindeutschland. This performance offered Burleigh further exposure to Black elites who regularly hired soloists for home musical gatherings.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ "At The National Conservatory of Music," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1891; "The Talbert Recitals," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1892.

¹⁴⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, chap. 4: "Burleigh at the National Conservatory of Music: 'In the Center of American Musical Activity'"; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, chap. 9: "Burleigh's Singing Career: 'An Art of Astonishing Versatility.'"

¹⁴⁶ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, chap. 9: Second Recital by W. T. Talbert.

Figure 2.3 Program for Thad Talbert's recital, 1892

RIVERSIDE BANK,
 CAPITAL, \$100,000. 57TH STREET AND 8TH AVENUE. SURPLUS (earned) \$32,500
 BUSINESS AND ACCOUNTS INVITED.

Chamber Music Hall,
Monday Evening, May 16th, 1892.
 AT 8:15 O'CLOCK.

SECOND RECITAL BY W. T. TALBERT.

PROGRAMME.

1.	PIANO,	{	a. Mazourka, op 7,		<i>Chopin, b 1809, d 1849</i>
			b. Polish Dance, op 40,		<i>Scharwenka, lives in New York</i>
				W. T. TALBERT,	
2.	SOLO, Tenor,			GEO. BOARDLEY.	<i>Selected</i>
				(By kind permission Signor Farini.)	
3.	VIOLIN, 7th Concerto.				<i>De Bériot</i>
				WALTER F. CRAIG.	
4.	ARIA, O "Mio Fernando,"				<i>Donizetti</i>
				MME. DESERIA PLATO.	
				(By kind permission Signor Farini.)	
5.	'CELLO,	{	a. "Evening Star," from "Tannhauser,"		<i>Wagner, b 1813, d 1883</i>
			b. "Melodie,"		<i>Massenet</i>
				CARL HEMMANN, JR.	
6.	DUET, "Parigo O Cara," from "Traviata,"			MME. PLATO and MR. GEO. BOARDLEY.	<i>Verdi, b 1816, lives in Milan, Italy</i>
7.	VIOLIN,	{	a. "Legende,"		<i>Wieniawski</i>
			b. "Nocturne,"		<i>Chopin-Sarasate</i>
				WALTER F. CRAIG.	
8.	SONGS,	{	a. "Stride la Vampa," Canzone,		<i>Verdi</i>
			b. Spring Song,		<i>Newin, lives in Boston, Mass</i>
				MME. DESERIA PLATO.	
				(Violin and Cello Obligato)	
9.	DUET, Miserere Scene, from "Trovatore,"			MME. PLATO and MR. GEO. BOARDLEY.	<i>Verdi</i>
10.	PIANO, "Recollections of Home,"			W. T. TALBERT.	<i>S. B. Mills, b 1839, lives in New York</i>
			"Heart whence thy joy!"	MME. TILLIE JONES THOMAS.	<i>Gumbert</i>
REQUESTED.		}	Recitativ und Arioso		
			von "Undine."		

At the Piano Miss BLANCHE WASHINGTON.

The Steinway Piano used at this Concert.

Though Burleigh appeared only in the special encore termed "Requested," the other performers – Plato, Boardley, and Craig – were all local musicians. This recital introduced him to their network. In turn, Burleigh always had his eye on facilitating the careers of fellow Black musicians. The following summer, when he appeared with Frederick Douglass, the featured soprano soloist dropped out of "Negro American Day" at the Chicago's World Exposition. Burleigh was the likely turnkey who suggested Desaria Plato in her stead.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ "The Appeal of Douglass," *Chicago Tribune*, 1893.

Little is known about Plato. Her reported vocal range was exceptional, with “sustained beauty of tone from G below the staff to E above high C.” The Black singer and impresario, Theodore Drury, cast Plato in *Carmen*, the first production for Black-founded and cast Grand Opera Company. Press reports vary, but it appears that Burleigh was the conductor for this performance.¹⁴⁸

Talbert’s recital also featured a young New York pianist, Blanche D. Washington, who entered the Conservatory in 1894, the year after Burleigh rose to be vocal teacher. He probably acted as the turnkey who prompted Washington to pursue further training and audition at the Conservatory.¹⁴⁹

The violinist for Talbert’s recital, Walter F. Craig, became a lifelong collaborator and friend of Burleigh. In 1887, the *New York Herald* called Craig a violinist who was “a perfect master of his instrument.” That same year he founded and conducted a dance orchestra of seventy-five musicians that performed for White social events and musical theatre productions. In 1892, a few months before the Talbert’s recitals, Craig’s “Celebrated Orchestra” performed at Madison Square Garden for a giant cakewalk dance competition. The next year, likely at Burleigh’s behest, Antonin Dvořák hired Craig as first violinist of the Conservatory’s student orchestra. A highly respected music leader in the city who worked with White and Black musicians, Craig and Burleigh concertized together for over twenty-five years.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ This is in part because in the press her name appeared variously as “Desseria Plato” and “Deseria Plata.” She sang frequently with her husband, the tenor George Boardley, who was also on the program of Talbert’s May recital. “Expressive Power of the Colored Race,” *Werner’s Voice Magazine*, 1901; Harper Fortune, “Grand Opera As We See It,” *Colored American Magazine* 1, no. 2 (June 1900); “Grand Opera,” *Musical Courier*, 1900; Kristen M. Turner, “Class, Race, and Uplift in the Opera House: Theodore Drury and his Company Cross the Color Line,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 34, no. 4 (2015), 320–31.

¹⁴⁹ “Women Worth Knowing,” *The Women’s Era*, 1894.

¹⁵⁰ Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (W. W. Norton, 1997), 256. “Craig and Dvorak,” *Plaindealer*, 1893; Douglas W. Shadle, *Antonín Dvořák’s New World Symphony*, Oxford Keynotes (Oxford University Press, 2021), 119; “Craig’s Pre-Lenten,” *New York Age*, 1914; “Mme. Brown,” *New York Age*, 1915.

Despite Thad Talbert's very short time at the Conservatory, Talbert had an outsized impact on Burleigh's concertizing opportunities in New York. He connected Burleigh with a network of Black musicians at the crucial start of his career. Burleigh's debut at Carnegie Hall in spring of 1892 provided an entrée into the more competitive market of New York music performance. It functioned as a showcase of his vocal abilities which propelled his next high-profile performance.

Singing with Sissieretta Jones

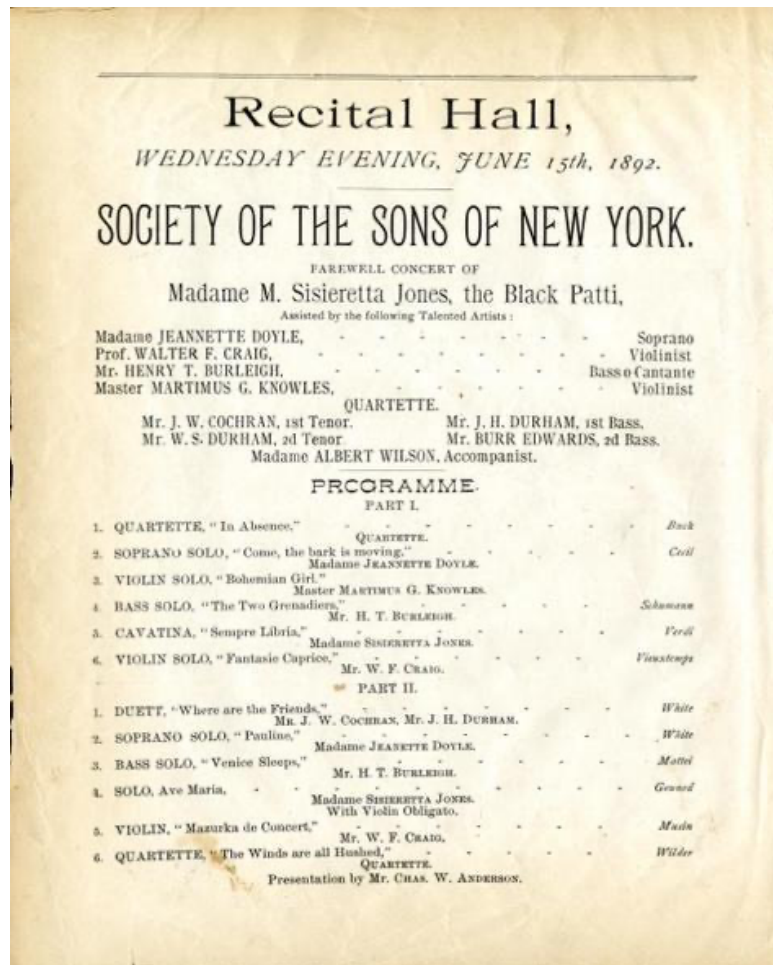
Members of the Society of the Sons of New York, an exclusive fraternal club composed of wealthy African Americans born in New York City, formed part of the audience for Talbert's May recital. These men sought to support the burgeoning Black population of the city, as many migrants were streaming to New York to escape racial terror in the South. On June 15, 1892, one month after the Talbert recital, the Society achieved a coup when they booked the newly famous Mathilda Sissieretta Jones to perform at their "Free Bread Fund" fundraiser at Carnegie Hall. Burleigh was tapped as baritone soloist.

The sold-out crowd of 1,200 on that stiflingly hot night fanned themselves as they listened enraptured by Jones's singing. This glittering audience in a glorious new concert hall encapsulated everything Burleigh dreamt of while growing up in Erie. Jones sang two pieces: an aria by Verdi and "Ave Maria" by Gounod. The only male soloist that night, Burleigh sang two art songs, one by Schumann, another by the Italian composer Tito Mattei.

The concert served a multilayered purpose: the benefit raised \$1,100 for needy migrants, while also shining a light on Black musical talent. Though Jones was the headliner, Burleigh acquitted himself well. One reviewer noted, "The audience went wild as Mr. Burleigh came upon the stage... being a prime favorite, as well as one of the best baritones in the city." Though his recital career had not yet reached White salons or events, the Black-

owned *Indianapolis Freeman* reflected the extraordinary recognition Burleigh had achieved in his community in a few short months in New York.¹⁵¹

Figure 2.4 Program for Sissieretta Jones's recital, 1892



Jones gained fame touring the West Indies and South America during the late 1880s. She broke into wider public consciousness in April 1892 as headliner of the "Grand Negro Jubilee" at Madison Square Garden. New York's White music critics were rapturous about her operatic range and artistry. Because of these reviews, Jones said the next morning she "woke up famous."¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 142.

¹⁵² Maureen D. Lee, *Sissieretta Jones* (South Carolina University Press, 2012), 31; Josephine Wright, "Jones [Joyner], (Matilda) Sissieretta," *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

After years of trying to break through into mainstream opera, Jones acquiesced to act as the figurehead of a new vaudeville company, Black Patti's Troubadours, a highly successful venture for over 15 years (1896–1915). W. C. Handy, the blues composer and performer, bemoaned these exigencies for art musicians: “All the best talent of that generation came down the same drain. The composers, the singers, the musicians, the speakers, the stage performers—the minstrel shows got them all.”¹⁵³

While the concert was a heady moment for Burleigh, he realized from Jones's struggles that a concert career was not a sustainable career path for a Black singer in part because of White agents. Though Carnegie Hall was never a segregated space, many other venues were. Even if a White agent were to invest in Burleigh's career, segregation made it very challenging to program concerts with mixed audiences.

Even twenty years later, Burleigh's vocal student and mentee, Roland Hayes, was admonished by his White patron, “you have got about as far as you can go in this country. The American public will never cotton to you.” Burleigh's contemporaries in the 1890s who had successful vocal careers, like Sidney Woodward and Sissieretta Jones, went abroad for most of their careers, only returning after receiving critical European credentials. Even with those *bona fides* performance opportunities remained limited. By the 1920s, Hayes was more successful, in some measure because of Burleigh and his repertoire of art song spirituals were a cultural phenomenon at that time. But in the 1890s Burleigh had to look elsewhere than the concert stage to earn visibility and acceptance.¹⁵⁴

Summer working, summer singing

Once again, Burleigh's ability to garner the support of older, established musicians opened new employment opportunities. In previous summers, Burleigh worked as a pantryman on steamer lines on Lake Erie. But in the summer of 1892, he landed a job as a wine steward at

¹⁵³ Abbott, *Out of Sight*, 146.

¹⁵⁴ MacKinley Helm, *Angel Mo' and her son, Roland Hayes* (Little, Brown and Co., 1943), 99.

the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs. The National Conservatory was a relatively small place, and though he was not a student of Victor Herbert, the two ran into one another frequently. From student bi-weekly concerts, Herbert also would have heard Burleigh witnessed his vocal giftedness and growing artistry. Through Herbert, Burleigh gained a new summer position, one which meant he was around music.¹⁵⁵

Herbert was married to Therese Förester, an Austrian soprano. When she was hired by the Metropolitan Opera in 1886, they moved to New York and settled initially in Kleindeutschland. On their first voyage to America, the Herberts bonded with Anton Seidl and Auguste, also a soprano at the Met and where Seidl was its conductor. Seidl became Herbert's mentor and employed him as an assistant as he transitioned his career to America. Eventually Herbert became cello soloist with the New York Symphony Society in 1887. However, Herbert saw himself as a composer more than an instrumentalist, an ambition nurtured by Seidl who employed him as copyist and musical assistant.¹⁵⁶

Seidl knew Thurber and the National Conservatory faculty well and recognized his assistant needed additional income in a new and unfamiliar city. Seidl may have turned Herbert's attention to the institution for employment, while he was establishing himself in the new city. In 1889, Herbert began work at the Conservatory as a cello instructor. Accordingly, the Herberts moved to East 17th Street and Irving Place across the street from the school and became neighbours of other faculty nearby. There Herbert became known as a *bon vivant*, socializing at the German restaurant Lüchow's, a short walk from the Conservatory, where art music industry leaders met to make merry and build industry relationships.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 38.

¹⁵⁶ Gould, *Victor Herbert*, 40–42, 59–62; James Huneker, *Steepjack* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 41.

¹⁵⁷ Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 19.

From his mixed English/Irish/German background, Herbert could relate with Burleigh's outsider status. By the end of his first semester at the Conservatory, Victor Herbert had taken the new student from Erie under his wing, a friendship that lasted their lifetimes. When in the summer of 1892 Herbert was hired to lead the John Lund orchestra at the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga, Burleigh secured a job as wine steward in the hotel dining room. Herbert probably helped Burleigh obtain this position. While kind, Herbert also enjoyed inviting Burleigh occasionally onstage to sing with the orchestra. Though African Americans were often part of the music offerings in Saratoga Springs, Burleigh was unique, as part of the waiting staff, to perform in the hotel.¹⁵⁸

While working at the Grand Union Hotel, Burleigh witnessed the further triumph of Sissieretta Jones. Her August 5 concert at the hotel was so successful that her new manager, Major Ponds, booked her for four further performances, one of which was before 5,000 White upper-crust vacationers in Saratoga's Congress Park. Herbert's support and the success of Jones gave Burleigh his first real hope of a crossover concert career in the White music industry.¹⁵⁹

September 1892 - Grand Encampment Concert, Washington, D.C.

From performing for White audiences in Saratoga, Burleigh and Jones sang together again on 22 and 23 September in Washington, DC, this time for Black audiences. As a locus of wealthy, educated African Americans, the nation's capital was replete with those in prominent government agencies since Reconstruction. They had accumulated wealth and enjoyed its benefits including musical performance. Black Washingtonians were curious to hear the promising singer after reading about his scholarship and performance at Carnegie Hall with Jones that June.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 192; Marion R. Casey, "Was Victor Herbert Irish?" History Ireland, February 15, 2017; Walton, "Burleigh Honored"; Myra B. Armstead, *Lord, Please Don't Take Me in August: African-Americans in Newport and Saratoga Springs*, (University of Illinois Press, 1999), 60–70.

¹⁵⁹ Lee, *Sissieretta Jones*, 41–43.

The two were billed as part of the church's "Grand Encampment Concerts." Union Army "encampments" in DC parks were reunions for veterans of the "Grand Army of the Union." The Metropolitan congregation wanted Black veterans to be honored, with concerts by the leading lights in Black freedom music. Performing with Burleigh and Jones was Marie Selika, who preceded Jones as one of the reigning black sopranos of the mid-nineteenth century. Selika had performed across Europe, sung for Queen Victoria, and was the first Black artist to perform at the White House when she sang for President Hayes in 1878. These two women were musical royalty. Undoubtedly the church's auditorium was filled to its 1,500-person capacity.¹⁶⁰

Just nine months after departing Erie, Burleigh was billed at this star-studded concert as "the celebrated western baritone" and the "Basso Cantante, commanding a firm, full and yet delicate execution of the highest grade." He sang alongside singers who he would perform with frequently over the next two decades of his career. One was the ubiquitous and reliable Walter F. Craig, on violin, and another, contralto Lulu Hamer. The tenor for this concert was Sidney Woodward, who like Selika found success singing across Europe and in Russia but struggled to break through into White concertizing spaces in America. Woodward and Burleigh worked together until the talented tenor's early death in 1924 at age forty-four.¹⁶¹

The star power of Jones and Selika was only overshadowed by the D.C. crowd's favoured son, the twenty-one-year-old violin prodigy, Joseph Douglass, grandson of the renowned Frederick Douglass. With the memorialization of Black soldiers in the Grand Encampment and his busy schedule of political duties in Washington, no doubt the senior

¹⁶⁰ "Grand Encampment," *Washington Bee*, 1892; "Madame Selika at White House," *National Republican*, November 14, 1878.

¹⁶¹ "Grand Encampment," *Washington Bee*, 1892; Cuncy-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 231–332.

Douglass was present and beaming as his New England Conservatory-trained grandson appeared with such talented musicians.¹⁶²

For Burleigh this appearance was his premiere in a church filled with elite Black Washingtonians who actively supported cultural events. Many of these became Burleigh's friends and collaborators, including Mary Church Terrell, Hallie Q. Brown, Anna Julia Cooper, and Andrew and Mamie Hilyer. One of the most consequential relationships to emerge from this Washington concert was with the violinist and composer Will Marion Cook, a protégé of Douglass, who became Burleigh's lifelong friend and collaborator.

Will Marion Cook's opera

Cook was born to African American parents in Washington in 1869. At the age of fourteen, his family sent him to his parents' *alma mater*, Oberlin College. There he studied violin at the Oberlin Conservatory, and while his playing was sensational, his bickering with fellow players presaged the social volatility that hampered his professional career. After four years, he headed back to his mother in D.C. with a recommendation from his professors to study in Europe.¹⁶³

Cook's family appealed to Washington elites for money to support their son's further studies. His mother, Isabel, approached Frederick Douglass. An accomplished violinist himself, Douglass succeeded in raising enough to send Cook to Berlin's Hochschule für Musik in 1887. Along with mastering the instrument, he mastered German and enjoyed living in cosmopolitan Berlin where his race mattered less than his class. Soon he gained grooming, manners, and dress that comported with the musicians he aspired to work amongst. Upon his return, however, he was frustrated by the segregation of many concert

¹⁶² "Grand Encampment," *Washington Bee*, 1892.

¹⁶³ Marva Griffin Carter, *Swing Along: The Musical Life of Will Marion Cook* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 5–12.

halls and the lack of managers and unions willing to push for integration. Cook likely doubted the viability of an art music career outside of Black institutions.¹⁶⁴

Still, Cook hoped to break through by writing an opera based on the popular novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Aware of Jeannette Thurber's desire to find and fund a great *American* opera, Burleigh perhaps encouraged Cook in this direction. With the vocal talent of Burleigh and Sissieretta Jones available, and an African American composing and performing an opera of the famous novel, this goal seemed within reach. The powerful Frederick Douglass also knew people who could make it happen.¹⁶⁵

Patronage of the esteemed Douglass was a boon for any African American. But the autumn of 1892 brought a unique opening for Cook. The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago offered an opportunity to demonstrate Black Americans' contributions which flourished since emancipation and despite the Jim Crow oppression. Douglass's pamphlet diplomatically phrased their purpose as "We would like for instance to tell our visitors that. . . two hundred and sixty years of progress and enlightenment have banished barbarism and race hate from the United States..." Cook received robust support for his proposed opera.¹⁶⁶

Burleigh and Sissieretta Jones helped fundraise for the opera that winter at Carnegie and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and they also earned starring roles. On the strength of Cook's ability and the anticipated opera, on 13 August, less than two weeks from the opera's premiere, Burleigh stopped by Dvořák's hotel in Chicago where he was preparing to conduct a concert for Bohemian Day at the fair:

Dear Doctor, I want to introduce to your consideration Mr. Will M. Cook, A former pupil of the great Joachim. Mr. Cook has marked ability in the line of composition and desires very greatly to meet with you and speak with you

¹⁶⁴ Carter, *Swing Along*, 6–7, 11–12, 18–20.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 20; Reid Badger, *A Life in Ragtime: Biography of James Reese Europe* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 29; Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 116–17.

¹⁶⁶ Barbara J. Ballard, "A People Without a Nation," Benjamin Harris Presidential Site, 1999.

about his work. He has composed an opera, the principal role of which I will sing.¹⁶⁷

This note made two things clear. First, Burleigh was rehearsing Cook's opera music at this time, and he fully expected to sing it. Second, Burleigh built robust relational bridges from the start of his career and was a willing turnkey to advance the aspirations of others. Cook had not heard about Thurber's open admission policy and had missed the June audition dates. But after Burleigh's recommendation, Dvořák met Cook, recognized his talent, and bypassed the normal admission protocol to admit Cook for matriculation in autumn 1893.

Burleigh on a world stage, August 1893

The venue for the premiere of Cook's opera was the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, a celebration of the nation's technological, commercial, and industrial progress. African Americans had a contentious battle with fair organizers for the meagre representational space allotted to them in the exhibition buildings. They also fought amongst themselves when those fair organizers offered one day out of the Exposition's many months to be "Colored American Day."¹⁶⁸

Sometime after Burleigh delivered his recommendation letter to Dvořák's hotel, the ever-mercurial Cook scuttled the premiere during the run-up to the August 25 performance at Colored American Day. The cancellation caused the best-known musician, Sissieretta Jones, to pull out of the event. For his patron, this collapse became a logistical embarrassment. Douglass needed to engage musicians to fill the vacancy Cook left. Douglass programmed two speakers and five art musicians including Burleigh.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 98.

¹⁶⁸ Christopher Robert Reed, *All the World is Here! The Black Presence at White City* (Indiana University Press, 2000); Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbia Exposition and American Culture* (Nelson-Hall, 1979); For more on the battle within and without the Black community about participation in the Exposition, see Christopher Robert Reed's *All the World is Here!* '2000' and Reid Badger's *The Great American Fair*, 1979.

¹⁶⁹ Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 114–18.

Art music played an increasingly important role in African American life in the late nineteenth century, as access to education during Reconstruction and beyond broadened opportunities for musical training. It became *de rigueur* for African American art musicians to demonstrate their education and virtuosity at the events of activists. Art music signified Black freedom – artistically and educationally.¹⁷⁰

As the Exposition event would have a mixed audience, the politics of respectability played a key part in countering the overt racism on display on the Midway. In exhibits like the Dahomey Village, where captive Africans play-acted White ideas of daily life, many spectators conflated their performative lifestyle with Black Americans. Across from the Dahomey exhibit was the “Captive Baboon” building, a common racist trope. Reportage by the special Exposition magazine, *World's Fair Puck*, included many racist stereotypes of African Americans, including a full-page cartoon comparing them to a stupid, savage, and chicken-loving King of Dahomey. Images in the magazine made clear who qualified as respectable: patriotic (White) Americans. Two portrayals in the widely disseminated magazine at the fair are illustrated here.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Perry, *May We Forever Stand*, 7–9.

¹⁷¹ Library of Congress, “Souvenir Map of the World’s Columbian Exposition,” Image, 1893.

Figure 2.5 Two racist illustrations from the *World's Fair Puck* magazine, 1893



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In his speech to two thousand people on Colored American Day, Douglass argued there was no “negro problem” but a “national problem” of “injustice, persecution, lawless violence and lynching” against Black citizens. Considering this, their accomplishments spoke for themselves. “Measure the Negro,” he challenged. “But not by the standard of the splendid civilization of the Caucasian. Bend down and measure him from the depths he has risen.” As evidence, he offered recitations by the poets Hallie Q. Brown and Paul Laurence Dunbar.¹⁷³

Then came the freedom music. Burleigh sang excerpts from Cook’s opera that he had rehearsed. Deseria Plato, the rising contralto who substituted for Jones, sang an aria from Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* opera. Sidney Woodward, the Boston tenor, sang Verdi, and tenor J. Arthur Freeman sang an art song by Dudley Buck. Maurice Arnold, a promising Black student in Dvořák’s competitive composition class, accompanied them. The finale

¹⁷² “A Sable Surprise,” *World’s Fair Puck*.

¹⁷³ “Honor to Their Race,” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, 1893; “The Appeal of Douglass,” *Chicago Tribune*, 1893.



included several pieces played by violinist Joseph H. Douglass, Frederick's grandson. Even some Black press outlets that questioned the value of being involved in the segregated fair considered the day a "glittering success."¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

The first eight months of Burleigh's life in New York started precariously with a failed audition, hunger, and lack of money. Slowly Burleigh gained stability as he accumulated many income streams which enabled an exhausting but viable life. Much more swiftly than he had reason to hope, his dream of concertizing came to fruition on three major stages in New York, Washington, and Chicago within eighteen months of matriculating at the National Conservatory.

He owed some of his success to patronage by the Black community, but also to his relentless search for work. Without Thurber's inclusive admissions and scholarships for talented musicians, Burleigh might never have made a career outside the Midwest. And thanks were due to the robust support by the faculty who recognized the hunger in Burleigh

¹⁷⁴ "The World in Miniature," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1893.

to succeed, along with the charisma, diligence, and talent which earned him their respect and friendship. From these parts Burleigh to knit together a substantial and viable career.

Burleigh's meteoric rise emerged from the circumstances and opportunities he conjured and those presented to him. It took courage to move to America's largest city from a small city in Western Pennsylvania and compete with other equally talented musicians in the maelstrom of the White art music industry. It took faith and temerity to move toward relationships across the color line and across Black class lines to make his talent known. In return, he garnered the respect of the Conservatory's founder and faculty and impressed New York's Black elites with his talent and connections with industry leaders.

People went out of their way to help Burleigh once he came to the National Conservatory. He had the humility to ask for help and an eagerness to learn. He had charm and good humour that set a wide variety of people at ease and evoked their desire to assist in his success. These factors came into play during the autumn semester of 1892, when Thurber hired the Bohemian composer of nationalist music, Antonin Dvořák, to lead her institution forward.

Chapter 3

Generative Friendships – Burleigh and Dvořák – 1892 to 1894

Introduction

In his first year at the Conservatory, Burleigh created social and economic space across racialized networks. His dignity, collegiality, and musical talent surmounted many relational barriers facing Black Americans in 1890s New York. He believed he belonged and showed his commitment by his work ethic. These assets earned Burleigh a surprisingly large and varied contingent of supporters in the Conservatory. Burleigh was uniquely positioned to teach the new director about Black music idioms, which Dvořák believed would be a rich source material for American nationalist music.

Burleigh's relationship with Dvořák has long been the preface to explain Burleigh's career. This chapter argues that their relationship is simultaneously overdetermined and erased. While his relationship with Dvořák was career-defining, the relationship is overdetermined as the most significant aspect of Burleigh's long, productive, and innovative musical career. Burleigh is erased because scholars largely regarded his association with Dvořák as one where Burleigh was merely an assistant who sang spirituals for the composer. Properly understood, Burleigh's family history of enslavement gave his performance of spirituals a deep emotional resonance that consoled the homesick and anxiety-ridden Dvořák. Furthermore, Burleigh taught him musicological knowledge about the circumstances of their creation and the community's various performance traditions. This intellectual and personal engagement led the composer to conclude that Black folk music was not only beautiful but relayed an essential aspect of America.

This overdetermination and erasure occludes the vibrant friendship they shared, to the benefit of both. Burleigh's biographer, Dr. Jean E. Snyder, brings more depth to the

relationship by showing their intimate friendship. This chapter will add the quotidian quality of their friendship: eating, drinking, walking, and talking around the city with Burleigh informing more than Dvořák's musical imagination. Burleigh gave him perspective into his racialized and marginalized life. Perhaps this, as much as spirituals, informed the moving pathos of Dvořák's American symphony.

While Burleigh's relationship and his music had a profound impact on Dvořák, the composer explored many sources to write music that represented the young country – the sounds of industrializing America, Longfellow's epic poem *Hiawatha*, and the First Nations' music he heard while traveling. However, through friendship, Dvořák heard Black music in its historical context. Because he was curious about Black sacred music, Dvořák invited the young student to his home, where he peppered Burleigh with questions about African Americans under enslavement and Black life in America writ large. Burleigh's history, experience, and musical sensibilities furthered Dvořák's intellectual quest for source material.

Although his association with Dvořák tends to confer legitimacy on Burleigh, cantering their relationship belies the significance of his own fifty-year compositional career of performing, composing, publishing, editing, and mentoring. His sustained success in the White art music industry was unrivalled during his lifetime and still begs equivalence today. His friendship with Dvořák demonstrates his unique ability to forge relationships with the Conservatory faculty, often for a lifetime. Friendship and collegiality with industry leaders were assets he utilized to foster his career.

Dvořák hired at the National Conservatory

In the first half of 1891, while Burleigh was settling into his new life, Jeannette Thurber was busy landing a big-name hire for the Conservatory. She had built a strong administrative staff, but the school had no director since the well-regarded French baritone, Joseph Bouhy, resigned unexpectedly in December 1888. Despite the hegemony of German music and

musicians in America, Jeannette Thurber sought, with singular ferocity, the Czech composer Antonín Dvořák as her new director.¹⁷⁵

In 1891, the always audacious Jeannette Thurber looked to make a strategic, prestige hire for director which would bring stability to the fledgling Conservatory and elevate the school in the public imagination. With big goals, Thurber aimed at “big game” for the directorship. To lure them in, she needed to differentiate her enterprise from more established enterprises, like Boston’s New England Conservatory. The Congressional Charter garnered praise in the press, if not funding. Instead she relied on the wealth of her supportive husband, Francis B. Thurber, to pay many of the expenses. At one time, his wholesale grocery concern, Thurber, Whyland & Co., was the largest in the world. His wife had ready cash to back her propitious negotiations.¹⁷⁶

Thurber’s close friend and faculty member, Viennese-trained pianist Adele Margulies, advocated for Dvořák. A highly popular and accomplished European composer, his belief in democratic access to music education aligned with Thurber’s *raison d’être* for her institution. In a widely circulated interview a few years earlier, Dvořák had stated, “Every child in Bohemia must study music...Herein, I consider, lies one great secret of the national talent for music in my country.” They were philosophically attuned to the centrality of music education to a vibrant national culture.¹⁷⁷

In her appeal for congressional funding, Thurber wrote, “America has, so far, done nothing in a National [sic] way either to promote the musical education of its people or to develop any musical genius they possess.” This idea of a “musical genius” peculiar to a nation’s citizens gained momentum in nineteenth-century Europe. Furthermore, Thurber knew Dvořák’s nationalist commitments: “Our nation’s tunes and chorales come, as it were,

¹⁷⁵ Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 8.

¹⁷⁶ Whitaker, “A Musicale.”

¹⁷⁷ Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 10.

from the very heart of the people and beautiful things they are.” His career gained professional ascendancy through incorporating these Bohemian folk “tunes” into his iteration of Czech nationalist music. Dvořák’s commitment to developing nationalist music made him a most desirable candidate.¹⁷⁸

Like many European composers in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Dvořák sought to reflect a particular national musical “language” that could define national identity. In the mid-nineteenth century reshuffling of empires and national boundaries, musical identity was a powerful way to demonstrate patriotism, while projecting the illusion of a stable, united, national identity. This project was part of an effort to make order out of the complex social, religious, and political relations in the changing European landscape.¹⁷⁹

Dvořák challenged the former oligarchical practice of defining the value of music based on the pedigree of the nobles who funded composers. He believed that national music identity was founded in folk music, saying he looked “to the simple, half-forgotten tunes of the Bohemian peasants for hints in my most serious work.” His inversion of music’s previous power structure spoke as much to his humble beginnings in the Bohemian countryside as it did to his belief that peasants and outsiders had the most to offer vis-à-vis the sound of a nation’s music. That hypothesis, expressed in his folk-inspired compositions, brought him wild international success and made him Thurber’s number one choice to lead the National Conservatory.¹⁸⁰

The Bohemian composer’s priorities for musical education were his belief in musical genius resident in the citizenry and the power of music to define national identity, along with his concept that the marginalized in society often had the most to offer nationalist music.

¹⁷⁸ Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 30; “In Aid of Music,” *Washington Post*, 1888; John C. Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America, 1892-1895* (Amadeus Press, 1993), 62.

¹⁷⁹ Philip V. Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (Taylor & Francis, 2010), 59–63.

¹⁸⁰ Michael B. Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer’s Inner Life* (Norton, 2003), 14; Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 28–29; Clapham, *Dvořák: Musician and Craftsman*, 87–89.

These qualities prompted Thurber to initiate negotiations with Dvořák via telegram in June 1891. She offered him the exorbitant salary of \$15,000 per academic year, along with many conditions that gave him the space to investigate and hypothesize about the elements of American music and time to substantiate his claim in compositions.¹⁸¹

Thurber funded the offer, as financial concerns continued for the National Conservatory. Though her husband's business had burned to the ground in 1890 and was rebuilding, apparently the Thurber's had bottomless pockets. Fellow Bohemian and friend of Dvořák, violinist Josef Kořenský, observed, "How much America is able to remunerate persons who are supposed to lend prestige and fame to an enterprise shines forth from the fact that Dvořák's annual salary as director of the conservatoire was twice as much as the administrator of the entire Kingdom of Bohemia is paid for his services." As he adroitly observed, Thurber anticipated the sumptuous salary would bring press attention and prestige to the Conservatory. Newspapers began chronicling the incoming director's activities with gusto, leading some music critics to dub it "the Dvořákian invasion."¹⁸²

Dvořák, aged fifty-one, landed in New York on September 27, 1892, with his wife, Anna, and two of their children, Otilka (8) and Antonín II (5); for a time, they left behind their four older children. Thurber welcomed him and his family in style at the Hotel Clarendon, one block from the National Conservatory. No record of the composer's first visit to the school survives, but Thurber was keen to bring him to meet the faculty. If so, he may have shaken the hand of a star-struck Burleigh at work in the front office.¹⁸³

The Dvořáks arrived in time to witness the full fervour of American patriotic celebration of the 400-year anniversary of Columbus's landing in First Nations' spaces. With

¹⁸¹ Whitaker, "Musical," 20–1.

¹⁸² Veronika Vejvodová, "Antonín Dvořák in the Notes of the Traveller Josef Kořenský and Czech Society in America in 1893," *Musicalia* 11, no. 1–2 (2020): 114, 132, fn. 83; "Business Improvement Is Slow," *The Sunday Ledger*, 1893; Evelyn Funda, "'New World' Visions and Homegrown Art," *Modern Fiction Studies* 65, no. 2 (2019): 274.

¹⁸³ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, xx; Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 33.

brass bands, parades, speeches, and parties, New Yorkers proudly proclaimed the American narrative of freedom and Gilded Age wealth, with its intrinsic message of White supremacy. Amidst this excitement, Dvořák explored the musical landscape on display.

Two weeks after his arrival, Antonín Dvořák was fêted at Carnegie Hall during an event which explicitly linked the concepts of the “New World” and exploration. Thomas W. Higginson gave the introductory remarks in his speech, “The Two New Worlds: The New World of Columbus and the New World of Music.” The former Union Major, Higginson, worked with free and newly emancipated African American troops during the Civil War. He wrote extensively about his fascination with the power of religious expression in spirituals sung by his men. Concerned about the preservation of this oral tradition, in 1867 he published the first substantial collection of what he called “Negro Spirituals” in the *Atlantic Monthly*, to preserve this folk music.¹⁸⁴

Like many late-nineteenth-century intellectuals, Higginson wrestled over cultural identity in a coming-of-age country. He proposed that “high culture,” in the often-fractionious democratic experiment, was thwarted by the energy of commercial pursuits and the growing popular culture of the stage, music houses, and minstrel shows – what Charles Loring Brace’s 1872 book called *The Dangerous Classes of New York*. White cultural gatekeepers like William Dean Howells, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, along with Higginson’s brother, Henry Higginson, founder of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, wrote about the war between the “civilized life” and the “peril” of democracy leading to a cultural “mediocracy.” The irony of his statement that “educated gentlemen” would lead the way in “saving our country” from the tastes of those dangerous classes was not lost on the female cultural entrepreneur in the

¹⁸⁴ “Antonín Dvorak Leads at the Music Hall,” *New York Herald*, 1892; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Atlantic Monthly; Negro Spirituals* (Reprint); 1867.” Batchelor, Lillion | Buffalo Quarters Historical Society Papers, Digital Collections, Monroe Fordham Regional History Center, Archives & Special Collections Department, (E. H. Butler Library, SUNY Buffalo State, 1867), 685–90.

audience responsible for bringing what Higginson called the “messiah of national music” to America’s shores.¹⁸⁵

Higginson portrayed Dvořák as a high culture tastemaker, despite his family’s humble family roots and his proclivity for Bohemia’s peasant-originating folk music. Using the trope of Columbus, Higginson situated the composer as an explorer of American music’s landscape, saying “triumphs of our land in music” were yet to be discovered. Interestingly, he also asserted that if the United States were composed of “unmixed English blood,” there would be a long wait. Despite his previous statement about “great men” leading culture, Higginson argued that “the other great musical races of Europe” – i.e. German and Italian immigrants – would initiate the shift in American national music.¹⁸⁶

Despite Higginson’s admiration for Negro spirituals while encamped with Black troops in the Civil War, his powers of imagination did not extend to the inclusion of such music in a national framework. Although Jeannette Thurber never racially segregated her school, she probably could not foresee this either. In his first month, Thurber gave Dvořák a copy of Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha* as inspiration for a “Great American Opera,” based on the poet’s fantasy about First Nations people. Neither predicted that the new director would find his inspiration in African American musical language, a distinct departure from the German “high culture” framework of music.¹⁸⁷

As Dvořák settled into his new home at 327 East 17th Street, two blocks from the Conservatory, Burleigh looked forward to the new academic year. Despite his whirlwind first six months at the Conservatory and summer working in Saratoga Springs with Victor Herbert and concertizing with Sissieretta Jones, nothing could have prepared him for what

¹⁸⁵ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow, Highbrow Lowbrow* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 203–10; Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 17.

¹⁸⁶ “Antonin Dvořák Leads at the Music Hall,” *New York Herald*, 1892.

¹⁸⁷ Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 34.

came next. New spaces and friendships awaited both men in New York City in the autumn of 1892.

Shared backgrounds and empathy

Burleigh's economic and racial challenges had parallels with Dvořák's background. Both grew up as aspiring musicians, limited by prejudice and family finances from rising in society. Both needed scholarships to attend the Conservatory. Both had rags-to-musician stories. The cultural elite sometimes viewed Dvořák as "provincial," "naïve," and "primitive," all pejorative terms for African Americans too. The respected *New York Times* music critic Richard Aldrich went so far as to describe Dvořák and his ability as "deviant," given his peasant background. His achievement appeared as an anomaly, what one critic called "a kind of talking monkey" to establishment snobbery.¹⁸⁸

Perhaps the initial spark of friendship arose as Dvořák recognized similar challenges in his background to Burleigh's. He expressed those echoes in a letter to the *Herald* on May 28, 1893. Recounting early sacrifices for his musical training, the composer recalled, "I can hardly understand how I endured the privations and labor of my youth." This perspective informed his view on where America's musical genius would lie: "It is the poor I turn to for musical greatness. The poor work hard; they study rigorously. Rich people are apt to apply themselves lightly to music... Poverty is no barrier to one endowed by nature with musical talent." Dvořák's identification with his "privations and labor of youth" mirrored Burleigh's own. Though the Burleighs were working middle class, nonetheless, he suffered the "privations" and economic challenges resulting from America's pervasive racial caste system. One senses that the composer identified with their shared struggle to afford and belong at a conservatoire.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Leon Botstein, "Reversing the Critical Tradition: Innovation, Modernity, and Ideology in the Work and Career of Antonín Dvořák," in *Dvořák and His World* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 21–29.

¹⁸⁹ Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 360.

On top of the racist indignities facing Burleigh on every street and in every White establishment in the city, his abilities were marginalized by race, with “Negro musician” as a common signifier in the White press. Set apart as fundamentally different from White musicians and reified racist assumptions, Burleigh was somehow less than his White colleagues. The friendship between Burleigh and Dvořák both offered relief from these discriminatory forces and engendered mutual recognition and exchange.¹⁹⁰

Every member of the Conservatory was keen to build a relationship with the director. James Huneker, Thurber’s secretary and piano faculty member, acquainted the composer with the neighbourhood. Described as “a born cosmopolite” and “devotee of greatness,” it is hard to imagine the composer was at ease with Huneker. He was always mindful of his humble beginnings. Perhaps discomfort accounts for the drinking binge Huneker described on his first outing with Dvořák.

Around the corner from the Conservatory at Third Avenue and 18th Street was Goerwitz Café, a German establishment frequented by many immigrants in nearby Kleindeutschland. In his halting German, Huneker introduced the socially uncomfortable Dvořák to a whisky cocktail, of which he reported the newcomer drank a prodigious amount. After such a flashy introduction to New York City by someone trying hard to impress, it is little wonder that the less sociable composer cultivated a relationship with the understated Burleigh.¹⁹¹

Though Dvořák had several Black students in his advanced composition class, Burleigh was the first African American he knew as a friend. As they grew closer, Burleigh was a regular guest in the lively family home at 327 East 17th Street. Burleigh recalled the

¹⁹⁰ Leon Botstein, “Darwinism and Dvořák,” in *Dvořák and His World*, ed. Michael Beckerman (Princeton University Press, 1993), 13, 19, 26, 28. Note: While “race” in nineteenth-century Europe was a signifier of ethnic difference during the disaggregation of empire and kingdoms, it nonetheless situated the most politically powerful White “race” as superior, thereby intrinsically situating Dvořák as a more liminal cultural contributor.

¹⁹¹ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 81.

idiosyncratic nature of Dvořák's home, saying his host "had bird cages all over the house with thrushes in them. He kept the doors open, so they flew about freely and joined in the singing. I'd accompany myself on the piano."¹⁹²

Through the fall semester of 1892, Dvořák invited Burleigh into his home for family dinner and singing around the piano. After supper, Burleigh sang while accompanying himself on the piano that William Steinway had lent to the new director. He became well-acquainted with the composer's children. Dvořák's young son, Okatar, was so enamoured with the young singer that he sometimes came to orchestra practice to sit on Burleigh's lap while he played timpani, until he annoyed his father sufficiently and was booted out.¹⁹³

Perhaps in the ease and playfulness of the Dvořák home, Burleigh felt free to sing what he called "my people's music," trusting in Dvořák's sensibilities and empathy. It was a trust well-founded. His friend, Burleigh recalled, affirmed it as music literature worthy as compositional source material, exclaiming, "Give those melodies to the world!" Burleigh took this directive to heart when he established his composition career. But it was the composer's empathy and curiosity about Black culture that Burleigh explicitly valued in Dvořák. His experience as a Czech-speaking citizen whose culture was marginalized under the Hapsburg empire made him naturally curious about Burleigh's experiences.¹⁹⁴

Under that empire, there was repression and destruction of Czech history and culture; books were destroyed to eradicate their language and identity. Czech nationalists sought to restore their cultural presence by establishing the Czech-language national theatre, opera house, and a conservatory in Prague. In the minds of many intellectuals, authentic Czech culture was found amongst illiterate peasants, unspoiled by Germanization efforts.

¹⁹² Peress, 'Dvořák House'; Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 131.

¹⁹³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 81–2.

¹⁹⁴ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 14; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 83.

Though White American art music made no such connection with Black music, Burleigh could perceive the same resistance in Black music.¹⁹⁵

The intimacy between the director and a vocal student conceivably grew from a shared experience of living under a destructive, dominant power levelled against their culture, language, history, and livelihoods. As the Hapsburg Empire sought to eradicate Bohemian language and culture, so did White oppressors attack African and then African American culture. White critics in turn viewed the culture Black Americans had created under racial terror as “primitive.” Dvořák and Burleigh shared many resonances, both musical and personal. The connection between Burleigh and Dvořák was more than a Conservatory student to a director, or a Black music tutor to a European composer. In this financially strapped, hardworking, and gifted student, Dvořák recognized himself.¹⁹⁶

During those sessions, Burleigh communicated musically the formative musical experiences of his family and community. By translating spirituals into a Euro-centric style for a White composer, Burleigh’s biographer, Dr. Jean E. Snyder, noted Burleigh’s “bi-musicality,” which she defined as the ability to “speak” fluently the language of both Black and European music. Doing so highlights a marginalized group’s ethos, history, and beliefs, while observing the compositional strictures of Western music.¹⁹⁷

For Burleigh, it was exhilarating that Black music might cross over what Jennifer Lynn Stoeber calls the “sonic color line” to describe the racialization of sound where “certain bodies are expected to produce, desire, and live among particular sounds.” The purpose of racializing sound is to create a hierarchy dividing “whiteness” and “blackness,” preferencing “white” sound as socially normative. She proposed that Black music could make “sonic

¹⁹⁵ Amelia Davidson, “Reclaiming a Golden Past: Musical Institutions and Czech Identity in Nineteenth-Century Prague” (Missouri State University, 2019), 53–4.

¹⁹⁶ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 55.

¹⁹⁷ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 1–2.

interventions into race, sound and American identity in national music” by “calling attention to the listening ear’s white supremacist orientations.” Burleigh’s ability to express the relationship between spirituals and European music democratized as Burleigh’s voice resisted usual Black/White categorizations. Perhaps for the first time, the composer could envision spirituals’ musical idioms to represent both the potential and failure of American democracy in his American compositions.¹⁹⁸

Because Dvořák had incorporated Bohemian folk music in some compositions, he was attentive to differences and similarities in Burleigh’s performance practice of African American folk music. Burleigh recounted how the composer would listen attentively and then “jump up and ask: Did they really sing it that way?” Burleigh did not tell us his response, but the honest answer was, of course, “no.” Burleigh bi-musically filtered his singing through his art music training.¹⁹⁹

Neither Burleigh’s piano accompaniment nor solo singing were part of the spirituals’ communal tradition. His familiarity with spirituals, however, meant that Burleigh syncretized his *bel canto* voice training with the call and response, improvisation, and community creation of this oral tradition. His genius in the future was to craft art songs from the oral tradition, which retained the emotional power and the lived experiences of enslaved people. This gift made him the standard bearer of Black art music in the early twentieth century.

We will never know what hybrid sonic form Burleigh’s spirituals took during those evenings at Dvořák’s family piano. Perhaps because he was an outsider, not enthralled by America’s particular brand of White supremacy, Dvořák enthusiastically embraced the spiritual art form as equal to the musical idioms. After hearing the sonorous baritone sing a version of “Go Down, Moses,” the composer stated confidently, “Burleigh, that is as great

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.; Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York University Press, 2016), 132–34.

¹⁹⁹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 81.

as a Beethoven theme!” Burleigh found this a strong encouragement for utilizing spirituals as a composition and performance source.²⁰⁰

Unlike the White American composers who appropriated Black music before 1892, Dvořák learned these songs in the context of a trusted friendship with an African American. He was also intensely curious about the circumstances surrounding the creation of these folk tunes and the ongoing verisimilarities of being Black in America. The Czech queried Burleigh about the lives of the enslaved people who created this music he so admired, peppering his guest with “hundreds of questions about Negro life,” Burleigh recalled. The young singer admired that the Czech felt “great love for the common people of all lands, pointed the way” when creating his symphony with African American folk roots.²⁰¹

As Dvořák saw himself in Burleigh’s struggles, so Burleigh saw himself reflected in the composer. “Dvořák used to get tired during the day and I would sing to him after supper. I had been hungry in my time; I had known how hard it was to overcome discrimination, and I knew what a great man Dvořák was in music. It seemed impossible to me that he should be able to get anything from me, and wonderful that he should ask for it.” What Burleigh offered Dvořák was mutual recognition away from his discomfort with celebrity. What Burleigh received was also mutual recognition, encouragement, and empathy.²⁰²

Camaraderie walking New York’s soundscape

After their friendship had developed around the composer’s home dinner table and at the parlour piano, it deepened as they traversed the city together. Scholars have minutely followed a paper trail of music and articles to discover the genesis of Dvořák’s hypothesis about “Negro melodies” as the fount of America’s music nationalism. Perhaps of equal value

²⁰⁰ Murray, “The Story of Harry Burleigh,” 104.

²⁰¹ Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 78–83; ‘Sweet Chariot Inspired Dvořák’, *New York World-Telegram*, 1941.

²⁰² Peress, *Dvorak to Duke Ellington*, 23.

was the cordiality and companionship between these two men. While dining, parlor singing, and wandering about the city together they discussed music and their lives to make the sound and stories of spirituals resonate vibrantly in the composer's musical imagination.

Walking and exploring the city also gave Dvořák relief from his well-documented homesickness and mental health challenges. Because of his agoraphobia, anxiety, and panic attacks, he never walked alone. Several friends regularly accompanied him, and Burleigh was one of them. Milos Safránek, a Czech diplomat, recalled, "Immediately after Dvořák's arrival, Burleigh established an animated, cordial, and permanent relationship with his teacher... I learned that Burleigh visited Dvořák quite often, perhaps daily, and sometimes the composer took him to see a new engine or to watch the departure of a steamship from New York."²⁰³

This account reveals several significant details. First, though clearly the mature composer had much to teach the young vocal student, it has been mistakenly reported that Burleigh was in Dvořák's advanced composition class. He was in fact enrolled in the artists' course, which prepared musicians for a professional singing career. Clearing this misapprehension, Burleigh wrote with characteristic humility that he was "not far enough advanced at the time to be in his classes." However, Burleigh did not suffer from false humility. In the same 1934 piece, he acknowledged being "constantly associated with the great master during the two years he taught in the National Conservatory in New York. I sang our Negro songs for him very often," and Dvořák "filled himself with the spirit of the old Spirituals. I also help to copy parts of the original score. A study of the musical material in the *New World* is made to reveal the influence of Negro song on it."²⁰⁴

Second, Safránek's account describes the quotidian nature of their friendship, but situates Burleigh in the subordinate position of "being taken" around the city. Indicative of racist assumptions shaping perceptions, surely Burleigh navigated the city better than the

²⁰³ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 170–88, 130.

²⁰⁴ Hazel G. Kinsella, *Music on the Air* (Viking Press, 1934), 188.

Bohemian. However, since Burleigh was constantly overlooked, underestimated, and marginalized by White people as he moved about the city, perambulating with his celebrity friend gave Burleigh a measure of safety he did not enjoy when walking certain places by himself.

Sonically, Dvořák found 1890s New York both vibrant and relentless. In 1892, steam-powered elevated railways, horse-drawn carriages, and streetcars were still the dominant form of transit, as New York's subway did not open till 1904. The closest elevated train to Union Square was the Third Avenue El. Coming from the overcrowded Lower East side, it was full of a variety of immigrants: Jews, Slavs, Scandinavians, and Chinese, along with Germans from Kleindeutschland. Dvořák, his secretary, and possibly Burleigh were known to have taken the train all the way to its northern end at 155th one evening so that he could view the freight yards where workers loaded goods under gaslight before the massive engines whisked them away west toward the country's interior markets.²⁰⁵

Along the way, whether by train, streetcar, or on foot, they would have encountered the music of the city. Dvořák wrote about his attentiveness to all the sounds of New York: “from negro melodies, the songs of the creoles, the red man's chant, or the plaintive ditties of the homesick German or Norwegian, to the melodies of whistling boys, street singers, and blind organ grinders.” While ambling with Burleigh, he explored New York's sonic landscape with a *de facto* ethnomusicologist of Black music.²⁰⁶

There is currently no record of Burleigh walking with his friend through the relatively small, segregated, Black section of Manhattan, only a fifteen-minute walk from the Conservatory. However, given his intense interest in their music, Dvořák would logically have been curious to visit the center of Black Manhattan. Black migration to New York

²⁰⁵ Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 40.

²⁰⁶ Antonín Dvořák, “Music in America,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, February 1895, 429–434.

would double in the 1890s compared to the two previous decades, but the population in Manhattan was relatively small in 1892.²⁰⁷

The concentration of African Americans residing in Greenwich Village pushed northward, looking for affordable housing between the 1880s and 1890s. Racially restricted housing policies squeezed this population into the area north and west, roughly from 23rd to 53rd Street, from Seventh to Tenth Avenues. There they found landlords willing to rent to Black Americans in an area called the “Tenderloin,” named after a police captain’s claim that the graft and protection money he extracted from residents provided him with a tenderloin steak dinner every night. This area was never racially or socially homogeneous. Black New Yorkers lived side by side with Irish and Italian immigrants. Despite its reputation as a notorious vice district, many theatres began to populate the Tenderloin, drawing workers, visitors, and the city’s elite.²⁰⁸

A “Black Bohemia” emerged in Manhattan during the 1890s. In 1892, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* described this cadre as the “Negro 400,” mirroring the *New York Times*’ list of “The Four Hundred” White aristocrats. That same year, St. Philip’s, home to many of the “Negro 400,” moved from its downtown location to 161 West 25th Street. Bethel A.M.E. and St. Mark’s Episcopal Church likewise moved to the Tenderloin.²⁰⁹ However, there was more to Black social life than churches. Burleigh’s club in 1892, the Toussaint L’Ouverture Club, was described as “beautifully furnished from roof to cellar,” with “everything in all departments conducive in the slightest degree to the comfort and pleasure of its members and their gentlemen friends.” Though Burleigh had to economize, this membership was

²⁰⁷ Marcy S. Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City Before World War I*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 5.

²⁰⁸ **Ibid.**, 9–11, 15–16, 7; Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (Norton, 1992), 203–4.

²⁰⁹ Luther P. Jackson, “Review of” *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865-1920*,” by Seth M. Scheiner, *Journal of Negro History* 51, no. 2 (1966): 94; David Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion - a Guide to Manhattan’s Houses of Worship* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 242–43, 94; “St. Mark’s Methodist Episcopal Church,” *Cleveland Gazette*, 1891.

more necessary than food, as these clubs were places of safety, dignity, and camaraderie in Jim Crow New York.²¹⁰

New York City's Black labour force in the 1890s was largely unheard on the street, because White unions used wage competition to exclude Black tradespeople and skilled workers. Half of Black men and over ninety percent of Black women in New York City at this time worked as domestics or in solitary jobs like elevator operators. Still, Dvořák perhaps overheard various “negro melodies” from coachmen or women on errands.²¹¹

Black “working women” made music. They sought to entice customers to brothels by singing “solicitous ditties,” though accounts do not describe those sounds. No doubt these sonic experiences engendered lively conversation between the two friends over similarities and differences between the things they heard in the Tenderloin compared to the spirituals. Burleigh, who grew up in a port city, heard a wide variety of linguistic and musical expressions. He could explicate for Dvořák the relationship between various types of American music and their cultural significance. Burleigh gave the Bohemian insight into how spirituals uniquely communicated African American religious feelings and hope.²¹²

Spirituals expressed the centrality of community and religion in Sunday worship and as part of the fabric of daily life for many African Americans. One practitioner of spiritual singing called the feelings evoked “puzzling emotions that would seem to be impossible to experience simultaneously and sadness, rage and love, tranquillity.” These complex emotions likely resonated empathetically with Dvořák in a way that mere notes on a page or academic musical debate did not. The narratives Burleigh related about Black life and his embodied

²¹⁰ “H. C. Smith, “In New York City – Mr. Henry T. Burleigh and the Toussaint L’Ouverture Club. Both Credits to the Race,” *Cleveland Gazette*, November 19, 1892.

²¹¹ Sacks, *Before Harlem*, 133, 112–13.

²¹² Chad C. Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 26.

performance of spirituals engendered in his Czech friend the unwavering conviction that they were foundational American music.²¹³

Unlike the predominantly secular folk music upon which he based his Bohemian national music, the folk music of Black Americans, one biographer surmises, “fulfilled Dvořák’s idealized yearning for a substance simultaneously ‘of earth’ and blessed by religious fervor.” The spirituality of Burleigh’s singing appealed to the composer’s deeply held faith. Unfortunately, Dvořák scholars have not explored how their shared faith drew these two men together. Burleigh said the spirituals were the “spontaneous outburst of intense religious fervor,” giving this oral tradition emotional complexity which resonated in Dvořák.²¹⁴

Black people in bondage, living in unremitting violence, were looking to God and waiting for freedom. The poignancy of the spirituals, like “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” was the faith required to trust God for deliverance. This waiting did not rob them of agency but undergirded their belief that any liberatory work was in line with the Divine’s intention that all humans should be free.

Dvořák’s inclusion of the spirituals’ themes fit well with the composer’s belief that America was not solely a physical place but somewhere shot through with faith akin to that of Jewish enslaved people forced to work under Egyptian pharaohs. A 1941 interview with Burleigh affirmed that Dvořák saw the spirituals as “the flower of American folk-art stemming from a burning need for religious solace in a hard life.”²¹⁵

In his American notebooks, the composer labelled the initial chords of the Largo movement “beginning of a legend.” Legends are based on traditional stories associated with individuals in a specific time and place that often involve the supernatural. The physical and emotional suffering of enslaved Americans combined with resistance and hope of divine

²¹³ Arthur C. Jones, “The Foundational Influence of Spirituals in African-American Culture: A Psychological Perspective,” *Black Music Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (October 1, 2004): 253.

²¹⁴ Michael Beckerman, “Dvorak as Prime Mover,” *New York Times*, November 17, 2002; Huneker, *Steeplejack*, 81.

²¹⁵ “Sweet Chariot Inspired Dvořák,” *New York World-Telegram*, 1941.

deliverance was, for the non-American, peasant-turned-composer, a quintessential spiritual and historical American legend. Burleigh made the legend of almost inconceivable resilience of Black Americans tangible.²¹⁶

Music critic and Dvořák biographer, H. C. Colles, maintained that Burleigh's singing caught the composer's ear "by use of the pentatonic scale, by a flat seventh, by a syncopation of rhythm." He believed this moody musical combination evoked wistfulness in Dvořák for Bohemian folk songs. Burleigh's singing at the end of the composer's long day reverberated with the composer's feeling of not being at home in the "new world." The spirituals expressed longing for release from suffering and Christian hope of paradise after the toils of life. Far from his beloved homeland and younger children, Dvořák must have connected emotionally with the music's pathos for a spiritual home.²¹⁷

The composer also missed his actual home in Bohemia. Considering his well-documented severe homesickness for his family and country, Colles believed that Burleigh singing the "Swing Low" lyrics, "comin' forth to carry me home," had a unique impact on Dvořák. He stated that the composer "snatched gratefully at something in which he could find an affinity with home" amidst New York's fast pace and cosmopolitanism. Dvořák's close friend, Anton Seidl, who conducted the American premiere of *Symphony No. 9, From the New World*, remembered Dvořák being so overcome with this nostalgia for his country that "I suggested that he write a symphony embodying his experiences and feelings in America," inspired by his "longing for home." Dvořák's "Swing Low" shaped his approach to the symphony and mapped the pathos of his emotional landscape.²¹⁸

The profound emotional and musical impression of Burleigh's spirituals gave the composer musical idioms for his symphony. White musicians could argue otherwise, and

²¹⁶ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 28.

²¹⁷ H. C. Colles, "Antonín Dvořák. III. In the New World," *Musical Times* **82**, no. 1180 (1941): 209–11.

²¹⁸ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 186; Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 381.

they soon did, but through his friendship with Burleigh, Dvořák gained insight into a side of America that few others at the Conservatory could give him. This collegial introduction to Black spirituals formed a crucial and controversial part of Dvořák's work in the New World.

Dvořák proposes "Negro melodies" for American music

Thurber's charge that the new director should discover the sound of American nationalism began an acrimonious debate among industry insiders. Whatever the source of America's unique music, it explicitly revealed something inherent about its history and people. The stakes were enormous about what story the nation's music would portray about itself, particularly to the dominant White music culture in Europe. When Dvořák claimed that Black music was endemic to America, music he understood through his friendship with Burleigh, his proposal that they were foundational, and the future of American music, sent shockwaves across American society.

Music critics anticipated that this "apostle of national music" would look to America's folk music. But a series of articles about what constituted the country's folk music was immediately contentious. An initial salvo began on Sunday May 15, 1893. About eight months after Dvořák befriended Burleigh, the *New York Herald* reporter, James Creelman, penned the now-famous article "The Real Value of Negro Melodies." He quoted Dvořák as saying, "I am now satisfied that the future of music in this country must be founded on what are called the negro melodies. This must be the foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States." In response, the White art music community went mad.²¹⁹

Music critics, musicologists, and historians have written about the racial controversy created by Creelman's article for over a century. As the literature is voluminous on the debate, this chapter focuses on the most comprehensive works regarding how Burleigh's

²¹⁹ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 100.

music was central to the uproar. Three scholars are particularly attentive to the press coverage. Michael Beckerman's *New Worlds of Dvořák* (2003) parses the symbiotic but sometimes combative relationship that Dvořák and Thurber had with the music press. John C. Tibbetts' *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895* gives ready access to primary sources from the period germane to the controversy.

Douglas Shadle's more recent *Antonín Dvořák's New World Symphony* (2021) is particularly attentive to the racial landscape of American art music before and after Dvořák's proposition about the centrality of Black music. He notes the ubiquity of lynching in the years Dvořák was writing his symphony: on average three people a week were being lynched in America in the years 1892–93. The lynching of three Black merchants in Tennessee in March 1892 set in motion the journalistic career of Ida B. Wells, the first to systematically investigate this racial terror.²²⁰

The uproar caused by her work still reverberated in the ears of the White press when the highly respected European composer made his claims about Black culture. The European music master stepped unwittingly into America's ongoing racial fury. As the African American music critic Sylvester Russell wrote, this proposal "fell upon the ears of the American White people like a thunderclap." The press covered the resulting controversy daily in New York through the end of 1893 and into 1894.²²¹

The initial critique was confined to whether Black folk music as a source of American art composition was a valid pursuit. But the debate quickly devolved into a cacophony of naysayers on what was the actual "characteristic" of the national identity. Some predictably claimed that Dvořák was a foreigner and therefore unable to understand accurately America's essential musical identity. Many others, such as James Huneker, took the position that the melodies Dvořák cited were not original to African Americans, but

²²⁰ Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 99–100.

²²¹ Sylvester Russell, "Great Dvořák Dead," *Indianapolis Freeman*, June 4, 1904.

written by White people such as Stephen Foster. Thomas Higginson's *in situ* collection of spirituals during the Civil War decisively refuted this contention, but this oft-repeated misconception threatened recognition of Black creative brilliance.²²²

The general critique soon gave way to explicit racist language and claims. In response to the *Herald* article, Boston composer Philip Hale wrote mockingly of Dvořák as a “negrophile” who sought musical inspiration wandering the “jungles of the Bowery and the deserts of Central Park.” The words “jungle” and “desert” served as a racist invocation of “Africa.” Indicative and typical of racist critiques from White art musicians, *American Art Journal* wrote:

These melodies are so incipient and trivial that an American would be ashamed to derive his inspiration from such trash: besides, the negro is a negro and belongs to Africa, not America. These so-called negro songs are not original... Have we Americans so little talent that we must derive our inspirations from such sources? Besides, art belongs to the world, not to one nation.²²³

This screed exemplified several racist misconceptions that made the debate so venomous. It assumed that “American” meant Whiteness, and it asserted the “melodies” of African Americans were shameful musical “trash.” Most painful for Black readers, “negro” was positioned as a non-citizen, considered African and “foreign.” “Africa” as foreign carried an entirely different valence than Europeans as “foreign,” since Americans so sycophantly adhered to Western European art music norms. Many voices in the debate repeated the claim that “negro songs” originated in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music of White popular composers. Finally, the writer concluded his argument by asserting that art’s universalism should not reflect the culture and history of a nation. This was part of a decades-long European conflict between proponents of absolute music and nationalists, who advocated for music invigorated with folk musical motifs.²²⁴

²²² Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 82.

²²³ John Ogasapian and N. Lee Orr, *Music of the Gilded Age* (Bloomsbury, 2007), 66; Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 105.

²²⁴ Shadle, *New World Symphony* 131.

Even Conservatory faculty member James Huneker betrayed Thurber publicly. Unabashedly racist and envious of Burleigh's influence on Dvořák, he publicly refuted the composer's stance on Black music as the foundation of a nationalist school. Writing for *Musical Courier*, a rival publication to Krehbiel's *New York Herald*, Huneker seemed so blinded by racial animus that he threw suspicion on Thurber's enterprise, saying, "... an American symphony, is it? Themes from negro melodies; composed by a Bohemian; conducted by a Hungarian and played by Germans in a hall built by a Scotsman." He conceded that Dvořák "evidently saturated himself with the so-called negro music," but he claimed the Largo movement was "Celtic in quality" and "certainly not American."²²⁵

Huneker blamed the symphony for the "evil" of encouraging ragtime, demonstrating he was not a musicologist. He then remarked, "I hardly need add that the negro is not the original race of our country," demonstrating he was not a historian either. No wonder this review disrupted his relationship with Dvořák. Thurber must have been outraged by Huneker's public chastisement of the composer's efforts to theorize and compose about the trajectory of America's art music compositions.²²⁶

Huneker's public criticism of the Conservatory's director was not only embarrassing for Thurber and Dvořák; it was petty as well. Though he frequently spouted racist rhetoric, he also claimed to introduce Dvořák to the concept of Black music as compositional material in December 1892. Huneker also patronizingly confessed to having a "like for negroes," because they were "very human, very musical, their rhythmic sense remarkable." But by this time, Burleigh was a regular visitor to the composer's home, tutoring him in the spirituals. The article which Huneker purported influenced Dvořák is in the composer's archives, so he did indeed receive it. However, its impact was likely less than Burleigh's first-hand knowledge as part of the Black community. Huneker's cutting remarks likely arose from

²²⁵ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák* 88; Shadle, *New World Symphony* 130–31.

²²⁶ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák* 82.

jealousy that this “negro” was an intimate of White musicians in general, and Dvořák in particular.²²⁷

Others, like Boston composer Amy Beach, regarded “negro melodies” as beautiful tunes but not “fully typical of our country.” This sentiment rested on either the unconscious idea that African Americans were not genuinely American, or the conscious thought that they ought not to be. The final set of critics came from those who asserted that Dvořák was not original in this claim, because many others had “discovered” Black sacred music before him.²²⁸

Bostonian George Whiting, for example, founder of that city’s Beethoven Society, said that he had asserted national music in his paper given at the Music Teacher’s National Association some eight years earlier. The fact that he worked for the rival New England Conservatory of Music might have added a layer of bitterness to his refutation. Dvořák, by contrast, framed his praise of Black music not as an academic exercise, but focused on its beauty and its part of the “common humanity of [any American composer’s] country.”²²⁹

The backlash impacted Dvořák personally, adding to his already fragile mental health. The mildest critics gently pointed out he was misguided; others felt he lacked proper musical judgment. As if those comments were not disparaging enough, some invoked minstrelsy. One critic jokingly claimed the composer “blackens his face while closeted in his studio in search of nebulous inspiration...burnt cork for Dvořák.” Creelman, whose interview ignited the firestorm, said that Dvořák “locked himself in a room and turned the lights out” because “the world is too much for him,” after reading many outlets criticizing both him and his assertions.²³⁰

²²⁷ Huneker, *Steeplejack*, 68; Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák* 122–23, 148–49.

²²⁸ Shadle, *New World Symphony* 104.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 79, 41–42.

²³⁰ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 88; Shadle, *New World Symphony*, 102.

Perhaps the liberal setting of racial and gender inclusion in Thurber's Conservatory had lulled him into disbelief about the depths of racial animosity he might experience as a White person. Although familiar with the hostility and ridicule of his Bohemian heritage in a new and unfamiliar American racial caste system, he may well have worried for his safety – personal and professional – if he waded further into the fray.

As for Burleigh, he did not speak on the subject at all until many years later, probably to protect both his friend and his nascent career. Not that music critics were beating a path to Burleigh's door to solicit his thoughts; they marginalized him, as they did Dvořák's proposition.

Opening the door for Black students

A week after Creelman's articles appeared, Dvořák rallied from his seclusion to pen a response in the *Herald* on May 28, 1893, the Sunday after Creelman's article. His opening paragraph was unequivocal: there was “a sure foundation in the Negro melodies for a national school of music.” Then he pivoted to note that the young musicians of America just needed access to intelligent teaching and rigorous work to create such a “school.”²³¹

One senses Thurber's guiding hand in this elegant article. It reiterated Black music's centrality to the American music project, but then deftly turned to Thurber's mission, of American music education and public funding for her institution. It was good that she acted as his ghostwriter, since the director's English was adequate but not elegant. Dvořák again advocated for her mission from his own experience, stating, “Could I have had in my earlier days the advantages, freely offered in a school as the National Conservatory of Music, I might have been spared many of my hardest trials and have accomplished more.” To defuse the tension by changing the subject seems an elegant redirection toward a less controversial belief in music education, which both Dvořák and Thurber passionately shared.²³²

²³¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 87.

²³² Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 355–57, 350–61.

Dvořák's own impoverished childhood informed this section regarding the primacy of free tuition at the Conservatory: "Poverty is no barrier to one endowed with musical talent." Penning this response subverted the concept that the Conservatory's students, including the African American ones, were too poor or uneducated to deserve the investment. After recalling the "long bitter years" of his struggle to gain musical education, Dvořák stated his belief that less privileged students worked harder and studied more seriously than those from wealth.²³³

Initially, the director spoke about Conservatory students without racial terms. Now familiar with the potency of race in America, Dvořák waited till the closing lines to argue explicitly for inclusion of non-White students. He advocated for inclusion of merit-based students regardless of race. In his view, they were best situated to contribute to music nationalism, because their music grew "out of the very soil and partaking of its nature – the natural voice of a free and vigorous race." By doing so, he expanded his argument for African American students' inclusion in White art music – not merely as hardworking and talented students, but as those who held the cultural key to a nationalist shift in music. Dvořák went even further by affirming the importance of their music, their role in building the country, and their resilience under violence and bondage.²³⁴

Neither Dvořák nor his likely ghostwriter understood the problem of associating African Americans with the soil. While Europeans commonly used the trope to show the foundational nature of "folk" communities to the nation, in the United States the statement inadvertently tied Black musicians to chattel slavery or forced labour of sharecropping. Black Conservatory students likely read this comparison as a well-intended but derogatory characterization.

²³³ Ibid., 359–61.

²³⁴ Ibid.

On Tuesday May 16, 1893, five days before Dvořák defended his thesis on Black music, Jeannette Thurber made an astounding announcement in the *New York Herald*. Admission to the National Conservatory was “thrown open free of charge to the negro race.” Without her archives, it is unclear whether she was the driving force behind this change or whether Dvořák’s impending interview for Creelman’s article pushed her to solidify her democratic direction further. Either way, Thurber’s admission policy changes publicly buttressed her director’s position after the racial firestorm following his interview with Creelman published the previous Sunday. Given that Thurber was media savvy, she responded in a way that both forwarded her philosophy about American musical education and drew fire away from her embattled director.²³⁵

Besides explicitly inviting Black students, Thurber clarified that a path existed at the Conservatory for African Americans to join the faculty. She added, “a branch for the instruction in music of colored pupils of talent, largely with the view of forming colored professors of merit.” According to Thurber’s communiqué, there were already two Black faculty members: Harry P. Guy had been a teacher since 1891; the other was likely German-trained composition student Maurice Arnold. The opportunity for a rigorous preparatory teaching curriculum was a boon to Black students, since most needed to supplement any performance career with a teaching career on the side. Those who rose to faculty level left the Conservatory with the qualifications and experience to take on better musical teaching jobs.²³⁶

Thurber never met a press fiasco she could not manage. Far from backing down in the face of multiple attacks on her director’s musical opinion, she deftly turned the heat of the spotlight in her direction by announcing her admissions policy to Black Americans

²³⁵ Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 359.

²³⁶ Ibid.; David Beveridge, “Reception of Dvořák’s Operas in America,” in *Dvořák in America - 1892-1895*, ed. John C. Tibbetts (Amadeus Press, 1993), 358; “At the National Conservatory of Music,” *Cleveland Gazette*, 1891.

during the racial firestorm. Her logic was that if Black music was the basis of a “great and noble school” of American music, then more Black students belonged in the school.

In response, the Black press reported, “A chorus of gratitude burst from the lips of the negro race” when the *Herald* announced the new admissions policy. Since the dismantling of Reconstruction, segregation effectively barred many African Americans from a variety of educational opportunities. Gaus C. Bolin, an attorney in Poughkeepsie, New York, expressed the sentiment of many when he published a letter directly to Thurber:

Amid the many discouragements which come to the colored people of this country in this fierce struggle for existence, and in which they are so greatly and so very unjustly handicapped, there does come to them occasionally a ray of hope and great encouragement when they find those who are broad minded, liberal viewed and humane enough to consider and truly feel that no matter what the color of a man’s skin, no matter what the place or condition of his birth...

The fact that in this your latest project in connection with your institution you have decided to employ colored teachers and to give them a chance to develop themselves while endeavoring to direct the effort of others is a source of grateful appreciation from every black person in America, and perhaps my own elation is somewhat colored by the fact that my own young brother, Paul C. Bolin, is one of the lucky chosen ones.²³⁷

Thurber never barred Black students from her school, but this public announcement actively recruited them. Burleigh and Paul Bolin, a keyboard scholar, led the new department for incoming Black students for whom tuition was free.²³⁸

Dvořák never wavered in his contention that Black music constituted a nationalist idiom for composing American music. Thurber not only stood by her director but acted upon his premise. Burleigh, who wisely remained out of the spotlight, was explicitly part of this new chapter in American art music and Thurber’s commitment to seek out and support other talented, aspiring Black musicians.

Premiere of “From the New World” symphony

²³⁷ Gaus C. Bolin, Letter to Thurber, *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, Newspapers.com., 1893.

²³⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 52.

Burleigh could hardly have imagined his spirituals' singing in Dvořák's parlour would reverberate in White art music so soon and on such an enormous stage. Dvořák not only grasped fresh inspiration for his American symphony from Burleigh's mentoring in Black music, but he was also profoundly affected personally by stories of physical and spiritual struggles contained in the music literature of African Americans. Little could either Burleigh or Dvořák conceive of the cultural popularity this symphony took in American cultural imagination. It continues to be one of the most popular symphonies performed in the United States, causing the Czech composer's work to become, *de facto*, a piece of the American musical canon.

At its Carnegie Hall premiere on December 15, 1893, the symphony's passionate and poignant Largo movement demonstrated its emotional power. William Arms Fisher, a friend and contemporary of Burleigh's at the Conservatory and one of Dvořák's White composition students, vividly remembered that the echoes of the spiritual "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," from which the composer drew his motifs, "so touched to the heart was the great audience, that in the boxes filled with women of fashion and all about the hall people sat with tears rolling down their cheeks."²³⁹

The close relationship that Fisher and Burleigh enjoyed with the director gave them a window into his emotional distress, which became a thematic expression of universal longing in his symphony. Fisher explicitly connected the *New World Symphony's* Largo movement to Burleigh's spiritual singing and Dvořák's homesickness. "The largo movement," Fisher asserted, "with its haunting English horn, is an outpouring of [his] own home-longing...and a sense of tragedy of the black man as he sings in his 'spirituals.'" One Dvořák scholar asserted that the composer changed the Largo's original arrangement for clarinet and flute because the plaintive *cor anglais* so closely resembled Burleigh's voice quality. There is a deep

²³⁹ William Arms Fisher, "Goin' Home," 1922.

irony that White folks found emotional catharsis in the freedom music of enslaved Americans.²⁴⁰

The spirituals communicated hope in suffering, belief in redemption, and confidence in future liberation. For the composer, who suffered from agoraphobia and panic attacks, this music connected an existential longing and hope for relief. For African Americans, these songs connected deeply to all the internal contradictions of White America's narrative of freedom and the reality of racial oppression. As a communal faith creation, spirituals offered a survival strategy under the quotidian violence of the Black enslaved life.²⁴¹

A complex transaction occurred between Burleigh, Dvořák, and the listeners of the *New World Symphony*: a process I term “spiritual transliteration,” when White listeners appropriate the emotional and spiritual power contained in Black sacred music without acknowledging the conditions that made such music a necessary survival mechanism. This process translates the experience of Black American creators of spirituals into an emotional catharsis for White listeners. Burleigh approved of this process, though doubtless he also wished the White audience for spirituals would acknowledge the pain and suffering of its originators.

His rapprochement with White listeners appears in his 1917 statement on the G. Ricordi sheet music of “Deep River”: Burleigh expressed hope that the spirituals would essentially cross the color line and bring “deliverance from all that hinders and oppresses the soul” for all people. This stunning and underexamined bridge between the music of the oppressed and those who oppress happened throughout Burleigh's career, as he continued to compose and perform spirituals in White spaces.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ William Arms Fisher, “Reminiscences of One of Dvořák's Pupils,” *Phonograph Monthly Review* 1, no. 8 (1927); Fisher, “Goin' Home”; Colles, “Antonín Dvořák. III. In the New World”; Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 132.

²⁴¹ Tiearea J. Robinson, “The Healing Element of the Spirituals,” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 8, no. 7 (2015): 13–15.

²⁴² Burleigh, “Deep River: Old Negro Melody.”

As for Burleigh's experience in the glittering auditorium of Carnegie that December night in 1893, we have precious few words of his. In a brief statement, he conveyed how moving he found the experience. "I never forgot that first public performance," he recalled. "I suppose it was the first time in the history of music that a Negro's song had been a major theme in a great symphonic work." The significance of Black sacred music as the "foundation of a great school of music" set him on a unique compositional path in the future.²⁴³

The wrangling between music critics, composers, and journalists on both sides of the color line continued to rage. Some argued that the melodies and themes in the symphony were neither indigenous nor American. Other naysayers claimed that the "melodies" were penned by White composers, a hackneyed argument by this point. Taken together, they denied the essential Americanness, beauty, and emotional complexity of music created during enslavement and sought to whitewash the tunes as not "negro" at all. As was true across many arenas in America's racial caste system, there was a collective effort to deny the equal footing of Black and White Americans. Though Burleigh and others were unambivalent about the success of expressing American nationalism through Dvořák's incorporation of spirituals, others were not so sure.²⁴⁴

Burleigh remained modest for many years about the part his knowledge played in Dvořák's theory about American music. Trusted others spoke about his erasure from the narrative of Dvořák's development in American music. Victor Herbert stated, "that very talented Harry Burleigh had the privilege of giving the Dr. some of the thematic material for this Symphony...I have seen it denied - but it is true. Naturally, I knew a good deal about this Symphony - as I saw the Dr. twice or thrice a week - and he was working on it."²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Antonín Dvořák, quoted in John C. Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America, 1892-1895* (Amadeus Press, 1993), 359.

²⁴⁴ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 181-91.

²⁴⁵ Victor Herbert, letter to Carl Engel, 1922, quoted in "African-American Influences," Dvořák American Heritage Association.

William Arms Fisher also clarified the record. As a fellow student in 1893, he knew first-hand Burleigh's influence on the composer. He noted that Dvořák's symphony was largely completed by summer 1893, four months before its premiere on December 15. By this time, Fisher says the composer had "saturated himself" with the spirituals that gave "rich expression" to his American works.²⁴⁶

Burleigh only spoke clearly about his relationship with Dvořák in 1916 and how the spirituals affected his symphony. Perhaps Burleigh chose to speak then because he was fully established in his singing, composition, and music editing careers. He was also savvy about the business of music by this point. Reviving the idea of Dvořák, a revered White European composer's value of spirituals, was a tacit selling point and validation for his new art song spirituals that were beginning to appear.

Burleigh was always clear that Dvořák was not quoting spirituals. Instead, the Bohemian's creativity and musical imagination were stirred after being immersed in their musical expression so that he might invent his original themes. In a *Musical America* interview in April 1916, Burleigh expressed how close he was to Dvořák's process: "I copied many of the orchestral parts of the 'New World' Symphony from his original '*partitur*' ... getting it ready for its first performance by the Philharmonic. Did Dvořák know the tunes of the negro, our spirituals? Of course he did, and he knew 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,' which the second theme of his first movement of the 'New World' resembles so strongly." Burleigh had another reason to reiterate the primacy of Black music as a compositional source for art music: he was preparing to break the art song color line.²⁴⁷

In June 1916, a month after this interview, G. Ricordi published his first art song based on a spiritual, "Deep River." Tying his composition to Dvořák's work aligned him

²⁴⁶ Fisher, "Goin' Home."

²⁴⁷ Walter Kramer, "H. T. Burleigh: Composer by Divine Right and 'The American Coleridge-Taylor,'" *Musical America*, April 29, 1916, 25.

with European art music aristocracy and the Bohemian's imperative to Burleigh to "give these melodies to the world!" Arranging "Deep River" as an art song was a racially fraught move which he fortified through Dvořák's White approbation, because he was about to tread on the sacrosanct cultural terrain of the White, European art song genre which was considered the purview of White concert singers. This first professional, published art song version of a spiritual gave voice to Black life, Black theology, and the Black experience in America.²⁴⁸

Dvořák's advocacy for Black music validated what Burleigh and others already knew: that African American folk music held deep religious significance and cultural worth. His connection with the composer elevated his musical reputation and garnered him powerful friends and patrons. However, the continual reification of that relationship has also overdetermined Burleigh's connection with spirituals and overshadows his long career's many musical, social, religious, and cultural contributions.

Burleigh's close identification with Dvořák and spirituals contributed to what Sam A. Floyd, Jr., historian of African American music, called the "Invisibility and Fame of Harry T. Burleigh." Burleigh sung across the color line his whole life. He had a successful career publishing his songs for twenty years before "Deep River." He was hired by one of the most prestigious music publishers and was a founding member of ASCAP. For all its benefits to him, his association with a White, European, symphonic composer has tended to obscure his many long-standing career accomplishments.²⁴⁹

As time passed, the typically humble and self-effacing Burleigh spoke more boldly about the influence of his spirituals on Dvořák. He wrote the program notes of 21 and 22 March 1918 for the Philharmonic Society of New York's performance of Dvořák's

²⁴⁸ "Sweet Chariot Inspired Dvořák," *New York World-Telegram*, 1941.

²⁴⁹ Samuel A. Floyd Jr., "The Invisibility and Fame of Harry T. Burleigh: Retrospect and Prospect," *Black Music Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): 179–194.

symphony under the baton of Josef Stransky. In them, Burleigh explicitly refuted those contesting the composer's claim about the centrality of Black music.

There is a tendency in these days to ignore the negro elements in the 'New World' symphony, shown by the fact that many of those who were able in 1893 to find traces of negro musical color all through the symphony, though the workman ship and treatment of the themes was and is Bohemian, now cannot find anything in the whole four movements that suggests any local or negro influence, though there is no doubt at all that Dr. Dvořák was deeply impressed by the old negro spirituals and also by the [Stephen] Foster songs.

It was my privilege to repeatedly sing some of the old plantation songs for him at his home in East 17th Street, and one in particular, 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,' greatly pleased him, and part of this old 'spiritual' will be found in the second theme of the first movement of the symphony- it is in G major and is first given out by the flute. The similarity is so evident that it doesn't even need to be heard; the eye can see it. Dvořák just saturated himself with the spirit of these old tunes and then invented his own themes. There is a subsidiary theme in G minor in the first movement with a flat seventh, and I feel sure the doctor caught this peculiarity of most of the slave songs from some that I sang to him; for he used to stop me and ask if that was the way the slaves sang.²⁵⁰

In the heightened racial animus during 1918–19 Burleigh was more forthcoming. Black troops in World War I were fighting for their country and demanding that their service have meaning at home. Regardless, lynchings doubled from the previous year. "Scientific" racism held sway in the academy and White imagination. Half a million to a million Blacks moved to the North to escape racial terrorism in the South. The Spanish Flu pandemic was destabilizing society. Its spread amongst the Black population put pressure on segregated healthcare facilities. Within this context, White Americans expressed increased animosity toward anything Black being considered American. Burleigh's advocacy for Dvořák's claims about Black music was an effort to bring the authority of a White European male composer back to the fore. Reminding the public that Dvořák saw Black music as America's source for nationalist music, Burleigh was again putting forward the argument that Black Americans were not only citizens but foundational contributors to the nation.

Conclusion

²⁵⁰ New York Philharmonic, "Burleigh, Henry [Harry] Thacker," *Digital Archives*.

Burleigh's relationship with Dvořák, while the composer was gestating his American symphony, cannot be overstated, because they exchanged more than music. They shared personal and community history, companionship, and empathy between two people marginalized by dominant cultures. This mutual recognition was a rare and generative friendship between people across the color line in America's 1890s.

Burleigh's ascent as a trusted colleague, confidant, and companion of the famous Bohemian composer was surprisingly rapid. Dvořák initially invited Burleigh home in the autumn of 1892 because of his interest in Black music. What started as a senior musician being cordial to a student shifted as Burleigh elucidated the multidimensional music forged during enslavement as a source of consolation, joy, and survival. Burleigh garnered his ethnomusicological knowledge from his home community, church, and family. After dinner, Burleigh conjured his grandfather's music and stories at the piano in Dvořák's parlour.

Similarities in their backgrounds drew them close: both grew up in marginalized communities; both came from modest backgrounds; both were gifted and struggled to afford conservatory training; both had a vibrant Christian faith. With these common threads, their friendship deepened as they conversed and wandered about the city. Functioning as an ethnomusicologist, Burleigh answered Dvořák's "hundreds of questions about Negro life" not only about Black sacred music, but the stories behind their creation – stories of survival, joy in trials, coded communication and escape, and spiritual consolation under the most degrading and inhuman of chattel enslavement conditions.²⁵¹

It was often noted in Burleigh's performances that he could connect listeners emotionally to his music. Reviewers said that he was able to convey "every conceivable phase of human sentiment" to his listeners with a "rich, mellow pure" voice with "a special tone color for each emotion." With that voice, he drew Dvořák into the deep feeling of these

²⁵¹ "Sweet Chariot Inspired Dvořák," *New York World-Telegram*, 1941.

songs which the composer later was able to translate so powerfully into his symphony. Never was there a hint of the minstrel house. Burleigh felt a deep obligation to persuade his friend that spirituals deserved serious consideration. From Burleigh, the composer learned the potential of Black music, and it inspired one of the most emotionally touching pieces Dvořák ever composed; it is still one of the most popular symphonies in the world today.

Chapter 4

Generative Geography – Café Culture 1892 to 1895

Introduction

The Rialto area around Union Square with Kleindeutschland just to the south was densely settled with musical institutions and the homes of New York's art music elite. This proximity meant that the artists, composers, publishers, empresarios, and various deal makers knew each other and socialized in many of the same places. Quite a few taught at the Conservatory; others concertized together in nearby music venues. Publishers and music writers bumped into one another on the area's streets, in streetcars, or at their regular tables in nearby restaurants. This geography fostered an intimate network amongst musical colleagues. The cultural formation within the Rialto and the attendant relational networks requires geographical and historical specificity. Such analysis elucidates the relationships that Burleigh forged while at the National Conservatory.

Geographical proximity engendered by the musical café culture shaped Burleigh's early years in the city, establishing the foundation for his fifty-year career. Late-nineteenth-century cities were burgeoning with new clubs and social groups around political, cultural, and social affinity groups. But art musicians modelled their gathering on European café culture which reached its apogee between the 1890s and 1930. Unlike club culture, Viennese-style café culture had looser, more Bohemian frameworks of inclusion.

Most importantly, as Burleigh cultivated his career during Dvořák's tenure, nearby German restaurants and cafés were central to art music networks in the 1890s. During the reign of Jim Crow, it is astonishing to find Burleigh invited by Conservatory faculty into these establishments with industry movers and shakers. Victor Herbert, protégé of Seidl and the Conservatory faculty, noted how often Dvořák and Burleigh were "seen walking down Broadway, deep in conversation." When asked for recollections of the composer during this

time in New York, Herbert wrote, “Mr. Harry Burleigh...probably knows much about him than I do.” Particularly as Herbert was on the faculty with Dvořák, while the composer was director of the Conservatory. His admission testifies to the intimacy of their relationship.²⁵²

These restaurants and cafés were spaces where one could forge a new identity, make professional and collegial connections, and be intellectually stimulated and challenged. James Huneker, aficionado and chronicler of New York’s music society, wrote that cafés were a place of “rendezvous for newspaper men, musicians, artists, Bohemians generally. It is the best stomping-ground for men of talent. Ideas circulate. Brain tilts with brain. Eccentricity must show cause or be jostled.” Looking into this bustling café culture, filled with New York’s elite musicians, we will find something eccentric indeed for its time: Harry T. Burleigh crossing the color line.²⁵³

As consequential as the relationship between Burleigh and Dvořák was for career opportunities, the most durable aspect of being embedded in his social circle – shot through with German language, musicians, and philosophy – was the German concept of *Bildung*. An ineffable philosophy that defies translation into English, *Bildung* described a muscular process of cultivating and elevating one’s spiritual, emotional, and intellectual sensibilities. The desired end of such commitment was to produce art that went beyond mere technical skill to touch something universal in human experience. *Bildung* held that such art then had a unique power to impact individuals and by extension transform the larger society. Spending hours around the tables at German restaurants with industry leaders, Burleigh imbibed his *Bildung* perspective from fellow musicians along with his German beer.

1890s Rialto - center of the music industry

²⁵² Gould, *Victor Herbert*, 39–40.

²⁵³ Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*. *American Moderns* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 14; Charlotte Ashby, *The Viennese Café and Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, ed. Gary B. Cohen (Berghahn Books, 2013), 4–6.

Starting in the 1870s, the Rialto was the center for music industry establishments clustered around Union Square, located to the north of 14th Street, to the south of 17th Street, and bounded on the east by Fourth Avenue and the west by Union Square West. Music publishing and engraving offices, theatrical supply stores, and entertainment agencies thickly settled the surrounding area. Music publishers M. Witmark & Sons, Boosey & Company, G. Schirmer, William Maxwell Music, and Novello – an English publisher who brought the music of Burleigh’s future friend and composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, to renown in America – were within two blocks of one another on the west side of Union Square. Likewise, music periodicals like the *Musical Courier*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Freud’s Music and Drama* were within a block of one another. All these were located two blocks west of the National Conservatory.²⁵⁴

This area had been a cultural center in New York since before the Civil War. Anchoring it was the venerable Academy of Music, built in 1854 by the city’s “old money” families who accumulated their wealth prior to the Civil War when it was the bastion of art music performance. Henry James, who grew up in the neighbourhood, described the area as the “august precinct...with a spacious and confident air...mark[ing] it for high destinies.” Sensing the northward push of the city, the “new money” industrialists who built the Metropolitan Opera House in 1883 chose a location twenty blocks uptown, approximately a mile away. But the business serving the music industry remained scattered around the Union Square area, including restaurants and cafés, publishers, music journalism, costume and scenery shops. It was strategic for Thurber to locate her institution nearby.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Frederick Warren Frick, Jr., “The Rialto: A Study of Union Square, the Center of New York’s First Theatre District, 1870-1900” (PhD diss., New York University, 1983). Note: All addresses in this section are drawn from the U.S. Federal Censuses of 1880, 1900, and 1910; the New York State Census of 1900; and *Trow’s New York City Directory* (various years beginning in the 1890s).[The 1890 census was mostly destroyed, so only the Veterans Schedule survives.

²⁵⁵ James, *Washington Square*, 23.

Proximity made for friendships that generated new ideas, debated old ones, and facilitated professional and collegial networking and socializing. In the late 1880s, for example, Huneker recalled seeing William Mason alighting from the “little blue horse-car” that traversed the area. Mason, the first American pianist to train with Franz Liszt, worked closely with Theodore Thomas before taking the post as Jeannette Thurber’s director of the American Opera company in 1885. Starting in 1877, Thomas held the prestigious position of conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, directly across the street from the Academy of Music. Huneker likely saw Mason visiting Thomas, who lived close by on East 17th Street, the block where the Conservatory was located.²⁵⁶

Walking about the Union Square area, one easily ran into cultural and political figures, like powerbroker William Steinway as he ambled six blocks down Irving Place each morning from his home at 26 Gramercy Park to his offices at Steinway Hall on East 14th Street, between Irving Place and Fourth Avenue. Steinway might have tipped his top hat as he passed Victor Herbert walking up Irving to teach at the Conservatory from his home at 212 East 14th Street. Many mornings he walked to morning coffee at Fleischmann’s Model Vienna Bakery at 10th Street and Broadway, passing the Conservatory from his home at 327 East 17th Street. On his way he might have accosted his neighbour, Edward MacDowell and his mother Frances. They lived one block north of the composer at 232 and 227 East 18th Street respectively. Though Edward was never directly associated with the Conservatory, his mother Frances Knapp McDowell walked to work at the administration office of the National Conservatory at the corner of 17th and Irving Place. She was the consequential

²⁵⁶ Huneker, *Steeplejack*, 25; Ezra Schabas, *Theodore Thomas: America's Conductor and Builder of Orchestras*, (University of Illinois Press, 1989); Rose Fay Thomas, *Memoirs of Theodore Thomas* (Moffat, Yard & Co., 1911); Rubin, “Jeannette Meyers Thurber.” 294–325: Theodore Thomas (1835–1905), a German-American conductor, was a pivotal figure in shaping American orchestral music. He served as music director of the New York Philharmonic from 1877 to 1891 and was the founding conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1891. In 1885, he briefly collaborated with Jeannette Thurber as musical director of her American Opera Company. His residence near East 17th Street placed him close to the Academy of Music and the National Conservatory of Music, where William Mason and James Huneker were active.

relationship for Burleigh, who knew her from his post as doorman for Mrs. Russell's music salons in Erie. It was her intervention that gave him a second chance at his vocal audition.

Anton Seidl, conductor of the New York Philharmonic orchestra, also briefly led the opera department at the National Conservatory during Dvořák's tenure. The two often met at Fleischmann's, where they read the international papers, smoked cigars, took coffee, and argued about music. Seidl may have lingered for a few moments at Union Square's fountain as he made his way from the Sixth Avenue elevated railway at 14th Street to the Metropolitan Opera house at Broadway and 39th Street. Perhaps he also greeted Boosey & Co.'s music editor, George Maxwell, and G. Schirmer's editor, Max Spicker, as they walked with James Huneker, *Music Courier* journalist, toward their respective offices one block away. Such were the impromptu, "hail fellow, well met" sort of incidental meetings in the area that gave Burleigh unprecedented entrée into the White art music industry.

In 1901 while walking in the neighbourhood, Burleigh had one such generative exchange, when he ran into music publisher, William Maxwell. At the time, Burleigh was writing his art song "Love's Garden." The two stood and chatted about this work, then Maxwell encouraged him to finish it and bring it round to the new William Maxwell Music offices at 8 East 16th Street. As a result of this happenstance meeting, not only did Maxwell publish "Love's Garden" in 1902, but many others of Burleigh's art songs up until 1912. One of the most successful for Maxwell Music's catalogue was the 1903 art song "Jean." With his characteristic modesty, Burleigh described the piece as "just a little thing done between his exacting duties as Church and Concert Singer." "Jean" became his first commercial success and brought him to prominence as a composer.²⁵⁷

G. Schirmer was Burleigh's publisher at the time of this exchange with Maxwell. From its offices on Union Square, G. Schirmer had begun to publish Burleigh's work in

²⁵⁷ Kramer, "H. T. Burleigh: Composer by Divine Right," 25; Frick, Jr., "The Rialto," 287–88; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 257.

1898. That year, they published a set of three art songs. But after that the firm appeared to be interested in Burleigh's music based on Black dialect poetry, published collectively as "Plantation Melodies Old and New" (1901). Perhaps that is why Burleigh approached William Maxwell with a romantic art song, because Schirmer boxed him into a racialized category of music. Maxwell did not work at the Conservatory, which begs the question about how they recognized one another and were familiar enough to strike up a conversation. Presumably the answer lay in the café culture where neighbours and fellow musicians socialized.

In White at Music's café culture in New York c.1892

Every network seems to have a key chronicler of spaces that socially bind friends and colleagues. By the late 1880s, music critic James G. Huneker was that *bon vivant* amongst major players in New York's White art music. When Jeannette Thurber hired him in 1888 as piano teacher at the National Conservatory, she not only gained a faculty member, assistant, and press liaison, but a central figure in the music café culture. It was a mutually beneficial relationship, as it also gave Huneker proximity to some of the leading lights in music of the late 1880s: Theodore Thomas, Victor Herbert, Rafael Joseffy, and other important musicians in various Conservatory roles.²⁵⁸

Huneker landed in New York from his native Philadelphia in February 1886, the same year as Victor Herbert made his way there from Germany. Knowing that Union Square, located at 14th Street and Fourth Avenue, was the city's current musical mecca, he made his way to a café opposite Steinway Hall which he says in this animated autobiography, *Steeplechase*, was "a prime magnet" for him.²⁵⁹

By the time Steinway built his music hall and piano factory on Union Square in 1866, many elite New Yorkers had already decamped from the area and settled ten blocks further

²⁵⁸ Grove Music Online, s.v. "Huneker, James Gibbons," accessed February 17, 2022.

²⁵⁹ Huneker, *Steeplejack*, 7.

north around Gramercy Square Park. As a result, starting in the 1860s, previously prohibited businesses settled nearby, including popular theatres such as Wallack's, which provided light British comedy.²⁶⁰

As leisure and entertainment establishments taking up residence in the area, throughout the 1860s Union Square transitioned to a much more socially and economically diverse district. Not only were restaurants and theatres sites for prostitution, but formerly well-to-do brownstones also held "wild, ragged, dirty, and untameable children living in cellars, dark holes, and miserable shanties." All this existed within and around the elite spaces of Steinway Hall and the concerts of the New York Philharmonic.²⁶¹

When Stewart's flagship store opened in 1862, the Union Square area still retained some air of respectability, but increasingly conditions worried reformers like the Citizens' Association. By 1870 more theatres opened, offering variety and minstrel shows. This combined with the hustle and bustle of shopping crowds prompted a *New York Sun* journalist in 1874 to name the area "Rialto," which signified it as a marketplace and site of exchange.²⁶²

By the late 1880s, the Rialto had lost its aristocratic shimmer and became less "august" than Henry James remembered. It turned a bit shabbier but more democratic where it intersected on the northside of Union Square with the popular "Ladies' Miles" shopping district. So, despite the presence of New York's wealthy audiences and renowned musicians in the Rialto, by the time Huneker arrived in town, the area had developed into a mix of vaudeville, music, and mercantilism. Doubtless this spicier edge to the social space intrigued the young Huneker newly landed from the more provincial Philadelphia. And as the city was currently gripped with Wagner fever led by Anton Seidl's conductorship at the Metropolitan

²⁶⁰ Frick, Jr., "The Rialto," 77.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 25; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 20.

²⁶² Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 211, fn22; Frick, Jr., "The Rialto," 27.

Opera House, the young Huneker relished being in the musical center of New York's Germanic life.

By the time of the 1890 census, New York was 27 percent German, so the Rialto was a multi-ethnic, polyglot district. The immediate neighbourhood around the Conservatory was interwoven with Kleindeutschland. Wealthy White New Yorkers settled northward into the lower blocks of 20s and 30s, once the German immigrant community pushed up the island from the lower east side to Union Square. Here boys earned money carrying cans of beer and long sticks with salt pretzels through the street twice a day, a German tradition called *Brotzeit*, or bread time. Directly across 14th Street from the Steinway Hall, Huneker discovered the German eateries of Lienau's and, a few doors east, the popular Lüchow's.²⁶³

Before other mechanical forms of communication were ubiquitous, these restaurants functioned as key junctures of connection with the musicians and institutional leaders from the White art music scene, as well as the music critics and journalists who covered them. Huneker called these restaurants the "headquarters of the musical aristocracy." Not only did he feel at home in these convivial spaces, but he became a keen observer of music's geniuses.²⁶⁴

Restaurants, bars, and cafés were gathering places for New York's music elite. Seidl held court at Fleischmann's Model Vienna Bakery. The musical community and even the public, who knew him by sight, stopped to greet him as he smoked his long, thin cigars. In the morning hours, Dvořák could be found at Fleischmann's or the nearby Café Boulevard, reading the day's papers, smoking his ubiquitous cigars. No doubt he grumbled at the extensive music columns about him in daily papers written by music critics who were taking their coffee and papers at adjacent tables. That Burleigh regularly visited these cafés with Seidl and Dvořák belied his status as a Conservatory student, even as his visibility violated *de*

²⁶³ Joseph Horowitz, *Moral Fire: Musical Portraits from America's Fin de Siècle* (University of California Press, 2012), 71.

²⁶⁴ Huneker, *Steeplejack*, 7.

facto segregation. His renowned companions were his only shield from derision and expulsion.²⁶⁵

Lunches and dinners often shifted four blocks northward to favoured restaurants across the street from each other and on the same block as Steinway Hall and the Music Academy. German-owned Lüchow's and Lineau's both had upstairs "drawing rooms," where pianists like Rafael Joseffy vied with others in virtuosic competitions on the keyboard, drawing cheers from listeners and, likely, winning rounds of drinks into the bargain. In these spaces, they celebrated, performed for one another, drank together, and enjoyed food that tasted of Europe. Unlike the morning cafés, these rooms were away from public view. Inside, the café culture was less tied to social mores and was more transgressive and convivial.²⁶⁶

Lüchow's entrance plaque stated, "Through the doors of Lüchow's pass all the famous people of the world." These people included New York artists and visiting composers, performers, and writers. Caruso, Strauss, Paderewski, Rubinstein, and later Toscanini all visited Lüchow's when Union Square was the center of musical life in New York. William Steinway was considered the establishment's "patron saint." He frequented Lüchow's so often that the proprietor named an upstairs room after him. The room served as an unofficial extension of the offices of Steinway Hall across the street. William Steinway even held all-afternoon board meetings in Lüchow's "Steinway Room."²⁶⁷

Gemütlichkeit describes the atmosphere in these spaces – good-natured, jolly, agreeable, comfortable, cozy, and snug, where the menu items were named after some of the more famous musical patrons. Here, the conversation flowed as copiously as the *Würzburger*, a fine amber beer from Bavaria, for which Lüchow's was the authorized importer in

²⁶⁵ Henry Theophilus Finck, *Anton Seidl, A Memorial by His Friends*, (Scribner, 1899); Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 37.

²⁶⁶ Huneker, *Steeplejack*, 71; Jan Mitchell, *Lüchow's German Cookbook* (Doubleday & Company, 1952), 21.

²⁶⁷ Mitchell, *Lüchow's German Cookbook*, 21.

America. Out of all the venues in the Rialto, this restaurant held the highest status. “For a musician not to be seen at Lüchow’s argued that he was an unknown in the social world of tone.” For Burleigh, these connections were career gold. His future relied on those in musical publishing, patronage, and performance who frequented these cafés.²⁶⁸

This society created bonds of friendship and collaboration and worked out professional animosities. Rafael Joseffy, who along with Seidl was amongst Dvořák’s closest friends, had a famous row with a rival pianist in which tempers flared until a glass of water thrown in the other’s face ended the affair. Most importantly, however, these spaces encouraged professional connections. When James Huneker arrived in 1886, he characterized these establishments as where he met “every man that later was to have a finger in my personal pie.”²⁶⁹

These consequential networks gathered around various *Stammtische* (regulars’ tables) in friendship circles. It is conceivable, for example, that Herbert invited Burleigh to his *Stammtisch* in Saratoga Spring’s Grand Union Café and Bar after performing together there. Further circumstantial evidence points to Burleigh as welcome at Herbert’s *Stammtisch* at Lüchow’s, which was legendary for drawing the most popular singers, composers, and musicians of the 1890s. Years later, the founding of ASCAP in 1914 transpired around Herbert’s *Stammtisch*, with Burleigh playing a key role. A bronze plaque was later placed to mark the inauguration of the organization which ensured the rights of composers to fair recompense for the performance of their work.²⁷⁰

George Maxwell, the influential music publisher at Boosey, was a ubiquitous presence at Lüchow’s. Maxwell was hired in 1894 to open the New York office of British music publisher Boosey & Co. He was soon considered the voice of the music publishing

²⁶⁸ “Lüchow’s—America’s Most Famous German Restaurant.” *Toque Magazine*. August 30, 2010; James Huneker, “Musical Memories,” *New York Times*, 1919.

²⁶⁹ Jeanette Thurber, “Dvořák as I Knew Him,” *The Etude*, 1919; Huneker, *Steeplejack*, 42.

²⁷⁰ Waters, *Victor Herbert*; Mitchell, *Lüchow’s German Cookbook*, 129.

world. Maxwell's opinions were solicited regarding the state of music and the publishing industry in trade journals. Maxwell turned into one of the most pivotal figures in Burleigh's publishing career. Furthermore, in 1914 he was elected as the first president of ASCAP, of which Burleigh was a founding member.²⁷¹

One *Music Trade Review* described Maxwell as the center "in social, musical, and commercial circles" and esteemed him as the "refinement and culture of a gentleman." As he developed their business, Boosey gained the reputation as a publisher "of eminence in the old world, which is rapidly duplicated by the new," with retailers in New York and wholesale trade across the country. Their offices at 5 East 17th Street were at the center of the art music world, a five-minute walk from Lüchow's and a block from the Conservatory.²⁷²

As a major player in the city's musical establishment, it was Maxwell's business to frequent various cafés where major composers and music writers congregated socially. When Dvořák and Thurber disrupted norms and expectations at the National Conservatory, he no doubt participated the lively debate about "negro melodies." He heard of and then met Burleigh, known widely in the close community as the "negro" student who moved the Czech composer to argue that "negro melodies" were central to American musical literature.²⁷³

These spaces were not a place of anonymity but maximum visibility, where social capital was required to enter. It might appear improbable that a young African American student like Burleigh was welcomed inside these spaces. But in the autumn of 1892, his second Conservatory semester, Burleigh's friendship with Dvořák opened the doors of music's café society. This immeasurably changed his profile and raised his respect within New York's elite art music community.

²⁷¹ "Boosey & Co.," *Music Trade Review*, 1894; Huneker, "Musical Memories," *New York Times*, 1919; "ASCAP Celebrates its 60th Anniversary," *Music Educators Journal* 61, no. 1 (1974): 105.

²⁷² "Specialty Talks—Interview with George Maxwell," *Music Trade Review*, 1896, 9.

²⁷³ Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 39–40; Fisher, "Goin' Home."

Crossing café culture's color line

Upon arriving in 1892, Dvořák immediately met others for whom congregating in cafés was a natural part of musical culture. The Conservatory faculty took him to their favorite haunts to introduce the famous composer to their circle. In Prague, Dvořák had participated in a similar custom called the “Long Table,” where men and women in science, arts, literature, and industry ate, drank, and exchanged ideas. Once initiated into New York’s tradition, Dvořák invited one of his new friends in this circle, the young singer from Erie.²⁷⁴

There were many impediments to Burleigh entering this musical café culture: he was younger and a student, but race was the most intractable. Jim Crow customs still held sway. People perceived as non-White knew that most public spaces were unwelcoming, at the very least, and hostile in many cases. Many hotels, restaurants, theatres, schools, and public transportation remained *de facto* segregated spaces. Therefore, it initially seems improbable these exclusive spaces, catering to the constellation of art music stars, would welcome a Black Conservatory student from Erie, Pennsylvania.

Burleigh gained entrance due to a combination of the eclectic, Bohemian sensibilities of café culture and powerful allies: from Dvořák and Anton Seidl, to Victor Herbert, and conductor Frank Van der Stucken. Seidl conducted the premiere of Dvořák’s *Symphony from the New World*. He carried out an extended dialogue with the composer about the themes and motifs of the music’s debt to spirituals, which could have included Burleigh.

Victor Herbert was already a fan and friend of Burleigh’s before the Czech composer’s arrival, as they worked together at Saratoga Spring’s Grand Union Hotel. Van der Stucken was another of Burleigh’s early and enduring supporters. He conducted Burleigh in the student orchestra. More significantly, Burleigh’s position as the Conservatory’s orchestra librarian brought the two into daily contact.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Vejvodová, “Antonín Dvořák,” 117.

²⁷⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 81.

We know of these café companions because of another singer's jealousy, published in a White-owned newspaper. In 1894, White singer Lewis A. Williams competed against Burleigh for the same baritone soloist job at St. George's Church. When he did not receive the position, Williams gave a "sour grapes" interview about a "colored man" being hired instead of him. Williams conceded that Burleigh's voice was a "splendid one," in fact judged by "a number of foreign musicians to be unquestionably one of the best voices in America." Williams even claimed that the choirmaster had planned to hire him but delayed offering the contract.²⁷⁶

In the intervening period, Williams earned a soloist position at All Souls' Church, another prestigious White Episcopal congregation, though not nearly as famous as St. George's. Williams learned that the delay was because the vestry was "having a lively time over the signing of a colored man." The church, he said, "did not wish to put itself down as being the first to break the over the color line." As for his part, Williams finished his account of Burleigh's hiring by saying, "It strikes me as rather queer that I, a Southerner, should have encountered a rival in an African." Besides losing the position to "an African," what seems to have confounded Williams was that Dvořák "has shown him many courtesies. He often had him to luncheon when Anton Seidl and Frank van der Stucken were the other guests."²⁷⁷

Several things recommend the veracity of this account. First, it came from a vocal rival and a Southerner with White supremacist ideology who was irked to discover that Burleigh was part of this exalted musical sphere. Williams said that the idea of competing with Burleigh for the position was so repugnant that "as soon as I learned that a colored man was my rival...I declined to consider a proposition from St. George's." Second, given his racial animosity, Williams was more likely to diminish Burleigh's close relationships in the

²⁷⁶ "Kick of Singers," *The Buffalo Commercial*, September 29, 1894.

²⁷⁷ "Kick of Singers," *The Buffalo Commercial*.

musical community rather than bolster his rival's standing in associations with what James Huneker called "the cream of musical aristocracy."²⁷⁸

Williams might have observed them together at one of Dvořák's personal haunts, such as Fleischmann's Vienna Model Bakery Café: at Broadway and 10th Street, a few short blocks from the Conservatory, it reputedly served the best coffee and pastries in New York. For foreign nationals, there was an additional enticement to linger: the comfortable seating and variety of foreign language newspapers. Seidl, the grand maestro of the Philharmonic Society since 1891, also favoured the café. Contemporaries said that Seidl could make orchestra "sing and sigh and whisper, exult, plead, and threaten, storm, rage, and overwhelm." Dvořák admired him immensely and considered Seidl one of his closest friends in New York. One other contemporary news account notes Burleigh appeared with "Herr Seidl's great orchestra just before the noted conductor's death" in March of 1898. Given how central these two were in New York music in the 1890s, their inclusion of Burleigh was extraordinary both because of his race and his status as Conservatory student.²⁷⁹

There is further confirmation of Burleigh in music café culture from an article published by another White-owned newspaper. An August 1897 article in *The Nashville American* reported on Burleigh's impending appearance at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, a performance to benefit the fair's "Negro Department." Speaking of Dvořák at the National Conservatory, the article states, "Mr. Burleigh was a great favorite of his, they could often be seen lunching together or at some negro musical show." Surprisingly for a White news outlet, they described Burleigh as "this young musical genius."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ "Kick of Singers," *The Buffalo Commercial*; Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 11.

²⁷⁹ "Baking on Broadway, Then and Now," Village Preservation, February 13, 2012; Finck, *Seidl Memorial*, 87; Gould, *Victor Herbert*, 4; Waters, *Victor Herbert*, 11; Russell, "Great Dvorak Dead," 1.

²⁸⁰ "Genius in Music: Harry T. Burleigh, the Negro Baritone, Will Be Heard in Nashville," *Nashville American*, August 1, 1897, 14.

If there was any White social space in 1890s New York that a Black man could enter, music's café culture would be it. Though it was home to musical aristocrats, the sensibility of café culture had a bohemian inclusiveness. Most of these musicians – Dvořák, Seidl, Victor Herbert, and even the American-born Van der Stucken – had spent time in German café culture, where rigid identity lines were blurred in a manner unlike the rest of German or American society. New York's cafés functioned as a home away from home for musicians from a smattering of countries bound by the language and philosophy of nineteenth-century art music – German – which Burleigh was proficient in speaking.

Yet, the young singer had attributes that made him welcome. He was attractive and light-skinned, and he demonstrated extraordinary vocal ability and a rigorous work ethic. These traits engendered admiration from Dvořák and many others on the Conservatory faculty who frequented these cafés. Burleigh was also known for his conviviality and modesty. While the first quality was required in the joyous café culture, modesty was a posture not only because of his racial designation but also, he acknowledged the distance between a student and the luminaries around the tables.

Besides Burleigh's affable sociability and serious devotion to his work, Dvořák and Seidl likely included him because they shared Thurber's philosophy that American music must derive from democratic policies. The German-born conductor and his Czech friend found American culture appealing in part because it was distinct from the aristocratic societies in their countries. When Seidl became a naturalized citizen in 1891, he turned down many performances offers from European institutions. He objected when colleagues called him "Herr Seidl," asking them to address him as Mr. Seidl.²⁸¹

So Seidl was not merely a maestro for the aristocrats; he championed public performances, stating "the man who resists playing classical works for common people is not

²⁸¹ Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 224.

a true American.” He conducted many inexpensive, public summer performances at Coney Island, where even “the poorest German laborer takes his holiday.” German-born Max Spicker conducted those summer concerts with Seidl and also partook in the musical café culture. He was Burleigh’s counterpoint teacher, published his early compositions at G. Schirmer, and hired him for the choir of Temple Emanu-El.²⁸²

For his part, Dvořák despised the aristocratic culture in Vienna. He was marginalized musically by constant comparison to his mentor, Brahms, and marginalized ethnically because of his commitment to the Czech language and culture in his music. Unlike some of his fellow European composers who saw America as a soulless and cultureless mercantile nightmare, Dvorak’s sojourn filled him with enthusiasm for the “new world.” In his enthusiastic idealism, he saw a democratic breaking with the old-world social order and embraced its modernity with a sort of hopeful wonderment. He could not have found a better intellectual partner and more ardent fan of the country than Seidl, who he thought was ideally suited to conduct his new symphony. Thurber, meanwhile, relished two compatriots so aligned with her vision of a Conservatory committed to American national music.²⁸³

So, the composer and conductor of the forthcoming *Symphony from the New World* eschewed European aristocratic culture and instead preferences more democratic sensibilities. This likely informed inviting Burleigh into café culture. For not only was he gifted, hardworking and sociable, they knew that the connections he made around the tables at Fleischmann’s or Lüchow’s could be career-changing; and indeed, that turned out to be the case. Burleigh’s presence there is extraordinary, both because he was a student and

²⁸² Joseph Horowitz, *Dvořák in America: In Search of the New World* (Cricket Books, 2003), 47; Gould, *Victor Herbert*, 47; *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 6 (5665 [1904–1905]), “Biographical Sketches of Jews Prominent in the Professions,” 193.

²⁸³ Beveridge, “Dvorak’s Operas in America,” 308–11; Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák*, 4–5; Tibbetts, *Dvořák in America*, 38–40.

because of his racial categorization. This begs the question why the historical record currently tells nothing of it, despite the evidence of these press reports.

Making sense of historical erasure

Besides the sour-toned account of his rival for the St. George's job, the archive is currently silent on Burleigh in New York's music café culture. However, if in 1893–94 anyone was able to cross the unofficial color line at Lüchow's, Lienau's, Café Boulevard, or Fleischmann's, it was Burleigh. He garnered prestigious friends, was admired for his work ethic, was musically gifted, and had a measure of social comfort in White spaces because he had worked continually back-and-forth across the color line since boyhood.

Yet none of the White café culture members who were friendly with Burleigh – Maxwell, Victor Herbert, Dvořák, Seidl, Joseffy, Spicker, and Van der Stucken – publicly mentioned his presence in the city's café culture. But given the heightened racial climate and conversation since Dvořák went public with his proposal about “negro melodies,” likely they saw omission as protection. White backlash could end his nascent career or, worse, put him in physical peril. By all accounts, Burleigh always spoke of his relationship to Dvořák in a tone of humility, gratitude, and deference, but never presumption. Because of the social entrée given by the composer, other industry insiders became admirers and colleagues instrumental to Burleigh's career opportunities. So, archival silence does not signify absence.

Two figures may have contributed to erasing Burleigh's presence in café culture: James Huneker and Will Marion Cook, for wholly different reasons. Huneker competed with Burleigh to be a confidant of Dvořák. Upon his arrival, Huneker assured Jeannette Thurber that the new director would be in safe hands while he showed him around the neighbourhood. According to Huneker's autobiography, this introduction involved drinking a wide swath across lower Manhattan's “thirst belt” of bars during the director's early New

York days. He also claimed to help the new director find a local Catholic church to attend each morning. Huneker positioned himself as a Dvořák insider from the first.²⁸⁴

More insidious, however, was his claim that he introduced the composer to African American music. Huneker asserted that he drew Dvořák's attention to *Creole Suite*, an 1892 composition by Cincinnati composer John Broeckhoven, and directed the director toward an obscure article, "Negro Music" by Johann Tonsor. Huneker further claimed that elements of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" were in Dvořák's first surviving American sketch, which derived from four bars of a spiritual notated in Tonsor's article.²⁸⁵

It defies belief, however, that Dvořák's firm conviction about Black music came from an article and notated music, rather than from Burleigh's home performance of spirituals and his ability to relate their history and his own experience of this music. In his review of *Symphony from the New World* for *Musical Courier*, Huneker expressed peevishness about Burleigh's sonic influence on Dvořák. While praising the symphony, he wrote, "a sort of musical 'brogue' is negro music and all attempts to dignify it as a language are futile." This assertion reeks of jealousy.²⁸⁶

In other places, Huneker blatantly embraced racist rhetoric. He revelled in calling his 1893 class of Black students "in darkest Africa" and patronizingly confessed to having a "like for negroes," because they were "very human, very musical, their rhythmic sense remarkable." Seeing young Burleigh eating, drinking, and perambulating with musical royalty very likely engendered deep resentment. Although the best first-hand chronicler of café culture, Huneker had many reasons to remove Burleigh from the scene and distance him from Dvořák and his inner circle.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Huneker, "Musical Memories," *New York Times*, 1919, 47.

²⁸⁵ James Huneker, "Why American?" *Musical Courier*, 1893.

²⁸⁶ Huneker, *Musical Courier*, 1893.

²⁸⁷ Huneker, *Steeplejack*, 68.

Another figure who was “in the know” about Burleigh’s ability to cross the color line in café culture was his lifelong friend, Will Marion Cook. Cook owed his opportunity at the Conservatory to Burleigh’s friendship with Dvořák. In the summer of 1893, Burleigh, Cook, and Dvořák were at Chicago for the World’s Columbian Exposition, appearing at separate events. After Thurber’s May 1893 announcement throwing open the admissions door to African Americans, Cook missed the June audition date, the next opportunity was not until December. On August 13, 1893, Burleigh wrote to Dvořák a letter of introduction which recommended Cook. The director immediately recognized his talent and offered him a place at the Conservatory. Perhaps it stung the brilliant but prideful Cook that a month later Dvořák announced Burleigh was elevated to the position of singing teacher, while he was only an incoming student.²⁸⁸

Like Huneker, Cook was envious of Burleigh’s close relationship with the composer.

Later he wrote:

“All [Thurber] and Dr. Dvořák asked was talent - and heaps of it - and the power of concentration on the subject at hand. Burleigh was the pet. I [was] the outcast of the whole school. Burleigh ran errands, played the tympani (extremely well)...sang baritone and bass in [the] school Negro Chorus. And smiled his way into the hearts of all.”²⁸⁹

Part of Cook’s anger seemed directed at Burleigh’s ease of performing with Dvořák. Despite receiving tutoring from the renowned Berlin violinist Joseph Joachim, Cook experienced severe performance anxiety with the director. He recalled, “I was barred [for a while] from the classes at the National Conservatory of Music because I wouldn’t play my fiddle in the orchestra under Dvořák. I couldn’t play; my fingers had grown too stiff. Dvořák didn’t like me anyway; Harry Burleigh was his pet.” Despite their lifelong friendship, Cook found Burleigh’s close relationship with the composer so galling that he continued to describe Burleigh as Dvořák’s “pet” as late as 1947.

²⁸⁸ Carter, *Swing Along*, 28; “Other Personals,” *Cleveland Gazette*, 1893.

²⁸⁹ Carter, *Swing Along*, 31.

Though Cook had long-held bitterness, he clearly felt indebted to Burleigh for his intervention with the Conservatory admission. When Cook undermined his own career through erratic and impulsive behaviour, he retained Burleigh's unwavering support for his unique and brilliant musical vision. When Cook left the Conservatory before graduating, Burleigh, who had recommended him, may have felt embarrassed. Nevertheless, Burleigh supported his friend during his intermittent financial troubles.

Cook remembered, "I was desperate. My feet, with soles worn through, were burnt black by walking on the hot cobblestones of New York streets. I was hungry almost all of the time, except when I could meet Harry T. Burleigh... He only made a small salary but always had enough to treat me to coffee and crullers at a little dairy called Cushman's... or to a twenty-five-cent dinner." Soon Cook found his calling in Black musical theatre by creating the first African American composed, directed, and cast musical, *Clorindy or The Origin of the Cake Walk* in 1898. Burleigh helped him with most aspects of the production.²⁹⁰

Cook deeply admired Burleigh, and toward the end of his career believed that Burleigh had "done more to lift his and my God-forsaken race out of the mire" than anyone else. But he sounded bitter recalling "in passing the long road he had helped lift plenty of White folks. How they loved him." Unlike Huneker, however, Cook likely did not see Burleigh's presence in White café culture as transgressive, but as path-breaking.²⁹¹

When Cook wrote these recollections in 1907, Burleigh was well-known in many White spaces by then. And yet, Cook may have been hesitant about drawing attention to Burleigh's participation in New York's café culture. In addition to the racial violence in New York in the summer of 1900, other racial skirmishes were punctuating the cityscape in that period. Cook would not have wanted to endanger his friend by emphasizing his presence in places where he was often the only Black presence.

²⁹⁰ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 21; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 211–13.

²⁹¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 352.

Though documentary evidence is characteristically wanting around Black figures in this period, we have reason to distrust the silence of the archive on Burleigh's presence in White music café culture with Dvořák. As noted earlier, Huneker, musicians, music critics, publishers, and patrons all flocked to these spaces to network, socialize, to be seen as members of the "world of tone." The Conservatory faculty, particularly those close to Burleigh, valued his talent and work ethic, and knew how connections made around a table in places like Lüchow's were career changing. According to Cook, Burleigh had "smiled his way into their hearts." So, they were willing to risk the blushes of White Americans, acclimatized to segregation, to bring an African American student into this socio-cultural space.

Bildung

Eating and drinking was not the only aspect of White music café life. Philosophical conversation was integral for those who gathered around the *Stammtische* – large round tables set aside for their most prestigious, regular customers. Lüchow's *Stammtische* were filled overwhelmingly by those of Germanic birth and musical training. For them, excellence in music was not only a matter of pride but was a manifestation of the Germanic philosophy of *Bildung*.

Conceived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *Bildung* has no succinct English equivalent. While it contains the concept of a liberal education, it is not necessarily an instrumental educational approach. Instead, *Bildung* encompassed personal, inner educational development, which "implicitly promised a life of dignity" and an attendant personal and societal liberation through the powers of German high art.²⁹²

Bildung, from the German noun "image" and the verb "to shape or construct," involved a commitment to reason and a liberal self-education to fashion an inner,

²⁹² Alexandre Alves, "The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: *Bildung* and its Historical Meaning," *Educação & Realidade* 44 (April 4, 2019): e83003," 7–11; Eichler, *Time's Echo*, 27–28.

harmonious self. The eighteenth-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder framed *Bildung* as an individual practice that helped people reflect the “*imago Dei*,” the image of the divine. The writings of Humboldt, Schiller, and Zelter enlarged the scope of *Bildung* to encompass this individual development as a core aspect of citizenship, and part of a communal process as well as an individual one. In this view, artists worked not solely from self-interest, but to elevate national culture. *Bildung* served as a particularly useful “binding agent” after German unification in 1871, because it proposed a common German heritage, mainly through music.²⁹³

Aesthetic education spread the philosophy of *Bildung*, thus inventing what scholar Jennifer A. Herdt calls the German “Religion of Art.” She sites German ideals that challenge an individual to seek artistic perfection, not for self-aggrandizement but for the well-being of others.²⁹⁴ In the process, specific texts became sacralised, and certain people were considered prophets. These guiding texts and prophets enabled individuals to pursue *Bildung* without regard to their societal standing or access to exclusive institutions. They could attain personal transformation “on the wings of [German] culture.” Goethe, for instance, critiquing a new cathedral, focused less on the artistic accomplishment of the structure and more on how the architect’s creation showed he was “capable of transcendence.” This transcendence was the highest achievement of a life formed by *Bildung*.²⁹⁵

In the 1890s, when Burleigh occupied *Stammtische* at Lüchow’s, Fleischmann’s, and other elite watering holes, *Bildung* philosophy was such a ubiquitous framework for musicians that it was an unconscious, cultural, hegemonic mindset among New York’s German-trained musical elite. They may or may not have bandied about the word *Bildung* while they opined

²⁹³ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds. *Music and German National Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5–7; Jennifer A. Herdt, “Ethical Formation and the Invention of the Religion of Art,” in *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 134–36; Eichler, *Time’s Echo*, 32.

²⁹⁴ Herdt, “Ethical Formation,” 188–89.

²⁹⁵ Eichler, *Time’s Echo*, 26; Herdt, “Ethical Formation,” 122.

about artistic life, but the concept formed the foundation of their aesthetic and spiritual approach to their work. Their goal was to create superior art arising from individual *Bildung* self-cultivation. Their music – whether they were performers, conductors, composers, or publishers – could contribute to social improvement and infuse listeners with national pride.²⁹⁶

Bildung as an ethic for life was intelligible to Burleigh because it overlapped with an associated concept of racial uplift. While uplift was in part about racial pride, it also concerned the enjoyment of creating and consuming various cultural aesthetics in the visual, musical, and literary arts. Regarding music composition, the German-educated Du Bois argued that composers engaged with an “invisible, supersensible realm” of the “universal” in art music. Intellectual and spiritual creative engagement touched something ineffable, surpassing racial categorizations.

Returning from his university experience in Berlin, Du Bois experienced *Bildung* as “something of the possible beauty and elegance of life permeated my soul.” Beethoven’s symphonies and Wagner’s music shifted what he considered his “narrow racial and provincial outlook.” Du Bois’ master compositions manifested the *Bildung* ethic by their musical transcendence.²⁹⁷

The influence of *Bildung* on Burleigh is key to understanding his compositional efforts, his unapologetic Wagnerianism, and his lifelong admiration for German “high” art. *Bildung* also illuminates his commitment to strenuous musical studies, superior compositional skills, wide-ranging literary interests, and a belief that Black music would positively impact American culture. As modelled by the whole music café culture, he held himself and other composers and musicians to a high calling of proficiency in practice, pedagogy, and

²⁹⁶ Applegate and Potter, *Music and German National Identity*, 31–32.

²⁹⁷ Lawrence Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878-1943* (University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 66; Du Bois, W. E. B. *Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (International Publishers, 1991), 156.

production. And though he never used the political term “Black nationalism,” his artistic expression uplifted the race by demonstrating emotional and cultural richness through his erudition and virtuosity. In this context, Dvořák’s admonition to “give this music to the world” exemplified the most consequential directive of *Bildung*.

Lest it strain credulity that Burleigh imbibed German philosophy along with his Pilsner around the tables of Lüchow’s or coffee at Fleischmann’s, African American intellectual giants Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois drank from the same philosophical fountain. American philosophy was still relatively new in the late nineteenth century, as intellectuals like William James wrestled with European philosophical ideas related to the American experiment. Du Bois and Douglass, however, read canonical German texts within the context of the Black experience – Kant, Herder, Schiller, Hegel, and the lesser-known Ludwig Feuerbach – as they sought to frame their liberation ideologies. They wanted to apply the moral, ethical, and spiritual meanings behind European philosophy’s concepts of consciousness, the self, agency, and freedom to the African American experience.²⁹⁸

Bildung inspired Burleigh, because its practice of ennoblement through self-education led, theoretically, “toward a life of aesthetic grace.” In remarks made for the NAACP in 1924, Burleigh advocated that individuals undertake aesthetic cultivation to ennoble the nation. Burleigh stated that social change was more effectively achieved by artists than by political action. Echoing *Bildung* principles that an artist does not seek intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic ideals as ends in themselves, but for community and national edification, he argued:

Artists, after all, represent, or they express, the highest mentality of any race.
The men and women who give themselves to artistic endeavor are the true

²⁹⁸ Matthew Stewart, *An Emancipation of the Mind, Radical Philosophy, and the War over Slavery* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2024), ix–xxi, 203–8, 276–84; Russell A. Berman, “Du Bois and Wagner: Race, Nation, and Culture between the United States and Germany,” *German Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (1997): 123–35; Mitchell Aboulafta, “W. E. B. Du Bois: Double-Consciousness, Jamesian Sympathy, and the Critical Turn,” in *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy*, ed. Cheryl Misak (Oxford University Press, 2008), 171–83.

starts of any race. They are the true physicians who heal with melody the ills of mankind. They are the torch-bearers. They find new worlds.²⁹⁹

Accounts of his Burleigh's career point toward his lifetime of *Bildung* cultivation of mind, spirit, and voice through diligent application. Musicologist Maud Cuney-Hare called him an "intellectual musician," who had the advantage of "an educated mind as well as a trained voice." Music critic Walter A. Kramer wrote that he had "fine mental equipment," and was "a composer by divine right and what is more he is a thinker, a man who writes music not because he enjoys seeing his name on the program of some singer, but because he feels deeply, profoundly in the language of tone." His vocal student, operatic soprano Charlotte W. Murray, recalled that "he believed music powerful instrumentality for international understanding." Nora Holt, the Chicago music journalist, wrote perhaps the best description of Burleigh's achieving the *Bildung* idea of "a life of aesthetic grace": "The gods of light, truth and music have always enveloped him since birth, and his faith has kept them – through the mundane dissonances that haggle and tug and distract – but he has emerged with these gods still part of his being, leading and sustaining him."³⁰⁰

Conclusion

Burleigh's intellectual and philosophical framework was formed by his early immersion in the German musical culture of café society gatherings. As a result, he worked not solely to forward his career and gain economic viability but had a guiding artistic philosophy and musical mission to uplift his community, while also influencing the ennoblement of the larger world.

He focused reasonably on developing many income streams to stabilize his life in New York. But the guiding philosophy of *Bildung* made him want more, want it all:

²⁹⁹Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 349.

³⁰⁰Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 328; Kramer, "H. T. Burleigh: Composer by Divine Right"; Murray, "The Story of Harry T. Burleigh," 328; Nora Holt, "Music Notes: The Human Touch," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 5, 1944, sec. Harlem Broadway Hollywood.

education, languages, literature, intellectual exchange, music consumption, and spirituality. He learned from artists in White café culture to pursue a path not solely for economic security, but to devote himself to artistic cultivation and achievement.

Dvořák's inclusion of Burleigh in White café culture was not solely based on his tutoring the composer in Black music and history. Burleigh's charm, convivial personality, and intellectual curiosity secured him access to art music's gatekeepers at the pivotal moment of his early career. He was able to enter these spaces because of the esteem in which his White associates held him. While rivals erased him from the archival memory of these spaces, they were unable to erase the art that arose from exchange around the tables of nearby cafés. The industry leaders Burleigh met in this café culture account for many of his future opportunities: concertizing in the homes of Gilded Age aristocrats, publishing beautiful and valued music, winning patronage positions, editing for a White European art music publisher, and being a founding ASCAP member.

His family equipped him with the social skills to work within White jobs and institutions without compromising his racial identity and dignity. On that foundation, he erected his musical education at the Conservatory and inclusion in White music's café culture. These became the structure that housed his career. While other Conservatory friends like Harry P. Guy and Will Marion Cook had to shift their focus to Black musical theatre and vaudeville to make a living, Burleigh built and maintained relationships in New York's music industry that enabled him to sustain his art music career.

Chapter 5

Contentious Fight for Civil Rights

Introduction

Before Burleigh was hired at St. George's, where he fulfilled his dream of earning a living as an art musician and which will be the subject of Chapter 6, he nearly risked alienating his powerful patrons at both the church and the National Conservatory when he engaged in the fight for civil rights in New York City.

The action he and fellow protesters undertook brought them into some of the upscale restaurants and hotel bars that Burleigh could have inhabited in the company of Dvořák, Seidl, Van der Stucken, the Maxwell brothers, and the rest of music's café culture. This time, however, Burleigh and his fellow activists were seeking access for their larger community. They wanted to open the door for Black New Yorkers to access spaces enjoyed by their White counterparts, regardless of their connections with powerful Whites.

While Burleigh and his compatriots expected and planned for White opposition to their civil rights work, they did not anticipate the backlash from Brooklyn's Black Brahmins, who had relentlessly fought for equity in education, housing, and respect in the ante-bellum and post-Emancipation period. The rift with Black Brooklyn leaders was deeply personal. Patronage by the community's most influential members had strengthened Burleigh's ability to survive financially in his early years in the city; and his uncle, William F. Johnson, was a central figure amongst these Brahmins. Indeed, without the patronage of this circle, the aspiring singer from Erie might not have lasted beyond his first semester at the Conservatory. But with his actions in the fight for civil rights in 1895, Burleigh discovered disapproval from both elite Black Brooklyn and his White patronage positions. This unique episode of Burleigh's direct political engagement demonstrates the fine and sometimes

perilous balance he negotiated his entire career while working with both White and Black elites.

Douglass Club direct action

Frederick Douglass, one of the leaders of nineteenth-century emancipation struggles, died at his home in Washington on 20 February 1895. Millions of African Americans grieved his death, particularly those who had worked with him, as Burleigh did at the Columbian World's Exposition in the summer of 1893. With Douglass' passing, the Black community keenly felt the onus to carry forward his emancipatory work.

One direct tribute to the fallen Black leader was a new Club – the Douglass Club. Formerly called the Kenmore Club, renaming it the Douglass Club on June 19, 1895 was explicitly to “perpetuate the memory of the late Frederick Douglass.” Among its founders were Harry Burleigh, and his two friends Richard E. Stovall and Charles W. Anderson. These three had been members of the Kenmore Club, of which Stovall was president, as well as the Toussaint L'Ouverture Club, located in the same building as the more exclusive Society of the Sons of New York. It was no coincidence that four days earlier, New York State had passed a new civil rights law.³⁰¹

A month after Douglass' death, New York state legislature passed a Civil Rights Act, also known as the Malby bill. The new law protected, at least on paper, the civil rights of all citizens from discrimination in public spaces and accommodations. Black elders in New York and Brooklyn had fought for the desegregation of New York's public spaces for decades. In 1854, a 24-year-old African American teacher, Elizabeth Jennings, was traveling on the Third Avenue Railway car to her church organist job when the conductor forcibly ejected her for refusing to leave her seat. The daughter of a prominent abolitionist family,

³⁰¹ “Colored Brethren Looking for a Snub,” *Buffalo Courier*, 1895; Smith, “In New York.” *Cleveland Gazette*, 1892; Evan Friss, “Blacks, Jews, and Civil Rights Law in New York, 1895-1913,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 4 (2005): 75.

she sued the city. The New York Supreme Court ruled that as the streetcar was a “common carrier,” it must “carry all respectable persons.” The jury awarded Jennings \$250 in damages and \$22.50 in costs; but more importantly, the case put public transit companies on notice that Black citizens “had the same rights as others.”³⁰²

At a federal level, equal rights to public spaces were established by the Supreme Court in 1875 during Reconstruction. Yet these were obliterated in 1883 by the same court in the case known collectively as the Civil Rights Cases. Given the capriciousness of federal protections, New York’s Republican governor, Levi P. Morton, signed a state law protecting civil rights on June 15, 1895. This law targeted equal access to public accommodations, saying “all persons within the jurisdiction of the state” should be “entitled to ... full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges of inns, restaurants, hotels, eating-houses, bath-houses, barber-shops, theatres, music halls” and other “public conveyances regardless of race, creed, or color.”³⁰³

This state law had teeth to it. An aggrieved person could file suit for monetary damages of up to \$500. Hoteliers in New York protested this penalty, but Black lawyers like T. McCants Stewart and Black ministers rallied their communities to pressure Morton to sign. After its passage, many Republican proprietors of barber shops, bars, hotels, restaurants, and public baths swore they would change parties.³⁰⁴

In the only direct civil rights action in his career, Burleigh, Stovall and Anderson – the new Douglass Club – planned to test compliance to the Malby bill as soon as Morton passed it as law. On Sunday 16 June – one day after the bill was signed – they set out to establish whether New York establishments respected the law. These friends each brought

³⁰² John H. Hewitt, “The Search for Elizabeth Jennings, Heroine of a Sunday Afternoon in New York City,” *New York History* 71, no. 4 (1990): 390–97; “City News and Gossip.” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1855.

³⁰³ *The Civil Rights Cases*, 109 U.S. 3 (1883). Oyez; Cheryl D. Hicks, *Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 132–33.

³⁰⁴ Friss, “Blacks, Jews, and Civil Rights,” 74–75; “Testing the Civil Rights Act.” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1895; “Testing a Civil Rights Law.” *Evening Star*, 1895.

something unique to this action. Charles W. Anderson was involved in instigating the legislation and knew the timing of its passage. Richard E. Stovall had many friends and colleagues in the Black men's club movement in Washington and New York, which positioned him well as a recruiter for the action. Burleigh brought name recognition because of his association with the National Conservatory and Dvořák and his position at St. George's. It is striking, however, that not a single article alluded to his church association. This omission suggests he knew that his patrons would not appreciate any association with overt public action. The trio probably worked to keep Burleigh's job out of the press to protect him. Similarly, only two articles mentioned his teaching position at the Conservatory.³⁰⁵

The well-connected Stovall alerted the press and invited them along. As the trio tested which restaurants, bars, barber shops, and public baths would accommodate them, journalists would vividly capture the response to their bold action. As group spokesman, Stovall clarified that no newspaper had incited them and denied that the funds they used would "come from any source but our own pockets."³⁰⁶

Assuming they gathered at the site of the Douglass Club, located on West 53rd Street, Burleigh, Stovall, Anderson, and the reporters following them would have taken them downtown via the Sixth Avenue elevated train line. The three men and their press entourage alighted at the north-west corner of Madison Square across the park from Delmonico's, the upscale restaurant where they began their demonstration. Here, the trio was "served without a murmur" after their surprise arrival. Reportedly, they received positive treatment because "all the men were good-looking, well-dressed, gentlemanly, and reputable citizens." Their

³⁰⁵ "R. E. Stovall & Co.," *Colored American*, 1889; "Washington Under the Calcium," *Colored American*, 1902; Smith, "In New York," *Cleveland Gazette*, 1892; "Colored Brethren Looking for a Snub," *Buffalo Courier*, 1895; "Testing Their Rights," *San Francisco Examiner*, 1895.

³⁰⁶ Lately Thomas, *Delmonico's; a Century of Splendor* (Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 255.

class worked to gain them access; yet, in response to enquiring White patrons, the French waiters said that it was the fear of jail that forced them to “serve the colored men.”³⁰⁷

Across the street, at Hotel Bartholdi, they ordered steaks, which the waiters served “burnt to cinders.” Nonetheless, Burleigh and his friends made a show of eating them. White resistance followed them as they ventured into the Tenderloin to try Irish bars like Thompson’s café at 35th Street and Broadway, and Shanley’s located next door. At the latter, the saloon keeper promised them service if they sat behind a screen. They refused. At O’Neill’s at Sixth Avenue and 22nd Street, “every waiter became deaf and dumb,” ignoring them. Anderson enquired loudly, “Let us understand one another. You refuse to serve us, knowing that by refusal you violate the law?” The cashier remained silent. After O’Neill’s, establishments started charging each man a dollar instead of 10 cents for cocktails. Flush with cash from his well-paid St. George’s position, Burleigh showed his pockets “weighted with rolls of bills.”³⁰⁸

After receiving the overpriced drinks, Burleigh announced that he intended to “sue the proprietor for extortion and discrimination against men of his race.” Reporters observed that Mr. Thompson, the café’s proprietor, “did not seem overjoyed at the prospect.” Burleigh and company made clear, however, that should they win financial remuneration in court cases, they would donate to charity after court costs. Unlike Elizabeth Jennings’ successful case seeking financial recompense against the streetcar driver, the Malby law’s mandate was not upheld by the courts. Burleigh could not know in advance that ultimately there was no will by the courts to enforce fines for transgressing the new civil rights law.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ “Must Feed Negroes,” *The Wichita Eagle*, 1895; “Colored Eat At Delmonico’s,” *The Sun*, 1895.

³⁰⁸ Thomas, *Delmonico’s; a Century of Splendor*, 256; “Must Feed Negroes,” *The Wichita Eagle*, 1895; “Hotel Men Are Worried,” *New York Times*, 1895; “Negroes Not Unanimous,” *New York Times*, 1895; “Colored Brethren Looking for a Snub,” *Buffalo Courier*, 1895.

³⁰⁹ “Good! Colored Brethren in Clover” *Topics*, June 29, 1895; “Colored Brethren Looking for a Snub,” *Buffalo Courier*, 1895; “Hotel Men Are Worried,” *New York Times*, 1895; Douglas J. Flowe, *Uncontrollable Blackness, African American Men and Criminality in Jim Crow New York* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 59.

The trio met their most overt resistance in barber shops and Turkish baths. Here, the skin of White and Black bodies was more tangible, visible, and exposed. Journalists reported that barbers were “in trepidation” because, under the law, they needed to “save and shampoo the dark-skinned brother if he makes an application.” One account reported that “there was a war” when the three arrived. Everard’s and Murray Hill Baths both claimed to be “all full” when Burleigh and his friends approached. Other baths acknowledged the law and agreed to the men’s right to enter, but their managers pleaded with them not to injure their business by doing so. The three made clear that they did not wish to cause harm and were “merely making a test” before they left. Nevertheless, Anderson told reporters, “This matter will be pressed, and I will have plenty of backing, financially and otherwise, to press it.”³¹⁰

Reports vary on how many places, out of the approximately twenty-five they visited, refused service. Forcing compliance was not their intent. Rather, they wanted to show the varying levels of adherence to the law across a wide swath of public spaces. Their effort served a broader goal. Stovall hoped to challenge job segregation in the police force and civil service at both local and state level, and to “wipe out what was left of the color line.” The color line remained durable despite their efforts.³¹¹

The White proprietors and employees at these businesses were by turns aggressive, exploitative, or plaintive when encountering Burleigh and his colleagues. In return, the trio remained undaunted by the brazen disregard for the law. They hoped that the press coverage would bring justice in the moment or recompense later in the courts.³¹²

Their efforts received surprisingly widespread coverage. Papers from the South, Midwest, and West Coast all picked up the story, in addition to more local ones. Though

³¹⁰ “A Misdirected Effort,” *New York Times*, 1895; “Must Feed Negroes,” *The Wichita Eagle*, 1895; “Testing the Civil Rights Act,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1895.

³¹¹ “Testing Their Rights,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 1895; “Hotel Men Are Worried,” *New York Times*, 1895.

³¹² “Negroes Test the Law,” *The Sun*, 1895.

Burleigh, Stovall, and Anderson hoped this press coverage would further public awareness of the discriminatory law-breaking, reporters' accounts foregrounded the boldness of the three and the variety of spaces they attempted to patronize, making the focus these upscale Black men, not the civil rights law. Burleigh, Anderson, and Stovall wanted their action to highlight Black exclusion from public accommodations; but further debate about discrimination in the job market failed. The White press's critique played a part, but the acerbic dressing down by elite Black Brooklynites crushed their hopes.³¹³

Both sides of the color line weigh in

Criticism on the trio's direct civil rights action was swift from both the Black and White communities and was emblematic of the pressures that shadowed Burleigh's entire career. Examining those forces illuminates how he navigated those dynamics. Without his personal archive, the Conservatory's records, or any mention in the St. George's archives, we can only surmise from the circumstances why this incident was his only conventionally understood political action.³¹⁴

The three Douglass Club members likely conceived their resistance to Jim Crow as courageously carrying forward Frederick Douglass's liberatory efforts, and so they surely anticipated White condemnation. Criticism in the White press revolved around the concept of "uppity negroes" who should know their place. White proprietors were unaccustomed to African Americans like Burleigh – twenty-nine years old, flush with success in his chosen career, and emboldened to prove non-compliance with the new civil rights law. As young, educated, and well-dressed men with money in their pockets, the trio defied White racial stereotypes. Their unapologetic self-representation subverted White portrayal of the Black community in the city writ large.

³¹³ Friss, "Blacks, Jews, and Civil Rights," 75.

³¹⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 119.

Historian Douglas J. Flowe's book *Uncontrollable Blackness* makes an interesting point about New York in the 1890s: that while Black crime emphasized race, White crime was seen through the lens of class. And this view of Black crime mean that Black New Yorkers were policed and viewed by social Darwinists as less fit for civilized society. So although Burleigh and his companions were testing enforcement of a legal doctrine, they were perceived as the transgressors.³¹⁵

What is worse, the supposed reasons for Black crime were characterized by the *New York Times* as Black New Yorkers "growing lazier and more untrustworthy" and exhibiting "vices of idleness, vanity, and immorality." The paper denigrated the three men as fresh from the racetrack, "flush with money and flashy clothes." They told Burleigh and his friends to "get back in line." The reporters offered advice on comportment for "negroes and mulattoes," clearly targeting the fair-skinned Burleigh. They portrayed him as "self-assertive and swaggering," unlike the "hard-working" African Americans who "lead honest lives." Further, journalists contrasted the trio with White immigrants who "bear themselves with habitual quietness and humility." This comparison implicitly reinforced the White supremacist perception that African American citizens were somehow fundamentally un-American. The activists' unapologetic embodiment of their full, political, and social selves defied the White limitations placed on them.³¹⁶

While White critique was unsurprising, when people from wealthy Black Brooklyn criticized the trio, it was more painful and had the potential to harm their careers. Arguably this Black backlash shaped Burleigh's own approach to the press ever after. The strategy of Black Brooklynites who had achieved educational and economic success was to keep their affairs out of the sight of the White press, because signalling any affluence and personal autonomy could invite unwanted scrutiny and trouble for the community. Burleigh never

³¹⁵ Flowe, *Uncontrollable Blackness*, 9.

³¹⁶ "A Misdirected Effort," *New York Times*, 1895.

again expressed overt political views in the press and avoided interviews except on rare occasions. A measure of invisibility enabled more autonomy.³¹⁷

Because New York's prestigious "Black 400" were *de facto* barred from restaurants like Delmonico's and Sherry's, instead of demanding access, they poured their wealth into fine food and parties hosted within their lavishly furnished homes. So hearing of the Douglass Club's activism, these Black Brooklyn elites did not celebrate but joined in the White press's critique.

Victoria Earle Matthews, for example, co-founder of the Women's Loyal Union, was interviewed by the *New York Times* about the Malby law action. She acknowledged the success of their investigations in calling the public's attention to the Malby bill but argued that the law was redundant since the Constitution of the United States already protected their civil rights. Matthews emphasized that civil rights work should focus on enforcing existing constitutional rights. Her critique also carried its own racial and class tropes, because her article objected to the way managers treated "fair-complexioned" people in large stores, arguing that "nine-tenths of the ostracized negro people in this city are refined and genteel in manner." She emphasized that many in the community owned homes and employed servants yet were viewed as "curiosities" and a "menagerie of strange animals." She found this humiliating "to sensitive persons" in the Black community. Matthews attempted to parse colorism and classism distinctions, but these niceties mattered little to White readers of the *New York Times*, nor the proprietors of the places Burleigh and his friends investigated.³¹⁸

In contrast to Matthews' mild remonstrances, Thomas McCants Stewart expressed blazing, public anger. In the *New York Times*, the lawyer and journalist impugned the trio's motivations, suggesting they were "making tests" for potential financial gain. The Malby law imposed a minimum compensation of \$100, and up to \$500 should the discriminated party

³¹⁷ Flowe, *Uncontrollable Blackness*, 113–14.

³¹⁸ Ottley, *New World A-Coming*, 133–35; "Her View on Malby Law," *The New York Times*, 1895.

win the case in court. Yet Burleigh's fellow activist, Stovall, had made clear in the same newspaper two days earlier that if they went to court, they would donate any money they received to charity after deducting their legal expenses. "Our task is not money-making speculation...it is a war of proscription," said Stovall. Still, Stewart chose to describe their desegregation efforts using incendiary terms such as "discreditable," "mercenary," and "abominable."³¹⁹

Echoing Matthews, Stewart said that Black folks who were of "extreme sensitivity and delicacy" did not like to mention the discrimination they experienced, whereas these three were publicly broadcasting it. As a lawyer, Stewart promised he would never take up a Malby case against White establishment owners. Like Matthews, he thought the Black community should navigate discrimination by avoiding places where they "have a perfect right to go" because "they are uncomfortable if they feel they are in the midst of surroundings where they are not welcome." In his estimation, insisting on their legal rights was counter-productive to maintaining the current status quo of race relations in New York. Ironically, Stewart had rallied Black churches to support the Malby bill.³²⁰

Both Matthews and Stewart objected to the spectacle of confidence that Burleigh, Stovall, and Anderson exhibited by demanding adherence to the Malby law. While Matthews and Stewart believed that Whites should not "be at liberty to insult decent, orderly people," they also thought "orderly people" were elite Blacks with land, business, and employees. They frequently felt "indignant beyond expression" at their treatment, but dealt with it "without publicity, for we felt the less notoriety the better." In response, Burleigh and his friends must have wondered how African Americans might receive dignified treatment without fighting for their civil rights. When they entered the various venues to test the Malby

³¹⁹ "Hotel Men Are Worried," *New York Times*, 1895.

³²⁰ "Seeking to Gain Profit." *New York Times*. 1895; Friss, "Blacks, Jews, and Civil Rights," 74–75.

law, they also engaged patrons and service staff in “discussions on the equal rights of man.”³²¹

But their educational mission was a bridge too far for Stewarts. “Fiddlesticks!” he said regarding the concept of “social equality.” He believed that “every man is the arbiter of the social circle, and people choose their social friends as they please.” Colorism underlay McCants’ critique. Amongst Brooklyn’s “old families,” social status often coincided with the lightness of skin tone. James Weldon Johnson, himself from an “old family” of socially prominent Floridians, noted that New York’s Black society mirrored Southern White society. In both communities, he saw scions of the social elite gain entrance “regardless of pecuniary condition, or in fact, his reputation.”³²²

Burleigh’s public chastening did not end with Matthews and Stewart. To complete the trifecta of prominent critics, T. Thomas Fortune, editor of first Brooklyn’s *New York Globe* and then Manhattan’s *New York Age*, chimed in to support Stewart and Matthews, both of whom contributed to his publications. The three then presented a formidable force, adding to the negative White press storm besieging Burleigh, Stovall, and Anderson.³²³

Stewart and Fortune were both from wealthy, Southern families. Unlike Stewart, however, Fortune nurtured a notion of solidarity across the color line. He had spent his career committed to equal rights for African Americans and immigrants. He called the practice of using Black workers for strikebreaking of White labourers a “pernicious practice,” heightening racial enmity rather than bringing solidarity in the fight against capitalism.³²⁴

These veteran activists spoke to the press, rather than privately to the three young activists. Their engagement with public chastisement was partly to reassure White newspaper

³²¹ “Seeking to Gain Profit.” *New York Times*. 1895; Friss, “Blacks, Jews, and Civil Rights,” 74–75; “Free and Equal Whites.” *Times-Picayune*. 1895.

³²² Johnson, *Along This Way*, 133–34.

³²³ Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle: National Racial Justice Organizing, 1880-1915* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 50; Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman*, 50.

³²⁴ Carle, “*Defining the Struggle*,” 49–50.

readers that long-time representatives of the Black community in New York did not support these disruptive tactics. Fortune wrote to the editor of the *New York Sun* advising the trio not to provoke needless hostility from White patrons.

Others followed his perspective, writing that the activists “make themselves disagreeable by too great eagerness in availing [themselves] of new opportunities” offered by the Malby law. Like Matthews, Fortune believed the constitutional rights offered by federal government were sufficient legal protection for their community. They had all seen state laws undercut the federal protection for Black Americans at the end of Reconstruction, and no doubt feared placing too much credit on the capriciousness of sectional lawmakers.³²⁵

Burleigh knew his Black critics well. He had worked alongside them six months earlier, in December 1894, when he sang for the Women’s Loyal Union in support of Ida B. Well’s crusade against lynching. Victoria Earle Matthews was a co-founder of the Union, while T. McCants Stewart and T. Thomas Fortune actively supported Well’s anti-lynching journalism and activism. Stewart’s statements must have stung Burleigh deeply, because of his social ties to his cousin, William F. Johnson. Fortune and Johnson socialized with one another and were founding members of the Afro-American League.³²⁶

Johnson had also worked with T. McCants Stewart and Fortune in the 1880s to fight for equality in school facilities and opportunities for Black teachers. Stewart served on the board of the Howard Colored Orphans Asylum in Brooklyn, which Johnson ran. Burleigh continued these efforts, working with Stewart to improve facilities for African American schoolchildren in Brooklyn. Together they served as officers of the Brooklyn Literary Union. Just five months earlier, before the Malby protests, Burleigh sang at the Union, probably at

³²⁵ Carle, “*Defining the Struggle*,” 49–50, 39; Friss, “Blacks, Jews, and Civil Rights,” 78.

³²⁶ “Diamond Medal Contest,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1894.

Stewart's invitation, when John Mercer Langston, former president of Howard University and minister to Haiti, delivered an address.³²⁷

Not coming from a socially prominent family, Burleigh gained entrance to Black Brooklyn primarily because of his voice. He performed in their houses, rather than socializing as their equal. A popular recitalist in this New York Black aristocratic circle before he landed a prestige patronage position at St. George's, their patronage gave him much needed financial support in 1892 and 1893. Seeing these criticisms in prominent newspapers risked imperilling his reputation, and possibly his job.

So, vehement critique from both sides of the color line jeopardized the favor he found with his employers, J. P. Morgan and Dr. Rainsford at St. George's, and Jeannette Thurber at the National Conservatory. The local papers noted Burleigh's affiliation with the Conservatory. While both institutions were proudly progressive, the portrayal of Burleigh and his colleagues in the press would certainly have required a response by Thurber and Rainsford – either to inquiring reporters or to members of their institutions. As someone who carefully curated her institution's image, Jeannette Thurber was undoubtedly displeased with the publicity; she may have called Burleigh to task for the same reason as his critics in the Black community: the negative press would hinder the progressive work she was trying to accomplish. Burleigh's activism may have added to Thurber's many concerns. The economic "Panic of 1893" had significantly diminished the institution's financial stability. Thurber could not meet her contractual obligations to Dvořák, so he returned to Bohemia in April 1895 before the end of the school year and resigned his directorship in August. Thus, unwelcome press attention to her faculty added to her struggle to present the Conservatory in a positive light alongside her director's departure.³²⁸

³²⁷ Kafka and Matheny, "Racial Integration, White Appropriation," 11–13; Mullarkey, "In the Hands of Their Own," 155–64, 191; Carle, "*Defining the Struggle*," 36.

³²⁸ Whitaker, "Musical," 22–3.

Thurber wrote to Burleigh in the month following the public tempest, asking him to conduct the “colored chorus” for the upcoming school year. The publicly chastened Burleigh thanked her for her confidence, adding:

It shall be my duty to work diligently during the summer to get the assurance of as many as possible who will engage in the enterprise. I think it should be a success and by being a little more careful for quality rather than quantity I am sure I can meet your expectations and achieve a fair measure of success. Thanking you again, I remain...³²⁹

The Vestry notes at St. George’s did not document any response to Burleigh’s civil rights action. Neither did Rainsford speak to the reporters, who followed his public positions minutely on social issues. The Episcopal church, however, openly condemned “race mixing.” In 1883, when Rainsford was hired at St. George’s, an all-White group of southern Episcopal leaders convened the “Sewanee Conference” in Tennessee. White church leaders feared that racial equity would lead to miscegenation. They believed that race mixing produced a “lower stratum” of White race, “instead of the purest block of Anglo-Saxon Americans.” They predicted that social interchange would lead to the downfall of Christian civilization.³³⁰

Along with other racist reformers from the period, White church leaders condemned the mixing within “black and tan” saloons and other venues which enforcement of the Malby law would have opened to African American customers. The Sewanee Conference codified segregation of Black Episcopal congregations. Northern leaders went along with the decision, arguing that the “wisdom of [Southern church] action must after all be decided by their own knowledge.” This decision left Black Episcopalians with no representation in the General Convention, nor any other platform, to protest intra-denominational segregation.³³¹

³²⁹ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 21.

³³⁰ Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era* (New York University Press, 2008), 89–90.

³³¹ David M. Reimers, “Negro Bishops and Diocesan Segregation in the Protestant Episcopal Church: 1870-1954,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 31, no. 3 (1962): 232–33.

Many White folks viewed mixed race socializing as racially and morally dangerous. Yet Burleigh and his fellow activists pushed on this exact pressure point. They insisted that African American citizens had every right to enjoy the same social spaces as their White counterparts. Though archives are silent on Rainsford's reaction to Burleigh's activism, the young soloist likely knew the public reaction potentially imperiled his patronage in church music performance.

Burleigh and his friends had demonstrated that Black New Yorkers could not rely on state civil rights laws to create change without activists pushing for their enforcement. Making this point, however, resulted in influential, older Black political figures publicly dressing them down in the press. Burleigh's efforts also embarrassed the White institutions with which he was associated. This episode represents the complexities Burleigh faced in navigating the multiplicity of political stances in both White and Black communities to retain their patronage. His stable position at St. George's undergirded the rest of his career and provided the foundation for further music industry opportunities. These institutions also provided friendships, musical colleagues, and patrons for his concertizing career. The response to the trio's activism showed that further protest would disrupt this patronage, endanger his future economic security, and perhaps make it harder for other Black Americans to seek similar patronage posts for their careers.

Effect on Burleigh's future career

In 1895, and throughout his long career, Burleigh balanced on the slim intersection of the color line. He worked in both White and Black society and moved fluidly between their cultural spaces. But on one side, the elite Black community's critique assailed him; his elders tried to quash a group of upstarts they felt were upsetting the racial gains they had achieved over decades. On the other side of the line, the Episcopal church and other White denominations condemned race mixing as morally dangerous.

To exist simultaneously in the White art music world and the Black community, Burleigh moved away from direct political activism from 1895 onwards. Like many artists before and after, he channelled his liberatory work into his art and used his entrance into the White art music industry to hold the door open for others. Without his calculated caution, others who followed him, such as singers Roland Hayes, Marion Anderson, and Paul Robeson, and Black composers William Dawson, William Grant Still, Florence Price, and Margaret Bonds, may have struggled even further to achieve their careers. Burleigh's role as a turnkey to the door of the White art music industry helped later art musicians succeed.

By necessity, but perhaps with personal discomfort, Burleigh retreated in order to manage critical expectations from both sides of the color line. His strategic decision no doubt helped younger Black art musicians to achieve greater success than they would have without his groundbreaking entrance into White cultural spaces. His creative contemporary and friend, J. Rosamond Johnson, wrote of Burleigh: "Under the guidance of Mr. Burleigh, many of our present-day concert artists, both White and colored, have reached the peak of their success through his untiring efforts."³³²

Conclusion

Unlike Elizabeth Jennings in 1845, Burleigh and his friends never sued non-compliant proprietors. Historians do not know why the trio never followed through. Perhaps they were chastened by the leaders of Black Brooklyn's public vilification of their efforts, or maybe Burleigh retreated because the leaders of St. George's warned him that he would lose his well-paid, prestigious position at the church. At this point, Burleigh still depended on Black Brooklynites to hire him, although their influence waned somewhat as St. George's wealthy parishioners increasingly engaged him as soloist for their salons.

³³² J. Rosamond Johnson, *J. Rosamond Johnson, Autobiography, Unpublished*, 49: Courtesy of Melanie K. Edwards, Johnson's granddaughter, n.d.

On September 18, 1895, just over three months after Burleigh's action, Booker T. Washington delivered the Atlanta Compromise speech.³³³ It further affirmed the accommodationist stance that Burleigh's Brooklyn critics espoused. Not surprisingly, they all had strong ties to the Tuskegee founder. And as will be shown in Chapter 6, Washington was also well-known and supported by the Episcopal bishop of New York and the leaders at St. George's.

Another blow occurred eleven months after the action by Burleigh and Stovall to ensure equal access to public accommodations for African Americans. *Plessy v. Ferguson* became federal law.³³⁴ In his lone dissenting opinion, Justice Harlan wrote that although slavery had been abolished, this ruling meant that states had the power "...by sinister legislation, to interfere with the blessings of freedom; to regulate civil rights common to all citizens, upon the basis of race; and to place in a condition of legal inferiority a large body of American citizens, now constituting a part of the political community, called the people of the United States..." The Douglass Club members would realize more than ever how consequential their actions could have been in combating this new law if New York's judicial system had been committed to prosecuting violations of the Malby law.³³⁵

Burleigh never again engaged in overt, direct political action. At this point, the concept of *Bildung* was still new to him. This futile action cemented in Burleigh's trust that his artistic creation might be the path to deeper, lasting change in American's racial caste system. So, the Douglass Club's failure to bring about meaningful enforcement of desegregation, prompted Burleigh to focus his liberatory efforts on crafting a broad, sustainable career in the White art music industry. The key to that kind of career was working for and with White industry insiders. The National Conservatory and St. George's

³³³ Library of Congress, Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise." Speech, 1895.

³³⁴ National Archives, "Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)," September 2021.

³³⁵ National Archives, "Plessy v. Ferguson."

attracted some of the most influential White people who could assist in making that happen.

Burleigh could not risk alienating them.

Chapter 6

Patronage at St. George's

Introduction

By early 1894, Burleigh had earned enough from his teaching position at the Conservatory to repay his scholarship. He had also expanded his concert singing engagements within the aristocratic Black community in Brooklyn. Despite these successes, the Panic of 1893 made clear how financial depressions affected music patronage and impacted artists who relied on it. Burleigh must have wondered whether he could survive as a musician.

Yet the uniqueness of the National Conservatory, and the friendship he garnered from its faculty of New York's art music luminaries, all positioned him to advance – musically, socially, and economically – into a new stratosphere. This chapter covers Burleigh from 1894 to 1914 with the same breathtaking speed as his career. With his network of patrons and collaborators in White music culture, Burleigh swiftly established himself on both sides of the color line as a well-regarded singer. Despite these advantages, he remained a Black man in Jim Crow New York pursuing an artistic career predicated on patronage. He continually negotiated the veil of race consciousness that Du Bois saw as the burden for Black folks in America: to know that White people always saw them as un-American, out of place, and less than other similarly talented White artists.

Burleigh's career leap forward necessitates a glance back to the uniqueness of Thurber and her Conservatory. For it was Thurber who initially recommended that Burleigh try for the new baritone soloist position at St. George's Church and used her "great influence" to support his appointment. He also benefited from a devoted coterie of the Conservatory's "foreign musicians" who recommended him as "one of the best voices in America." Yet in the era of lynching, minstrelsy, and segregation, White people may have

seen his hiring as preposterous, despite Burleigh's demonstrative ability, if not for his powerful White advocates.³³⁶

St. George's supported Burleigh's career for fifty-two years, from 1894 to 1946. Understanding the background of the church and its leader demonstrates that, like the singularity of Thurber's institution, St. George's was a unique opportunity for Burleigh. Even today, a Black soloist in New York's wealthy White Episcopal churches is an anomaly. He needed more than ambition and talent to obtain this soloist job in 1894. Two things aided his successful application: first, St. George's was merely one block away from the National Conservatory and shared many relational connections; and second, Burleigh's hiring furthered the progressive impulses of the church's charismatic rector, William S. Rainsford.

Gilded Age Episcopatism at St. George's

During his tenure at St. George's, Rainsford pushed his Gilded Age congregation to grapple with the political, cultural, and spiritual crises of the late nineteenth century. Corruption among political and church leaders echoed the seeming moral vacuity of the modern industrial age in America. Burgeoning immigrant populations lived in wretched living conditions, often in newly mixed housing sections; this meant that previously affluent White Protestant residents now encountered people from different faiths – Catholicism, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam. Science and new forms of biblical scholarship also challenged long-held assumptions about the nature of the world and the theology of its management. Meanwhile a small group of industrialists and bankers encouraged middle-class progressives to seek reform of both the working poor and the affluent elite.³³⁷

³³⁶ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 214–15; “Burleigh Hired at St. George's.” *Cleveland Gazette*. 1895; “Kick of Singers,” *The Buffalo Commercial*; Nora Holt, “Music,” *Chicago Defender*, 1920: Holt's column “Music” ran regularly in the *Chicago Defender* from 1917 to 1921, offering classical music criticism and cultural commentary for Black audiences.

³³⁷ Matthew Bowman, “The Urban Pulpit: Evangelicals and the City of New York 1880-1930” (Georgetown University, 2011), 109–12; Matthew Bowman, “Religion in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” in *A Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 158–71.

Additional destabilization came as Christian sects, particularly among White Southern churches, retreated to biblical fundamentalism. In some denominations, ministers used theology to validate the social and racial hierarchy in America. Dr. Rainsford, however, was one of the church leaders who reached outwards rather than turned inwards in response to societal pluralism.³³⁸

Although White Episcopalian congregations often represented the wealthiest and most socially prestigious of their area, many supported progressive reforms. They approached cultural and racial pluralism through two related beliefs. First, they believed in a loving God and his message of tolerance as expressed by Jesus; and second, they had a duty of care toward their fellow humans who they believed needed moral healing. Various reforms around education, housing, employment, training, and other iterations of cultural, spiritual, and moral uplift characterized Protestant liberalism. Wealthy White church folks thought they served as exemplars to Americanize the masses: their philanthropy would lift them out of poverty and perceived moral corruption.³³⁹

One strand of elite philanthropy particularly affected Burleigh's career. The "beauty of holiness" movement believed that art, architecture, and music of sacred spaces represented a universal connection to the divine. Secular collecting institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York exemplified this philosophy. What started as a theological intervention energized a collection frenzy amongst rich Episcopalians like J. P. Morgan. They poured their wealth into amassing art collections to show to the less privileged. While collectors had many reasons driving their acquisition, one was the concept that the beauty of art, liturgical objects, and architecture had a divine impact on the soul. The governing Vestry of St. George's was filled with some of the most elite of these acquisitive

³³⁸ Bowman, "Religion in Gilded Age," 158–71.

³³⁹ Bowman, "Religion in the Gilded Age," 158–71.

Americans; and Rainsford began to help them channel their conspicuous consumption into something more democratic.³⁴⁰

J. P. Morgan, as Warden of the Vestry, had heard the young, Irish-born, Cambridge-educated Rainsford speak when he was invited to preach at St. George's in the 1870s. At that time the young preacher noted the emptiness of the pews compared with the "crowded streets and park, the many children." He decided "the only church worth serving is a church that served the people, not one set or class," but the "people of the neighborhood." At that time, he could not imagine St. George's being such a church.³⁴¹

Then in 1882, Morgan took decisive action because the church, which sat 2,000 people, had dwindled to about fourteen families. Rainsford arrived in New York for interview with the Vestry and was ushered into the "famous black study" of Morgan's home at 219 Madison Avenue, crammed with his extensive art collection. The young preacher envisioned making St. George's "a church of the people, a truly democratic church," but believed he had just a one in a hundred chance of getting Vestry support for his radical plans. Rainsford thought frankly, "The church was gone too far to be pulled up," so he was shocked when Morgan offered him the rectorship.³⁴²

Before accepting the job, Rainsford made three demands: abolition of the system of paid pews, abolition of all committees so he would hold complete sway on the structure and execution of his plans, and funding of \$10,000 per year for three years, exclusive of his salary, to move the church in a democratic and inclusive direction. After looking round at the anxious faces of his colleagues, Morgan said, "Done!" Though conservative politically and

³⁴⁰ Louis P. Nelson, *The Beauty of Holiness: Anglicanism and Architecture in Colonial South Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 344–8.; Stewart J. Brown and Peter B. Nockles, eds. *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World 1830–1930*, Online: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 136–47; Peter W. Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money: Episcopalians and American Culture from the Civil War to the Great Depression* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 19–21.

³⁴¹ Elizabeth Moulton, *St. George's Church* (The Rector, Church Wardens, and Vestrymen of St. George's Church in the City of New York, 1964), 65.

³⁴² William S. Rainsford, *The Story of a Varied Life* (Books for Library Press, 1922), 200; Moulton, *St. George's Church*, 68.

dictatorial in business, Morgan's acquiescence to Rainsford's demands demonstrated how much he loved the institution he had supported for twenty years. This unqualified backing by Morgan and the rest of the Vestry enabled Rainsford to build an exemplar of the "institutional church" over the next twenty-two years. Under his leadership, St. George's offered alongside traditional spiritual services a range of social services and training programs, many of them run by women, to provide for their diverse neighbours.³⁴³

Rainsford's operating principle was to make St. George's "an absolutely free and open church." A "free" church versus a "pew" church meant overturning the tradition of elites "owning" their pews, with the less wealthy relegated to space at the back. Since St. George's was down to a handful of families, the task was more manageable, but democratizing the space encountered resistance; yet Rainsford convinced members that only radical change could revitalize the church.³⁴⁴

Consequently, regular congregants were soon discomforted when "a smelly man was shown to the same seat" next to them. William H. Schieffelin, proprietor of the drug firm William H. Schieffelin & Co., was given "the thankless task" of "seating of the congregations under the untried free-pew system," which he reportedly did with gracious firmness. Proximity of socially elite congregants to their less privileged neighbours was, to the rector's mind, an obvious extension of the openness of the gospel, as much as it was social reform.

Beautifying the music program was next on the rector's agenda. His decision made Burleigh's future soloist position possible. As part of his democratizing efforts, Rainsford did away with the more accepted music structure of quartet and double quartet singers, and instituted a choir made up of members to lead congregational singing. Next, he brought the music front and center, reorienting the singers' position from the back of the church to the newly constructed choir stalls flanking the altar. To signify the importance of choral music

³⁴³ Moulton, *St. George's Church*, 68; Rainsford, *Varied Life*, 201; Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 125–31.

³⁴⁴ Rainsford, *Varied Life*, 211–13.

within the worship service, he wanted a “surpliced” choir that included women, boys, and men. The surplice, a common ministerial garment since the fourteenth century, elevated the role of the choir to that of ministers of the congregation. It also diminished social and gender differences by obscuring the street clothes of the singers under unisex garments.³⁴⁵

It is a wonder that J. P. Morgan willingly acquiesced to these revolutionary changes. By the 1870s, the monied class were captivated by social Darwinism: they believed they had earned the dominance to rule. Yet Morgan not only rubber-stamped but enthusiastically funded many of Rainsford’s reforming ideas. Perhaps he felt a strong sense of accountability as taught by his father, who admonished, “Remember that there is an Eye above that is ever upon you and that for every act and deed you will one day be called to account.” Despite the seeming incongruity of Morgan’s wealth and conservative political perspective, his faith led him to support Rainsford’s progressivism.³⁴⁶

By 1894, St. George’s was a far cry from the pitifully empty pews it had suffered when Rainsford arrived a decade before. Rainsford had transformed St. George’s into a vibrant institutional church with citywide popularity. The church maintained “one of the largest vested choirs in New York...with fifty-five members plus an auxiliary choir of twenty vested women.” Their previous baritone soloist, Albert Arveschon, had however gone on holiday to Europe and never returned.³⁴⁷

With auditions to replace the baritone, Morgan’s commitment to radical reform at St. George’s was to be tested: how about a young Black singer? Scholars have generally considered Morgan responsible for Burleigh’s hiring in 1894. Certainly, without his support

³⁴⁵ Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 125–31; *Year Book of St. George’s Church: Stuyvesant Square, New York, Easter, 1896* (George Hughes & Company, 1896), 209; Rainsford, *Varied Life*, 212; Moulton, *St. George’s Church*, 79–81.

³⁴⁶ Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 212–13, 238; Moulton, *St. George’s Church*, 79–81; Vincent P. Carosso, *The Morgans: Private International Bankers 1854-1913*. Harvard Studies in Business History 38. Harvard University Press, 1987, 83–90; Rainsford, *Varied Life*, 284–85.

³⁴⁷ Thomas M. Prentice, “Famous Choirs of New York,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1898; “Colored Chorister at St. George’s,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 20, 1894.

the church would not have crossed the color line; however, given the autonomy afforded to Rainsford, he probably lay behind this racially fraught hiring.

Burleigh's hiring

Wealthy White congregations competed vociferously for the most virtuoso soloists. In 1887 a New York newspaper proclaimed, “This city spends an immense sum of money for church music,” with prized soloists making anywhere from \$300 to \$1,500 per annum. “Collecting” the best of the best singers as church soloists was a competitive sport for wealthy congregations at this date. No doubt Morgan, whose reputation for collecting all manner of art and artifacts was well-known, agreed with the perspective of New York’s church music doyens that “first-rate music” affected the “devotional spirit of the people,” but also its “value in moulding musical taste.”³⁴⁸

Yet, none of New York’s White congregations in the 1890s employed an African American, making Burleigh, despite his talent, an unlikely candidate. Indeed, St. George’s uptown Episcopal cousin, St. Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue, once discovered that a female choir member was passing as White, and forced her to resign because of “Negro blood in her veins.” Given the cultural politics of Jim Crow New York, Burleigh must have anticipated rejection if not humiliation when he applied for the St. George’s job, despite the support of Thurber and the Conservatory’s faculty.³⁴⁹

Just before auditions opened, Burleigh appeared as a soloist with Dvořák and the Conservatory orchestra for the *New York Herald’s* Free Clothing Fund, singing an aria from Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*. The concert drew “an immense throng” that was “overflowing into the aisles.” Morgan was probably in the audience, given Dvořák’s star power, his friendship

³⁴⁸ “Church Music in New York,” *The Sun*, 1887.

³⁴⁹ Holt, “Music,” *Chicago Defender*, 1920.

with Thurber, and being a Philharmonic season ticketholder. This high-profile event, before a glittering audience, undoubtedly enhanced Burleigh's prospects for the job.³⁵⁰

Apprehensively, Burleigh entered St. George's for a Sunday service in early February. An usher, likely Schieffelin, encouraged him to linger after the service to speak with Dr. Rainsford. Schieffelin's job was to implement the seating according to the church's open pew seating, and he was known for making people feel welcome. His graciousness would have eased Burleigh's anxiety as the only Black person among the White parishioners.³⁵¹

Burleigh described the tenor of Rainsford's preaching that day as "so helpful and sincere." After the service he "summoned his courage" and handed the rector his card, which Rainsford took with a warm clasp of hands. Rainsford promised the young singer he would inform the organist of his application. Burleigh left "full of hope that a man so big and yet so simple would not allow my color to prejudice him."³⁵²

His hope in Rainsford was not misplaced. Still, hurdles remained. Knowing his choir and congregation's prejudices, Rainsford arranged for an unprecedented procedure: all competitors would perform behind a screen. Burleigh was chosen from the sixty applicants, but the audition committee immediately sought to rescind their votes. The rector, however, had the final say. But considering the color line, he likely asked Morgan's advice.³⁵³

Burleigh then sang directly for the Warden of the Vestry, who was reportedly "smitten" with Burleigh's "beautiful rich baritone voice." Morgan pointed to the Black youth and said, "He's my man." The decision was likely encouraged by what a rival applicant sourly called "the influence of a number of foreign musicians, who declare(d) him one of the best voices in America." Apparently, many of the Conservatory faculty added their voices to Thurber's endorsement. Though unnamed, his most likely supporters were those with whom

³⁵⁰ Rubin, "Jeannette Meyers Thurber," 153; Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 269.

³⁵¹ Walton, "Burleigh Honored," 82.

³⁵² Walton, "Burleigh Honored," 82.

³⁵³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 215.

Burleigh was seen crossing into café culture – Dvořák, Herbert, Frank van Der Stucken, and Anton Seidl.³⁵⁴

Breaking the church's color line

With his hiring for St. George's choir, Burleigh reached the highest echelons of church singers in New York. Burleigh's lived experience told him there was a cost to breaking with White racial norms and expectations. Rainsford and Morgan's endorsements held little sway in the racial backlash that Burleigh faced.

Burleigh's first Sunday as St. George's soloist was on 25 February 1894. According to news reporting, unaware of the race of their new soloist,

the congregation listened with pleasant surprise when a clear baritone rose above all the other voices in the processional hymn. Curious to see the new singer they scanned the faces of the white-robed procession as it moved across the chancel to the choir stalls. Among the last of the fifty men and boys, wearing the vestments of a chorister was a young colored man.³⁵⁵

Though arrested by Burleigh's magnetic voice, many congregants felt less than sanguine about the desegregation of their church. Poor immigrants might sit side by side with them in the free pews, but a "colored" man wearing choir vestments up in front of the congregation stirred up deep racial animus. "Division, consternation, confusion, and protest reigned for a time," Rainsford wrote. But in his firm leadership style, he recollected, "the thing was arranged, and I gave no opportunity for its discussion. When the question is one of church policy, I held, and hold, that the decision lies with the rector and no other," he stated. With hindsight, he declared "what a blessing his presence became in the choir."³⁵⁶

Not everyone felt that way: some members left the congregation. One man considered Burleigh's presence at the church turned St. George's into "a house of minstrelsy." Responding to that congregant, Rainsford quipped, "Yes, I heard that you

³⁵⁴ Ibid.; Elmore McKee, "Burleigh: The Man, His Music, His Mission," Unpublished speech, May 4, 1980, Archives of the Parish of Calvary, Holy Communion and St. George's, New York, 2.

³⁵⁵ "Colored Chorister at St. George's." *Chicago Tribune*.

³⁵⁶ Rainsford, *Varied Life*, 267; McKee, "Burleigh," 2.

preferred burlesque.” One observer reported Burleigh’s presence “so scandalized the congregation that it rose as a body and left the church.” Though hyperbolic, this assessment points to how many people voted with their feet against Burleigh’s presence in the choir. Modest by inclination and necessity, Burleigh must have been mortified, but not surprised, by the response. Rainsford continued to protect Burleigh from his members and the press.³⁵⁷

It appears that Rainsford was prepared for backlash about his new chorister due to receiving a backlash of his own. The day before Burleigh’s St. George’s debut, two articles appeared in the New York press. *The World* reported that governors of the Metropolitan Club, nicknamed the “Millionaires’ Club,” had blackballed Rainsford’s membership nomination by club president J. P. Morgan. The same day, the *New York Tribune* published a contrary report, denying Rainsford’s membership was scuttled; instead, he had withdrawn his name. They noted, however, that a previous Wall Street tycoon was likewise nominated and withdrew from consideration when it was apparent some governors were opposed to his membership. For his part, Rainsford’s only comment to reporters was that he was unaware of any blackballing, and “it was a matter that no gentleman will talk about.” Though Burleigh’s hiring was not mentioned, the timing is highly suggestive of pressure on the rector to remove the singer before services the following day.³⁵⁸

Meanwhile, William S. Chester, the organist and choirmaster, heartily supported Burleigh’s hiring when congregants protested verbally to him. Hearing of this, Burleigh offered to withdraw. The reality of Jim Crow racism often meant that African Americans only secured safety by accommodating themselves to places offering entrance and avoiding spaces where they were unwelcome. Therefore, when choirmaster Chester told him, “You

³⁵⁷ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 215-6.

³⁵⁸ “Dr. Rainsford Has Little to Say.” *The World*. 1894; “Rainsford Not Blackballed,” *New-York Tribune*, 1894.

are now a member of this group, and your place is here with us,” Burleigh had reassurance that at least his direct boss was welcoming and supportive.³⁵⁹

Burleigh’s integration in St. George’s upended White racial expectation. Because of Rainsford’s early reforms to bring the choir from the rear loft to the stalls in front of the congregation, everyone could see Burleigh by the altar during services. As a soloist who commanded the stage, he was inescapable.

The press around the country reported Burleigh as “the first colored member of a vested choir of any white parish in the world,” but Rainsford minimized the anomaly for his congregants. “I can see nothing remarkable in the fact of Mr. Burleigh’s being in my vested choir; he has a very fine voice; we should be glad to have him.” By mitigating racial hostility, the rector affirmed Burleigh’s belonging and eased his new situation with the church. Yet Rainsford also knew it was divisive and therefore said he never wanted to know who in the church was for or against his “revolutionary arrangement.” This was a gracious welcoming of Burleigh to the St. George’s family.³⁶⁰

It was not only the congregation who felt apprehensive: Burleigh himself, his friends, and family were alarmed when a Southern newspaper covered his incursion into White sacred space. The *Alexandria Gazette*, noting his race and Conservatory training, reported on his unprecedented position in a White church. As transpired in the 1900 Tenderloin riots, being a well-known Black musician made him conspicuous and a possible target for White retributive violence.³⁶¹

The Musical Herald of London ignored the racial uproar over Burleigh’s hiring, saying “the members of the choir were carefully sounded, and no one seemed to object to Mr. Burleigh as a fellow member.” The paper declared, “This is progress.” The reporter seemed

³⁵⁹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 215–16.

³⁶⁰ “Colored Chorister at St. George’s.” *Chicago Tribune*; “Burleigh at St. George’s.” *Cleveland Gazette*. 1894; Rainsford, *Varied Life*, 267; “St. Philip’s Church.” *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*. 1894.

³⁶¹ “News of the Day,” *Alexandria Gazette*, March 21, 1894.

unaware of the ensuing conflict within the church. But no other Black singers crossed the color line at St. George's until the contralto Carol Brice was hired as a soloist some twenty years later.³⁶²

The economic impact of congregants leaving because of Burleigh likely contributed to the 1894 year-end deficit of \$3,000 in St. George's coffers "due to withdrawal of private contributions" and "decrease in plate" collections. The finances of the church did not fully recover until 1898, though Burleigh's hiring was not the only factor. The impact of the 1893 financial depression added to the Vestry's challenges to raise funds. Over time, however, Burleigh brought in new members. One newspaper account, describing a voice "of remarkable power and quality," reported that "many strangers go to St. George's every Sunday to hear Burleigh."³⁶³

Despite the initial decline in economic support from the congregation, the Vestry increased the music budget shortly after Burleigh's hiring by \$600, perhaps to accommodate his initial salary, which in 1894 was \$800. Subsequently the church raised it to \$1,500, likely around 1900. This put his salary in the highest echelon of New York church soloists. By this point, Burleigh was beginning to earn big money for his performances at White society functions, so the raise was encouragement for him not to abandon his day job.³⁶⁴

Though Burleigh's desegregation of the church shocked many congregants and amazed much of the press, for him the job was very familiar. His British-trained vocal teacher in Erie had prepared him for high church choral music and three sacred choral positions: Erie's Episcopal Cathedral at St. Paul's (1885), Park Presbyterian church (1885), and the Reform Jewish Temple (1885), and he was a frequent soloist for Erie's First

³⁶² "Echoes of the Month," *The Musical Herald*, May 1, 1894; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 216.

³⁶³ "Vestry Minutes of St. George's Episcopal Church," Archives of the Parish of Calvary—St. George's, New York, March 1894," 38–40; "Vestry Minutes," December 1895, 39–40; Year Book of *St. George*, 1898, 36–7.

³⁶⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 219; "Burleigh in New York Society," *The David City News*, 1900; "Church Music in New York," *The Sun*, 1887; "Church Music in New York."

Methodist Church. These jobs had accustomed him to being a sole Black man performing in sacred White spaces.

Burleigh met the St. George's exacting musical standard with ease because of his early training, concertizing, and training at the Conservatory. Because of his family's teaching about work amongst White folks, he was likely prepared for the congregation's initial shock. But as musicianship was prized above all, his first mention in the *Year Book of St. George's Church* 1895 briefly observed his voice "enriched the musical part of the liturgy."³⁶⁵

That year, Burleigh began composing for church services with his first known publication, a simple hymn "Christmas Bells" for the Junior Choir. He did what church musicians had done for centuries: composed liturgical music as part of their musical position. The exacting music standard at St. George's meant that acceptance of this minor piece likely influenced Burleigh's decision to embark on a compositional career. Though his career as a composer is handled in future chapters, it is notable that a professional singing position enabled him to focus on composition, rather than supporting himself through various non-musical side jobs.³⁶⁶

Singing for Gilded Age aristocrats

Burleigh's work at St. George's brought new opportunities in the form of a network of aristocratic salons which hired him to sing. From around 1900, for the next thirty years, Burleigh sang in the salons on Fifth Avenue, the mansions of their summer communities. Burleigh sang for the Villards, Vanderbilts, Schieffelins, Roosevelts, Astors, and Morgans, reportedly "commanding \$500 to \$100 a night for singing...before social gatherings at the many well-known Fifth Avenue mansions." He had come a long way from his first Conservatory semester when he looked hungrily in the windows of New York bakeries. Honoring his thirtieth anniversary in 1924 at St. George's, Lester Walton, music critic for the

³⁶⁵ Holt, "Music"; *Year Book of St. George's*, 1895, 54–7.

³⁶⁶ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 230.

New York Age, wrote poetically, “He played for years up and down the scale of adversity before finding himself in time and in tune with success.”³⁶⁷

Besides securing himself financially, Burleigh’s concertizing broke White conceptions about Black music and musicians. Singing Beethoven, or Schumann, or Verdi in white tie and tails was the antithesis of minstrelsy. And cultivated, *bel canto* singing countered ideas of Black intellectual inferiority, criminality, and hyper-sexuality, which was a common lens for seeing Blackness.

This was never Burleigh’s mission: his aim was financial viability, to enable him to stay in the profession he loved. But it was a powerful by-product of expressing his selfhood in a concert or salon performance. White audiences in this period had what scholar Jennifer Lynn Stoever describes as an “aural image” of the Black singer. By using what she calls “technique of self” which “neither erased black cultural traditions nor depending on white male citizenship standards,” Black musicians “inverted negative constructions of blackness.”³⁶⁸

Sixteen-year-old Abbie Mitchell gave a lively account in her unpublished memoir of appearing with Burleigh at the Vanderbilts’ Newport home in the summer of 1900. There were two orchestras, a symphony for “serious” music and a jazz orchestra for popular. Burleigh, the Polish tenor Jean de Reske, and Australian coloratura soprano Nellie Melba each sang first with the symphony orchestra. When the jazz orchestra tuned up, Mitchell sang a piece from the recent musical *In Dahomey* composed by her husband, Will Marion Cook. Vanderbilt’s guest, Prince Henry of Prussia, enjoyed this number so much that Mrs. Vanderbilt raised Mitchell’s salary on the spot from \$35 to \$100.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Walton, “Burleigh Honored”; “Burleigh in New York Society.” *The David City News*. 1900.

³⁶⁸ Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, 132–34.

³⁶⁹ Abbie Mitchell, *Autobiographical Notes Regarding Early Career*, unpublished handwritten notebook, n.d. Mercer Cook Papers, Box 157-7, Folder 17, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, 52–3.

Two years later, Burleigh sang again for Prince Henry, the younger brother of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Seth Low, New York mayor and St. George's vestryman, appointed J. P. Morgan to arrange celebrations for the royal visit. After hosting the large "Captains of Industry" fête at Sherry's, a admired haunt of the New York "Four Hundred," Morgan threw a more intimate and exclusive affair at the University Club on March 7, 1902, at which Burleigh performed.³⁷⁰

Morgan's son-in-law set the scene. Burleigh stepped into that day and recalled the "zest" with which Morgan undertook organizing the occasion, including the music. A large hall in the University Club's new building was festooned with flowers and hung with tapestries. The White orchestra was in an elevated gallery, and a sonorous hum rose from the gathering of two hundred men. The orchestra prepared, shuffling to the pages of Burleigh's music. Though he was familiar with being the only Black face in many performance spaces, there was an air of frisson as he prepared to sing for those whose names filled the pages of daily newspapers and society magazines. Perhaps there was a titter of laughter from industrialists who found it discomfiting to see a tuxedoed African American not "blacked up" and costumed for minstrelsy. However, Burleigh stood poised as a consummate performer, waiting for the murmurs to subside and the room to quieten.³⁷¹

No record of the program exists of the "Southern melodies" he reportedly sang. Perhaps Burleigh started with a piece from his recently published *Plantation Melodies Old and New*, published by G. Schirmer in 1901. Into the anticipatory hush, he may have commanded attention with the loud and vigorous "Antebellum Sermon," which told the story of Joshua's faith that God would cause the walls of Jericho to fall. Or maybe he began *pianissimo*, bringing subjectivity to a young mother singing her babe to sleep with "Negro Lullaby."

³⁷⁰ Herbert L. Satterlee, *J. Pierpont Morgan, An Intimate Portrait* (Macmillan Company, 1939), 373–74.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Perhaps the next song was his “Ma Lawd’s a-writin’ down time” about a heavenly account book in which one’s deeds were recorded. The lyrics admonished, “Then doan’ think f’ t’ sin, Ef yuh doan’ want to pay” (“Then don’t think for to sin if you don’t want to pay”). Each of these songs held double meanings of such warnings. Burleigh retained an internal dignity, and likely a sense of humor, delivering such sermon-like lyrics to the rich, White audience.

Though he was clearly able to sing European repertoire with finesse, this audience of German royalty and American industrial royalty might have booed him off the floor given the limits of White musical and racial imagination. This occasion functioned as an audition of sorts for the White aristocracy, who held the patronage purse strings for art music singers. So, he cleverly modulated his program to his audience by presenting his compositions of “Southern melodies” with a voice fit for the opera house.³⁷²

Apparently, Burleigh was the highlight of the afternoon as “Mr. Morgan was particularly pleased that the only musical feature (excluding the orchestra in the gallery) was the introduction of Harry Burleigh, who stood on the floor of the hall in front of the Prince and sang in his inimitable and artistic manner the melodies of the southern negro, including some of his compositions.” Morgan was probably equally gratified because Burleigh’s artistry satisfied his collector’s acquisitional instinct to showcase the best and rarest. The Prince was gratified and commented that he “certainly had never been entertained this way before.”

There was a curious addendum to this concert. Most likely at Burleigh’s invitation, Prince Henry visited Marshall’s Hotel on West 53rd Street, the “clubhouse” of Black Bohemians. Members of the “Four Hundred” wealthiest families in the city and one Prince Henry of Prussian visited this “black-and-tan” establishment. Here racial mixing was as

³⁷² Satterlee, *J. Pierpont Morgan, An Intimate Portrait*, 374.

much of a draw as the music, dancing, fine dining, and celebrity spotting. The visitors undoubtedly met Burleigh with smiles of recognition during the European royal's visit.³⁷³

So, constantly interacting with White elites, Burleigh surely felt the “twoness” that Du Bois described as an inescapable psychic condition of Black folks in America: split between an inner sense of self, while othered by White consciousness. Du Bois argued that the purpose of the “striving of the Negro People” was to achieve equality of perception with the dominant culture, to the end of being “a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, and to husband and use [their] best powers.” For Du Bois believed that striving ought eventually to yield cultural inclusion and productive possibilities for Black artists in a White society, a hope disappointed over and over again.³⁷⁴

Burleigh's aim was to choose music he desired to sing and to compose while remaining within acceptable bounds of his patronage. To sustain his long performance career in White spaces, Burleigh found a way to maintain his integrity while everyone around him perceived him as something exotic, threatening, and only contingently welcome in White institutions. Because Burleigh knew his very presence as a Black man – who presented art songs inflected with Black folk music – destabilized this Gilded Age audience's conscious and unconscious perceptions.

A house of minstrelsy

On Burleigh's first appearance as soloist for St. George's, one congregant scoffed to Dr. Rainsford that a Black chorister turned the church into “a house of minstrelsy.” The remark was jarringly on the mark. Without a hint of irony, during the first year of Burleigh's tenure, St. George's Men's Club entertained themselves with a show of White men in blackface – the St. George's Minstrels. The Club's first production occurred early in 1894, a month after

³⁷³ Marc Kirkeby, “The Brightest Days of the Marshall,” NYC Department of Records & Information Services, April 20, 2017; “A Bit of Biography,” *New York Age*, 1913.

³⁷⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Strivings of the Negro People,” *Atlantic Magazine*, August 1897, 192.

Burleigh's hiring. A second show occurred that autumn. Neither programs nor commentary about the performances survive. This strange turn of events complicated Burleigh's sense of self at the church. Even as Burleigh processed down the aisle at St. George's each Sunday side by side with White choir members, the Club's minstrel shows communicated what its members thought was Burleigh's place in the racial hierarchy. Rainsford welcomed him, but Burleigh received ridicule from others.³⁷⁵

There was a lacuna of shows following the second show in fall 1894 and 1906. Only after Rainsford retired did the St. George's Men's Club minstrel shows return, so it is reasonable to connect their return with the end of his tenure. Perhaps the rector initially saw no harm in earlier shows based on ubiquitous popular entertainment. However, over time, White folks in blackface landed differently once Burleigh participated in the parish's daily activities. Rainsford might now have found these racist parodies more glaringly offensive than previously.

The revival of Men's Club minstrel shows also coincided with the debut of Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s 1905 book and play *The Clansman*. This work portrayed Black men as inherently violent rapists of White women, incorrigible thieves, and watermelon-eating, happy characters. The cultural moment reinforced common racist tropes. Despite congregants seeing Burleigh up front on Sundays in his surplice singing European church music, the cultural power and White consumption of *The Clansman* inevitably reified a racialized mentality toward Burleigh, even, or especially, if it came in the form of socially acceptable joking.

In addition to Rainsford's retirement, something else changed in 1906. Church membership rolls show Burleigh joined the church and the Men's Club that year. The Club, with its library and leather club chairs, provided Burleigh with a space to work in Jim Crow

³⁷⁵ *Year Book of St. George*, 1895.

New York. Eating, finding bathrooms, and even just relaxing was nearly impossible for Black citizens outside their own clubs and bars located in the Tenderloin. Burleigh could not readily access these places from St. George's, where he spent many workdays. In 1906, he lived at 449 Park Avenue at 57th Street, a short ride on the Third Avenue Elevated Railroad to St. George's, making the Club a great convenience.³⁷⁶

A newly minted Club member, Burleigh became musical director of the minstrel show that year. On the surface, it is nearly impossible to square Burleigh's participation with his known disdain for entertainment based on degraded representation of African Americans. Burleigh shared the opinion of his friend, British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, with whom he toured in 1906. The British composer had strong feelings on the genre, saying "coon songs" were "the worst sort of rot." He thought they lacked musical value and said, "There is no real negro character or sentiment" in them. In other words, they grossly misrepresented and dehumanized Black people.³⁷⁷

While Burleigh participated in Will Marion Cook's productions of *Clorindy* in 1896, *Senegambian Carnival* with Williams and Walker in 1898, and Sissieretta Jones's "Black Patti's Troubadours" in 1896, all these pushed back against minstrelsy by showcasing the creativity of these Black composers and thespians. Later, even in the safety of his community and for a charitable cause, when a Brooklyn group of friends put on a "novel minstrel show" in 1908, Burleigh wanted no part of it. The *New York Age* noted, "Burleigh never bothers about coon songs," though his wife was one of the "coon shouters" performing.³⁷⁸

Burleigh's close friendships with the artists in Black Bohemia centred on the Marshall Hotel provide an interpretive framework for his engagement with the Men's Club's minstrels. Ernest Hogan, Bert Williams, and George Walker were transitional figures in

³⁷⁶ *Family Record, St. George's Church 1895-1902*, II vols. (New York, n.d.).

³⁷⁷ "Calls 'Coon Songs Rot.' S. Coleridge Taylor Says They Are Not Negro Melodies." *New York Times*. 1904; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 156.

³⁷⁸ Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, 150–51.

African American comedic entertainment. Minstrelsy was their “Trojan horse,” by which they subverted racist minstrelsy tropes while also appealing to White audiences as minstrel entertainers. Bob Cole, musical partner of J. Rosamond Johnson, argued that the work of these performers was essential in the evolution of the stage. When eulogizing Bert Williams, though, Du Bois noted their smiles on stage “hovered above blood and tragedy, the light mask of happiness that hid breaking hearts and bitter souls.”³⁷⁹

In a similar vein, the St. George’s Men’s Club minstrel show provided a subversive opportunity for Burleigh. Over the fifteen years the Club produced the show, his role as music director undoubtedly curbed some of the worst impulses of members to use blackface as an excuse for mockery. But curbed is not eliminated. Burleigh undoubtedly found some of the skits humiliating.

Based on surviving programs from 1906 and 1921, the Club hosted sometimes two shows a year and sometimes none. Burleigh worked under at least three different Minstrel Committee chairmen over that period. The content of the shows, the cover art, and the nature of Burleigh’s role changed accordingly.

William J. Guy, chairman of the Minstrel Committee from 1906 to 1908, had great respect for Burleigh, notwithstanding the program art, which contained racist caricatures of Black folk. Under Guy, the music contained no “coon songs,” but rather popular numbers of the day. The second act often consisted of acrobats, song and dance numbers, comedians, a quartet, and sometimes a brass band ensemble. Burleigh soloed in at least four shows and performed a duet and quartet in two others. He sang either his own music or popular songs of the day.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ Lester A. Walton, “Music and the Stage.” *The New York Age*. 1908; Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (University of North Carolina, 2007), 150–51; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Short Draft of a Eulogy of Bert Williams,” 1922, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

³⁸⁰ St. George’s Episcopal Church, “St. George’s Men’s Club Minstrel Show,” February 21, 1909, February 7, 1907, February 20, 1908, December 10, 1909, Courtesy of Snyder: (I am indebted to Burleigh’s biographer,

When Burleigh's friend, Ernest Hogan, wrote "All Coons Look Alike to Me" in 1896, it launched a highly lucrative coon song craze that lasted till the 1920s. He admitted to mixed feelings about the lyrics but rationalized that "We have been called every name under the sun, so I added another. The coon is a very smart animal, so I gave the song the title." However, "coon" derived from "raccoon," connecting the image of that sneaky, nocturnal creature's habit of stealing food. Hogan was immediately assailed by some in the Black community for trafficking in gross stereotypes.³⁸¹

Black intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois and historian John Edward Bruce, however, praised Hogan's success as essential to early Black entertainers trying to gain a foothold in the White entertainment industry. Scholars today agree, noting that these Black performers "manipulate[d] the mask" to create a dialogue with mixed audiences that subverted the negative racial representations of popular entertainment.³⁸²

When Burleigh sang in the 1909 show, the program notes observed, "he has rendered a solo typifying some of the characteristics of the "Sunny South," and his singing was a "rare combination of pathos and sympathy that appeals to our audiences." Perhaps Club members heard pathos, but Burleigh inserted another layer of meaning when he subversively sang Stephen Foster's 1853 "My Old Kentucky Home," originally titled "Poor Uncle Tom, Good Night!" inspired by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Its lyrics condemned enslavement and its practices of sundering families for economic gain.³⁸³

Dr. Jean E. Snyder, who generously gave me access to the only, and most complete set, of programs from the minstrel shows in existence.)

³⁸¹ David Gilbert, *The Product of Our Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 29.

³⁸² Du Bois, "Eulogy of Bert Williams"; "Negro Song Writers." *Boston Evening Transcript*. 1897; Patricia R. Schroeder, "Passing for Black: Coon Songs and the Performance of Race," *Journal of American Culture* 33, no. 2 (June 2010): 139–40.

³⁸³ "St. George's Men's Club Minstrel Show," December 10, 1909; Schroeder, "Passing for Black," 139–40; "St. George's Men's Club Minstrel Show," February 21, 1909.

This performance exemplified the practice of “signifyin’” as described by Louis Henry Gates. During Reconstruction, white performers re-imagined “Poor Uncle Tom” as a melancholic longing for a lost Southern way of life. Burleigh’s trickster performance recovered its original intent. In *My Bondage, My Freedom*, Frederick Douglass said this song “awakens the sympathies for the slave, in which antislavery principles take root, grow, and flourish.” Burleigh shifted the song’s meaning back toward those who fought enslavement, even if the audience remained oblivious.³⁸⁴

During this period, Burleigh’s agents Brooks and Denton took advantage of his role in the St. George’s shows. The 1906 program photo depicted Burleigh dressed in white tie, looking straight and confidently into the camera. Advertisements noted his availability as a soloist, publicized his newest compositions, and were sometimes accompanied by a list of his growing catalogue with publisher William Maxwell Music. The well-attended entertainment furthered his composition and singing careers both inside and outside St. George’s.³⁸⁵

Finally, these programs under Guy’s leadership always included effusive thanks to Burleigh in the program notes. Guy wrote that it was the Club’s “good fortune” to have someone “whose musical ability and personal popularity is so well known to every member,” guaranteeing its success. Although he did sing in four shows between 1906 and 1913, Burleigh primarily worked as the musical director, which according to the December 10, 1909 program entailed training “the chorus and in many cases selected the songs adapted to the occasion.” Still, he did not have full control over the show themes or even all the music.³⁸⁶

Most shows contained primarily popular comic or romantic songs of the day rather than coon songs. But even those programs were illustrated with degrading, mocking images

³⁸⁴ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. David W. Blight (Yale University Press, 2014), 392.

³⁸⁵ “St. George’s Men’s Club Minstrel Show,” February 21, 1906.

³⁸⁶ “St. George’s Men’s Club Minstrel Show,” December 10, 1909.

of Black characters. The 1907 show did contain a popular coon song of 1906, “If the Man in the Moon were a Coon.” It proposed that a Black face could not reflect moonlight, so lovers had no chance of trysting in the park. Perhaps he found it impossible to exclude this song because it had sold three million copies the previous year.³⁸⁷

When William W. Kiesel took over from Guy as chairman in 1909, the most racist caricatures appear as cover art. But Burleigh’s direction is evident in the programming of Stephen Foster’s “Old Black Joe,” in which “Joe” laments the loss of those “gone from earth to a better land, I know.” Recorded by Paul Robeson in 1928 and again in 1930, it gives subjectivity to the often-nameless workers in the cotton fields of the South and sings the many griefs of enslaved life.³⁸⁸

There were two shows in 1910 and one in 1911, though no programs survive for these. With the new chairmanship of Frank Walsh in 1912 and 1913, cover art continued to depict caricatures of Black people: characters in tattered clothes with exaggerated physical features, wide grinning white lips, and bulging eyes. This representation must have felt like grit in the mouth to Burleigh. Through his carefully curated self-representation – in deportment, attire, and speech – Burleigh undercut those associations his entire life. Nevertheless, as a Black singer in this period, association with minstrelsy was inextricable in the minds of White audiences. One can imagine fellow Club members asking him to direct their mimicry of these gross caricatures during their performances, as if he or any African American embodied such cartoonish insults.³⁸⁹

After Guy stepped down as chairman, the program notes stopped noting with gratitude Burleigh’s role as music director, which minimized the visibility of his labour. Increasingly, the shows perpetuated a false idealization of Southern life. Burleigh’s

³⁸⁷ “St. George’s Men’s Club Minstrel Show,” February 7, 1907.

³⁸⁸ Stephen C. Foster, “Old Black Joe,” *Poetry Foundation* (August 11, 2023).

³⁸⁹ Programs for 1910, 1911, 1917 and 1919 are non-extant.

participation shifted as well: he functioned only as musical director, not as a member of the committee.³⁹⁰

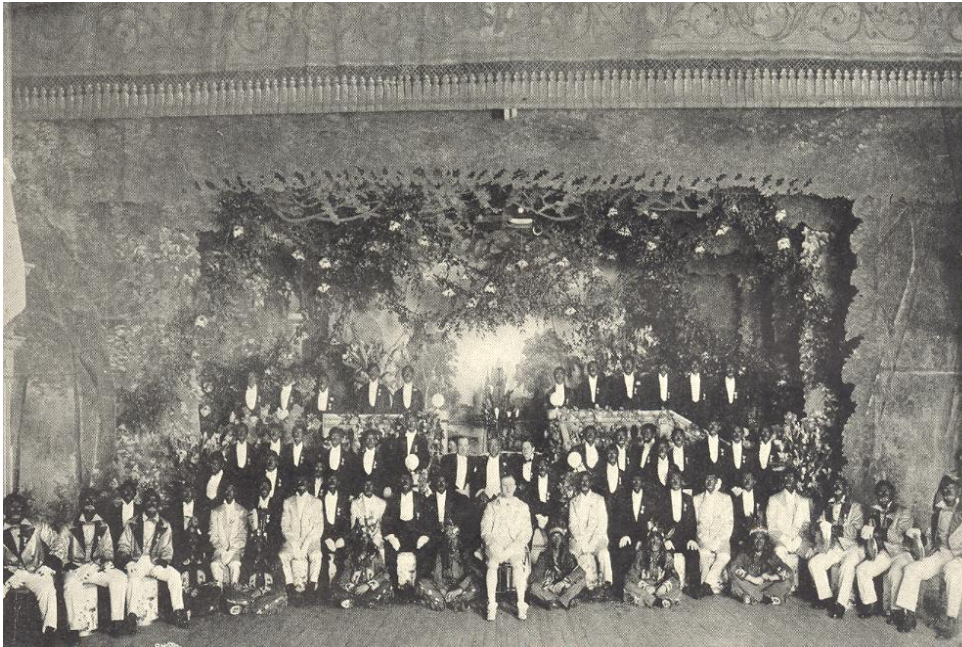
In 1914, with the onset of World War I, the programs changed their format to operettas like Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*. No sources exist to explain this shift. It must, however, have been a mercy for Burleigh that the Club no longer presented minstrel shows. Though there is a paucity of documentation, there is enough to postulate that Burleigh had some agency, albeit limited by other members' expectations. Through artistry and professionalism, he rose above the material he supervised.³⁹¹

Pushing the programming toward popular and comedic music and away from the worst iterations of coon songs was a considerable intervention. Burleigh had no power to prohibit his fellow members from appearing in blackface. Yet by leaning on the popular music of the year, Burleigh eased the most virulent racist characterizations and White supremacist representations. Nonetheless, he endured seeing his fellow congregants in the grossest mimicry of blackness and caricature of First Nations people.

³⁹⁰ "St. George's Men's Club Minstrel Show," November 22, 1912, Courtesy of Dr. Jean E. Snyder; "St. George's Men's Club Minstrel Show," February 21, 1909, Courtesy of Dr. Jean E. Snyder; "St. George's Men's Club Minstrel Show," November 21, 1913, Courtesy of Dr. Jean E. Snyder.

³⁹¹ "St. George's Men's Club Minstrel Show," April 23, 1914, November 19, 1915, and December 12, 1916, Courtesy of Dr. Jean E. Snyder.

Figure 6.1 Burleigh, third row center, surrounded by his fellow church members, 1911



Over many years, Burleigh slowly rose from pariah to celebrity at St. George's. An early biographer noted that by the end of Burleigh's tenure in 1946, St. George's was known as "Mr. Burleigh's church." New York cabbies recognized it immediately and navigated to St. George's. Black celebrities like Marian Anderson and Bill (Bojangles) Robinson visited when in the city. One of his fellow choristers recalled, "Never shall I forget that moment during the processional, while singing the magnificent hymn 'Be Still My Soul,' when from her place in the congregation Miss Anderson's glorious molten-rich voice rolled out in waves of glory. Never had music poured more joyously from every throat, so inspired was each by the majesty of this gifted woman."³⁹²

Over the decades, Burleigh managed to belong by carving out space to protect himself. The otherwise quite social Burleigh must have had his reasons to maintain a safe distance and not cross that boundary. Elmore McKee, St. George's rector from 1936 to 1946, recalled the painful realities for Burleigh of working across the color line. He remembered that between the 11am and 4pm services, Burleigh "was careful to go to lunch

³⁹² Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 173; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 172.

only with those choristers whom he knew felt at ease with him, and to restaurants where he was welcome.” One can imagine how humiliating was the racial hostility from his fellow choristers and congregants. It was also a painful reminder of the triumph of *de facto* segregation, versus the change he and fellow activists sought to enforce by the Malby law in 1895.³⁹³

On the thirtieth anniversary of his hiring, Burleigh made a significant intervention in liturgical music by creating a vespers service entirely comprised of Negro spirituals. Charles Safford, the church’s organist and choirmaster since 1913, was replaced by George Kemmer in 1924. This appears to have freed Burleigh to innovate in the order of service.

On the last Sunday of March, “hundreds of persons vainly stormed the entrances...trying to gain admission to the special vesper service.” The streets outside St. George’s were so crowded that police intervened to keep traffic moving. The ushers had to close the doors to the sanctuary half an hour before the service because of the crush of people. Notably, the radio station WJC broadcast the church’s vesper service for the first time.³⁹⁴

A murmur of respect occurred when the rector, Dr. Karl Reiland, called Burleigh out of the choir stall. Wearing his hood, indicating his honorary doctorate from Howard University in 1920, and his white surplice vestments, Burleigh bowed to the congregation as the choir began one of his best-known compositions, “An’ I Couldn’t Hear Nobody Pray.” After the service, Burleigh stood on the chancel steps and shook hands with the congregation. Gone were the days when much of the congregation left while he walked down the aisle as a chorister. As one paper put it, “Wealthy and fashionable New York bowed to Harry T. Burleigh Sunday afternoon at St. George’s.” In the pews were the Morgans, the Tafts, the Spencers, a circumstance one astonished Black reporter described as

³⁹³ McKee, “Burleigh.”

³⁹⁴ Moulton, *St. George’s Church*, 116.

“aristocrats sat side by side with members of the race.” The desegregation of the church which Burleigh had begun in 1894 was further secured.³⁹⁵

Normally circumspect when speaking to the media, Burleigh was unusually emotional in his commentary afterwards:

When they sang ‘My Lord, what a morning when the stars begin to fall’ it stifled me. I was completely overwhelmed. What an Idea! You can’t see it. I can’t see it. But the old Negroes working on the plantations knew what it meant. They could see the morning when the stars began to fall. The choir sang it so beautifully at the service. It was a big moment for me. I couldn’t even answer them to thank them for it, my heart was so full.³⁹⁶

Burleigh took the opportunity to engage in some Black musicology, teaching reporters the religious roots of the music. He wanted to distinguish them from minstrel songs, which, he thought, was how most White people heard them. Spirituals were “hidden under the mask of the Negro minstrel songs,” Burleigh said, because they were “cheaper, more popular.” He faulted “economic pressure” on African Americans to be “good showmen” for White audiences. Because of their ubiquity, “everyone hummed the minstrel songs and forgot the spirituals. We are just beginning to rescue the spirituals,” he observed.³⁹⁷

Burleigh then referenced the debate that Dvořák had weathered regarding what constitutes “American” in music, contending that there was still no “distinctive national literature or art; we have not made American music.” When that did happen, he was confident “it will show the influence of Negro spirituals.” On a pointedly personal note, he believed that spirituals would not affect the sound of the country’s music “until [America] is willing to admit that Negroes can be artists.”³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ “Crowds at Church Honor Negro Singer,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1924; “Sang 30 Years, Never Missed a Sunday,” *The Afro-American*, April 4, 1924.

³⁹⁶ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 294.

³⁹⁷ “NY Church Pays Tribute to Burleigh,” *Musical America*, April 12, 1924, 21.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Burleigh's innovation in creating a Negro Spirituals Vesper Service led to another unprecedented event. Since St. George's was "the first white church to introduce the singing of spirituals," in 1926 for "the first time in the history of New York a white choir had sung in a Negro church." The rector and entire choir of St. George's was invited to one of Harlem's most revered sanctuaries, Mother Zion A. M. E. Church. After being welcomed by Reverend J. W. Brown, the choir sang the Negro Spirituals Vesper Service; then they were served supper by the members of the church. How strange this reciprocity must have seemed to Burleigh after the many years of isolation at St. George's.³⁹⁹

The spirituals, he thought, demonstrated a personal relationship with Christ. They were originally a communal creation which he described as "the spontaneous outbursts of intense religious fervour, and had their origins chiefly in camp meetings, revivals, and other religious exercises." Yet for him, they also reflected a very personal and individual faith, for he observed they spoke of "my Savior, my sorrow, my kingdom." He affirmed on every spiritual published by G. Ricordi that his faith "in the ultimate justice and brotherhood of man." This belief was essential to sustaining his fifty-two-year musical career while negotiating the color line in Jim Crow America.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ Cleveland G. Allen, "Music: St. George's Choir Recital Inspiration," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 18, 1926.

⁴⁰⁰ Walton, "Burleigh Honored."

Conclusion

Patronage positions gave opportunities and took them away. Being hired in 1894 by such a powerful institution run by two charismatic and controlling men gave Burleigh unprecedented economic security. However, his sense of spiritual belonging was compromised by racist ideology, as illustrated by the minstrel shows organized by members of the White church. Burleigh found ways to act which gave him a modicum of safety. And by sustaining a presence at St. George's, he challenged White stereotypes about African Americans.

Music patronage enabled him to pursue a career in both art music singing and composition. It also curtailed a potentially historic concertizing career in Europe. The church position undergirded Burleigh's financial independence at a time when many trained Black artists left art music to pursue economically viable careers in popular music.

Patronage opened opportunities for Burleigh in Europe. These experiences led him to counsel younger artists about establishing themselves abroad before trying for a career in America. Burleigh advised the young visual artist Lois Mailou Jones that starting in Europe was a more level path for building a career. She recollected sitting with Burleigh and the sculptor Meta Warrick Fuller on a beach in Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, during the summer of 1922. Both told her, "Lois, you know you're not going to make it in this country. It's true that you are very talented, but because of the situation, you're not going to be able to have any success with your career. You are going to have to go abroad."⁴⁰¹ Despite the anti-Blackness that shadowed them there, Europe substantiated the concert careers of artists like Robeson, Hayes, and Anderson. Only then were agents willing to promote African American artists on American stages.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ Martha's Vineyard Museum, Interview with Lois Mailou Jones by Linsey Lee, September 17, 1993.

⁴⁰² Martha's Vineyard Museum, Interview with Lois Mailou Jones; Kira Thurman, "Singing the Civilizing Mission in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms: The Fisk Jubilee Singers in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of World History* 27, no. 3 (2016): 169–71.

Through long and sometimes painful experiences, Burleigh gained wisdom as a turnkey who then opened doors for aspiring African American artists during Jim Crow. Many of those experiences were achieved working within White institutions and for wealthy White patrons. As both Burleigh and artists during the Harlem Renaissance discovered, patronage involved artistic contortions but also yielded financial opportunities rarely available outside the dominant culture's institutional structures.

Chapter 7

Harry and Louise

Introduction

Though Burleigh was working in art music, he was not immune to the allure of footlights, particularly as some of his closest friends – Cook, Dunbar, and Williams – were charting new paths. In November 1898, Burleigh took on the side job of music director and conductor for the show *Senegambian Carnival*. The stage’s bright lights were not the sole attraction for Burleigh, however. Like Will Cook, he soon became romantically involved with one of the young chorus girls. And like Cook, he married a teenager, Louise Alston.

The reverberations of this liaison changed Burleigh’s life in numerous ways. Having to support his family financially constrained Burleigh’s career options. When Louise eventually chose a different life for herself, press coverage about “New York’s favorite baritone” was mortifying for Burleigh. Their partnership of thirteen years was disappointing for them both in different ways. For Burleigh, his shifting emotions about their relationship were expressed through his most passionate and despairing love songs.⁴⁰³

Footlights and foolishness

So, during Burleigh’s brief participation in Black musical theatre in the 1890s, he met Louise Alston of Washington, D.C. When Cook advertised in *Colored American Magazine* for “girls with good voices, handsome faces and forms, who wish to join an opera company,” the precocious seventeen-year-old Louise answered the call and was hired. She clearly hoped for a career in performance: she’d studied violin with Joseph Douglass and published poetry, which she performed in public readings. The local press described her as “a promising young

⁴⁰³ “Persons and Events.” *Standard Union*. 1895.

artist who has made a considerable reputation in local circles.” She “seems to possess a natural adaptability to the stage.”⁴⁰⁴

Perhaps trying to impress Louise emboldened Burleigh to essay one of his few musical theatre performances. While he was conducting *Senegambian Carnival*, a comedian missed his cue; Burleigh climbed onstage from the pit and commenced singing “Who Day Say Chicken in Dis Crowd.” He “vamped once, twice, thrice, descended back into the pit to hearty applause.” But realizing there was another upcoming number for the missing player, he “gave his baton to the first violinist, went backstage, donned an old coat and hat, and with cane in hand, appeared before the proscenium singing a ribald song.” Decades later he could still recall the choreography and performed part of his “bit” for the music critic, Nora Holt, in his office at G. Ricordi.⁴⁰⁵

At this point, Burleigh’s career and Louise’s might have headed in the same direction. Many of his closest friends were in musical theatre, and Louise was so set on a stage career that one article claims she “ran away to join Williams and Walker” in the autumn of 1898. While he later admitted that working in this musical tempted him to “launch into the ways of the world” with his friends, he “went straight back to his duties” and never again took to the theatrical stage.⁴⁰⁶

Burleigh was compelled to revert to his church music job rather than pursuing a more precarious stage career because by December 1898 Louise was pregnant. He wrote to her mother, Rachel Turner Farley, asking to marry her daughter. Louise was just seventeen while Burleigh was thirty-three when they married in 1899. Seven months later, in August,

⁴⁰⁴ “Brookland, DC News.” *Colored American Magazine*. 1898; “Women’s Night at St. Luke’s.” “Testing Civil Rights,” *Evening Star*, 1897; “Bethel Literary Society,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1897; “Passing Show” *Colored American Magazine*. 1898.

⁴⁰⁵ Holt, “St. George’s Fête Harry Burleigh.” *New York Amsterdam News*. 1944.

⁴⁰⁶ Holt, “St. George’s Fête.”

their son Alston was born; Burleigh's close friend, the vaudevillian Bert Williams, was godfather.⁴⁰⁷

Alston's birth certificate places them squarely in the Tenderloin at 436 West 33rd Street. However, in 1900 they moved to 39 South 4th Street in Brooklyn. This was far from where the Black Brahmins lived in the Weeksville area, so that Burleigh enjoyed privacy and avoided scrutiny. Perhaps it was also an effort to distance Louise from the tantalizing Broadway stage. Either way, the effect was to isolate Louise and her new child; for neither the Williamsburg Bridge nor the subway lines were yet built to give them easy access to Manhattan and the Tenderloin, where many of their friends were located.⁴⁰⁸

Ensuing scandal

There was good reason to fear how the pregnancy and rushed nuptials could impact Burleigh's career, partly because it was well-known that women found him "dangerously charming." But when rumours reached Victoria Earle Matthews, one of the Black critics of his direct civil rights action, she immediately discussed her concerns with William J. Schieffelin, a St. George's Vestry member and Tuskegee Institute board member. This prompted further observations in a letter to Booker T. Washington on April 8, 1899. By then Louise and Burleigh were married, and she was about four months pregnant. "Everyone respects his ability as an exponent and master of creation," wrote Matthews; but then she intimated that Burleigh had forfeited his moral reputation.⁴⁰⁹

It is unclear whether Burleigh's marriage was known at this time. Matthews accused him of being a womanizer and of having an issue with alcohol. Nowhere else has Burleigh been accused of problematic drinking. Matthews likely conflated his theatrical persona with

⁴⁰⁷ "Son of Harry T. Burleigh," *The Chicago Defender*, May 27, 1933.

⁴⁰⁸ U.S. Census, 1900, Brooklyn, Kings County, New York, population schedule, Harry T. Burleigh household; National Archives microfilm publication T623, roll [insert roll number if known]; digital image, *FamilySearch*, accessed July 29, 2025.

⁴⁰⁹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 189; Victoria Earle Matthews, "Matthews to Washington," April 8, 1899.

moral turpitude. While her overall suppositions may have been mistaken, she was not wrong about the entanglements Burleigh found himself in with Louise. Gossip amongst the Black community was not the only concern. The popularity of Black theatre celebrities also drew scrutiny from a White press eager to demonstrate to White readers the moral behaviour and sexual scandals that typified Black performers. At least the press did not get wind of Burleigh's under-age, pregnant girlfriend, which likely saved his St. George's position.⁴¹⁰

Despite the unplanned pregnancy, Burleigh certainly sounded genuinely in love. Writing to Louise's mother, Ray Farley, he claimed that Louise was "the soul of my life and inspiration is in her keeping." But he also clearly feared that the pregnancy would cost him not only his prized St. George's patronage position, but also his new relationship traveling with Booker T. Washington to raise funds for Tuskegee. Thus, he promised Louise's mother that regardless of the future, "My mind and arms are strong and (without being over confident) I feel that they can work sufficiently" to be able to "cope with the realities of life and the added responsibility marriage brings." His reference to his strength implies that he realized the possibility of losing his singing career and needed to find other work to sustain his new family.⁴¹¹

Burleigh's had value for St. George's in signalling their commitment to progressiveness; and for Washington in standing as an exemplar of racial accomplishment. Both considerations apparently outweighed Matthews' concerns. Burleigh was not sacked nor shuffled off to Hampton or Tuskegee, as her letter suggested. Neither did it deter his hiring at Temple Emanu-El the year after his marriage and the birth of his son.

Still, the pregnancy and subsequent marriage had an enormous impact on Harry and Louise's careers. Louise was ambitious for artistic expression as a poet and performer. She

⁴¹⁰ Matthews, "Matthews to Washington"; Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890 to 1915*, (Smithsonian Books, 1994), 186–87.

⁴¹¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 189.

knew Paul Laurence Dunbar and Cook from Washington, D.C. Dunbar's success inspired her to write and publicly recite her dialect poetry. Life on the stage was her aim in coming to New York. But unlike her new husband, the pregnancy tethered her to domestic life.⁴¹²

Had Burleigh remained unmarried, the aristocratic European contacts of both Morgan and Washington may well have enabled him to build a European concert career. Not only could this have changed the course of his career, but it might have enabled early-twentieth-century reception of Black music in Europe twenty years before Roland Hayes' groundbreaking appearances on those stages. Though Burleigh was no doubt sincerely in love with Louise, their precipitous nuptials meant, more than ever, that he must maintain his patronage positions and strive to grow his recital career.

So, Louise became a stay-a-home mother, isolated in Brooklyn, while Burleigh enjoyed a vibrant collaborative circle of artists at the Marshall Hotel. She must have seethed at her lot. But this was probably Burleigh's idea of what a reputable marriage looked like, even though most of his friends in theatre and music had fellow entertainers as wives.

From 1898 to 1902, seven of Burleigh's friends married fellow writers, singers, dancers, and actors. But, for a variety of reasons, these couplings rarely had staying power. The demands of showbiz life meant that most of them remained childless, and many ended with the divorce or early death of one or both partners.

Williams met his wife Lottie Thompson, a Chicagoan actor, singer, and dancer, on the set of *Senegambian Carnival*. Eight years his senior, she joined the show in 1900 during its run in Boston. They married that year and remained close to the Burleighs, vacationing with them and moving together to Harlem in 1910. Unlike others, the Williams remained married until Bert's untimely death in 1922 at forty-seven. They had no children.⁴¹³

⁴¹² "Passing Show," *Colored American Magazine*, Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 195.

⁴¹³ Camille Forbes, *Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America's First Black Star* (Basic Civitas Books, 2008), 80–2.

Other marriages of Burleigh's close friends in Black bohemia were even more troubling than the Cooks'. Paul Laurence Dunbar was at the peak of his career when he raped his fiancée, Alice Ruth Moore, in November 1897, causing her to seek medical treatment for internal injuries. This presaged their sudden marriage, either out of shame or fear on Alice's part, for Dunbar threatened to seek sexual pleasures elsewhere if she did not elope with him. In 1902, the journalist T. Thomas Fortune accused him of trying to murder Alice, who was also a published writer and poet. Dunbar beat her for over two years, until she finally left him after Fortune's intervention. They separated in 1902, with no children. Dunbar died in 1906.⁴¹⁴

George W. Walker married his professional partner and wife, Aida Overton, when she was a nineteen-year-old teenager. The Walkers were one of the most admired Black theatrical couples. Still, George's extramarital affairs were legendary, especially with White women. He died in 1911 at the age of thirty-nine; the cause was publicly stated as pneumonia but privately known to be complications from syphilis. Aida's death in 1914 of kidney failure at thirty-four years old was possibly related to Walker's syphilis. They had no children.⁴¹⁵

Then there was Ernest Hogan who married his wife, singer Mattie Wilkes, around 1901 but the two divorced before he died in 1909. Bob Cole married his professional partner, dancer Stella Wiley, in 1894. They divorced before Cole's death by drowning in 1911 and had no children. Amongst this cohort, only James and Rosamond Johnson married their wives a decade after their friends. Perhaps influenced by the sadness and misery of some of these couplings, they chose partners not involved in entertainment.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ Eleanor Alexander, *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow: The Courtship and Marriage of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore* (New York University Press, 2001), 4–5; Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 186.

⁴¹⁵ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 186; Aida Overton Walker, in "Aida Overton Walker: Female African-American Superstar," *American Vaudeville Museum*, University of Arizona, accessed July 29, 2025.

⁴¹⁶ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 186; "Ernest Hogan's Retirement," *The Freeman*, 1908.

But this group of friends, despite their marriages, but facing similar personal and professional challenges, stuck with and supported one another. As a result of sharing their lives and creative imaginations, this collective of performers created a vibrant and risk-taking contingent of Black brilliance in theatre and music.

Burleigh in Europe

Once Burleigh abandoned any aspirations for the stage, it was logical to aspire to further his singing career in Europe. Black art musicians a generation older than Burleigh had found the concert halls and salons welcoming there: the soprano Elizabeth Greenfield toured England in the 1850s; tenor Sidney Woodward (1860–1924), Flora Batson (1870–1906) and Sissieretta Jones (1868–1933) all toured Europe, and some as far as Australia and Africa. Since European concertizing evidently opened more doors than in America, Burleigh headed to Europe in the summer of 1908, his only documented concert tour abroad.⁴¹⁷

St. George's vestrymen J. P. Morgan and Booker T. Washington opened the gilded doors of London with letters of introduction to royalty, aristocrats, and, importantly, the American ambassador. Burleigh's long-anticipated European concertizing trip came to fruition as he and his wife Louise set sail from New York on May 21, 1908, leaving their son Alston in the care of his grandmother, Ray Farley, in Washington, D.C. In an extant travel journal, Burleigh's entries burst with enthusiasm during his first crossing of the Atlantic.

On its pages, he meticulously chronicled the time, speed, latitude and longitude at noon each day, how many minutes he adjusted his watch to coordinate with their eastward travel, and the changing light on the ocean's colours. The diary pages portray someone who had long dreamt of this voyage and embraced it with a schoolboy's joy. And he knew others onboard, notably the wife of Frank Stuart Armond. Along with Philip A. Payton, Jr., Armond had founded the Afro-American Realty Company in 1904, which was busy buying

⁴¹⁷ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 112, 305–6; "Choosers," *Music Hall and Theatre Review*, 1908.

up buildings in Harlem to overcome housing segregation there. Burleigh also knew a St. George's couple, Mr. and Mrs. Wood, who, unlike him, travelled First Class.⁴¹⁸

Spending much time on deck, he was keen to watch changes in the weather. While Louise accompanied him, she remains largely absent from his narrative, other than to note that when she rose at 8:30 a.m., this was “pretty early for her.” He rose between 5 and 6:30 a.m. and ate breakfast alone. This distance portended future differences in their relationship, as will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Burleigh's journal referred in passing to “incidents of our stay in London I have recorded in my small pocket diary (places visited, singing engagements, et al.)” Sadly, that document remains undiscovered, so there are no details of his performance programming.⁴¹⁹ The surviving journal, written partly in German, Italian, and French, did note that he attended the opera *Madame Butterfly* at Covent Garden, where he saw the royal family. On Sunday, Burleigh attended services at St. Paul's Cathedral and reported hearing “the most impressive services.” Louise remained absent in these entries.⁴²⁰

The American Ambassador, Whitlaw Reid, coordinated much of the tour. A lifelong friend of John Hay, the previous Ambassador to the Court of St. James, Reid and Hay both valued Black talent. In 1897, Hay supported the efforts of his fellow Ohioan, the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, by arranging a concert at the Salle Erard in Great Marlborough Street with Black British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Reid and Hay knew the calibre of talent they were introducing to London's elite.⁴²¹

Ambassador Reid arranged for a recital for King Edward VI and Queen Alexandra on July 7 at the home of the Earl of Lonsdale. Later the same evening, Burleigh performed

⁴¹⁸ Kevin McGruder, *Philip Payton: The Father of Black Harlem* (Columbia University Press, 2021); Burleigh, “My Trips Abroad 1908–1937.”

⁴¹⁹ Burleigh, “My Trips Abroad 1908–1937.”

⁴²⁰ Burleigh, “My Trips Abroad 1908–1937.”

⁴²¹ Jeffrey Green, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, a Musical Life* (Routledge, 2011), 65–7.

for the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland at Stafford House near St. James's Palace. With typical modesty about his reception, Burleigh noted, "I think the King like my voice." He then sang for the King's niece, the Crown Princess of Sweden, and her parents, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. At Dorchester House, he performed for Ambassador Reid and his wife and their guests, including Mrs. Bradley-Martin, whose infamous \$400,000 ball in 1897 created a backlash toward American aristocracy.⁴²²

Lord and Lady Algernon Gordon-Lennox invited Burleigh to sing for their guests at Broughton Castle, just north of Oxford in Banbury. Accordingly, Burleigh tried to arrange a meeting with Alain Locke, the first African American Rhodes Scholar, at Oxford 1907–1910. Later, he became a writer, literary critic, and significant contributor to the Harlem Renaissance. But Burleigh and Locke never got to meet, because the capricious hostess of Broughton Castle changed the times for Burleigh's recital several times, eventually asking him to sing at 10 p.m. after dinner. This scuttled their plans for Burleigh to see the "city of dreaming spires."⁴²³

Burleigh's recitals in England were so successful that he planned to return the following summer with "a big public recital" because "royalty has put a stamp of approval on his singing." One person who heard him play to King Edward was Lady Mary Paget, an American heiress. She then carried her approbation back to New York, for in February 1909 she requested him for the musical entertainment at a dinner at the Plaza Hotel given by Frederick Townsend Martin, considered "the beau Brummel of New York's 'Four Hundred.'"⁴²⁴

As a result of continuing aristocratic patronage, Burleigh did return to England for three months in the summer of 1909. This time, he and Louise were accompanied by her

⁴²² Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 156; Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 1990, 44.

⁴²³ Letters: Harry T. Burleigh to Alain Locke, June 24, 26, and 27, 1908, Box 18, Folder 19, Alain Locke Papers, Coll. 164, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴²⁴ "Lady Mary Paget Dinner," *The Appeal*, February 20, 1909.

mother, Ray Farley, and Alston. Perhaps anticipating that concertizing in England would lead to a European performance career, they placed Alston, aged nine, at Malden College, a boarding school in Surrey. He remained there until 1914 when war broke out in France.⁴²⁵

Burleigh's British agents, Ashton and Mitchell's Royal Agency, advertised him in 1909 as a recitalist. Capitalizing on the exoticization of African Americans, they characterized him as "an interpreter and revealer of his people," even though he sang "a most varied program, ranging from the classical song to the genuine songs of the Negroes." This advertisement situated Burleigh like many other singers who followed him – Roland Hayes, Marian Anderson, and Paul Robeson – as biologically different and sonically unique, even as audiences praised his artistry and art music vocal prowess.⁴²⁶

One sentence in Burleigh's travelogue hints at how he maintained equanimity with the racial othering he experienced on this trip and throughout his career. Inside the back cover of his travel journal he wrote, "There is something sublime in man's complete indifference to any but his own requirements," a translation, perhaps Burleigh's own, from Kant's *Remarks on the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). It demonstrates both his inclination to Germanic philosophy, and how he grounded himself in self-validation and personal standards while performing in aristocratic salons; he needed to counter the White assumptions he endured every day in conversation, comments, and his consciousness.⁴²⁷

This period coincided with a series of losses in the Marshall Circle. Taken together, these changes may partly explain why Burleigh abandoned any dreams of an extended recital career in Europe. Many years were to elapse before he returned to Europe. In the interim,

⁴²⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 197–98.

⁴²⁶ "For All The Best Known." *Morning Post*. 1909; Thurman, "The German Lied," 274–76.

⁴²⁷ Burleigh, "My Trips Abroad 1908–1937"; Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Patrick Frierson (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

his compositional career turned into his economic mainstay, along with his steady work at St. George's, Temple Emanu-El, and his music editorship at G. Ricordi.

If Burleigh ever considered trying a singing career abroad, three factors likely curtailed that notion. First, the family entanglements of a hasty marriage and the need to provide for a family kept him tied to his patronage positions. Second, those commitments at St. George's and Temple Emanu-El kept him engaged from October to June, the height of the concert season, thereby limiting his European prospects. Finally, the death of his two powerful patrons – Morgan in 1913 and Washington in 1915 – ended his access to their networks.

Louise strikes out on her own

During Burleigh's 1908 European singing tour, his reception was so successful that it seemed an international recital career was possible; but given ensuing events, it is more likely that Louise instigated this move, since it finally freed her from work-a-day motherhood to return to the stage. She had been isolated while watching Burleigh's jovial and collaborative friendships with the artists working out of the Marshall Hotel for the past nine years. Now it was her turn for a creative life.

During the heyday of the creative collective, the Marshall Circle, Louise forged her writing career without any of the collegial support and intellectual synergy her husband enjoyed across town at the Marshall Hotel. But she never gave up working on her poetry. From 1905 to 1907, she published in *The Colored American Magazine*. The fact that Booker T. Washington purchased the magazine in 1904 and worked each summer with her husband at that point likely aided this opportunity. However, this was not her first literary foray. At sixteen years old, a year before meeting Burleigh, she was called a "talented Washington poetess" by the *Indianapolis Freeman*, which published her early work. But any literary or performance aspirations were effectively killed when she became pregnant towards the end

of 1898. However, she continued writing unpublished between 1904 and 1906, as evidenced by Burleigh's four settings of her poems as art songs.⁴²⁸

Even early in her marriage, Louise indicated her independence by keeping her family name alongside Burleigh's. She was recorded as Louise Alston Burleigh in the U.S. Census in 1900 and 1910. National, decennial censuses tell more of Louise's evolution in identity. In the 1900 census, she gave no occupation but noted she had a one-year-old child. Evidence of the reclamation of her creative life is seen in the 1910 census, when she listed her occupation as "poetess" and "woman of letters." Freedom for an artistic life distinct from the famous "St. George's baritone" had strained their marriage to breaking point.

Either Louise pressured her husband, or the Burleighs made a mutual decision to send their son to an English boarding school in 1909. Transplanting nine-year-old Alston to Malden College was probably prompted by his father's concertizing successes the previous year. A European touring career seemed within reach. England would be a safe and central place for their son while his father performed abroad. Burleigh, a well-known anglophile, may also have believed that British education would give his son superior opportunities compared to the United States.⁴²⁹

Prioritizing the career aspirations of both parents meant a family life of constant separation. But a career in Europe never materialized for Burleigh, in part because of the disintegration of their marriage. For Louise's part, after Alston was in England, she tired of being the catch-all person for the household while Burleigh travelled widely. Having her son across the ocean gave Louise space to be the full-time artist she desired. In 1909, on the trip to take Alston to boarding school, Louise performed in London for the first time in the persona of a First Nations character, "Princess Red Feather." This appears to have been a

⁴²⁸ Burleigh, "Poetry," *Colored American Magazine*, 1905; Burleigh, "Poetry," *Colored American Magazine*, 1906; Burleigh, "Poetry," *Colored American Magazine*, 1907; "Bethel Literary Society," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1897.

⁴²⁹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 290.

trial run of what became a long career representing herself as an eroticized First Nations woman. Little did she know at the time, but there was a genuine woman of similar name, Princess Tsianina Redfeather. This “princess” appeared regularly singing with the American composer Charles Wakefield Cadman; she confronted Louise and demanded she change her stage name.⁴³⁰

Louise was not yet ready to abandon her pursuit as poetess, however. In 1910, she moved from publishing her poems to performing. Reviews began to describe her as “A reader without equal” of her dialect poetry. As of 1910, she no longer performed as Mrs. Harry T. Burleigh but as Louise Alston Burleigh. During these few years, Burleigh supported her efforts to have an artistic career. He wrote a set of “plantation songs” that incorporated her poems for recitation, which they performed together in 1911. Some considered the work a worthy successor to Dunbar’s.⁴³¹

Much as Louise seems to have been trying for an artistic life separate from Harry, her poetry leveraged her husband’s work. In 1911, she produced *Echoes from the Southland*, clearly a title imitative of Burleigh’s piano and violin sketches *From the Southland*, published in 1904, 1907, and 1910. Also in 1911, she was “reciting and singing the old Negro spirituals,” emulating the body of work associated with her better-known husband.⁴³²

However, a substantial career as poetess eluded Louise. In 1910, the couple moved to Harlem with Bert and Lottie Williams, to be surrounded by some of the best and brightest Black artists. It is hard, therefore, to comprehend why the Burleighs moved again in two years: this time to the East Bronx in 1912. Probably because their marriage was increasingly fraught, this relocation functioned as a face-saving gesture, affording a physical distance from

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 197.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 198–201.

⁴³² “Gives Successful Recital.” *New York Age*. 1911.

their community and distancing the reality of their relationship. But it left Louise totally isolated again.⁴³³

This new neighbourhood was very comfortable for Harry, but not for Louise. According to the 1915 census, this area was a White area with many Jewish neighbours from Russia, Austria, and Germany. Yiddish and German, both of which Burleigh spoke, were the *lingua franca* on these streets of the East Bronx in 1912, further exacerbating Louise's sense of alienation. Burleigh's multiple careers remained an easy subway ride to St. George's and Temple Emanu-El; but there was no easily accessible route from the east Bronx to Harlem. All the key people and institutions, like St. Phillip's Church, the newly formed Music Settlement School for Colored People, and the cultural center of the 135th Street Branch of the public library, had moved to Harlem. Any tether Louise hoped to maintain to the Black community was effectively severed.⁴³⁴

Whatever their private negotiations, the couple did not accommodate each other's creative ambitions. By 1912, Louise was planning European engagements and went on an extended tour of Florida with the celebrated singer and Harry's close friend, Abbie Mitchell. Reviewers wrote that her onstage presence was "full of soul and [she] reads with a spirit that wins her audience." The positive press encouraged her toward an entirely new career direction, out from under Burleigh's large artistic shadow.⁴³⁵

Burlesque

Perhaps the geographical separation from the Black community in Harlem beginning in 1912 explains why, when Louise began performing full-time, she eschewed her identity as African American. In 1913, she performed in London again as "Princess Red Feather" in a program produced by Hiawatha Coleridge-Taylor, son of the recently deceased composer. The press

⁴³³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 127; "Gives Successful Recital." *New York Age*. 1911.

⁴³⁴ New York State, *State Census, 1915*, population schedule, [civil division, e.g., Manhattan Ward 12], 77–78. Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 25.

⁴³⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 201; "Gives Successful Recital." *New York Age*. 1911.

contextualized her “Red Feather” persona as “Louise Alston Burleigh, wife of the celebrated colored baritone of New York.” The article described her as a “writer, poetess, and actress.”⁴³⁶

But Louise found this insistent association with her husband an insult to being an artist in her own right. Upon her return to New York, there were no more recitations of her poetry, and she no longer associated herself in the press with Burleigh. Instead, despite the previous challenge, she resumed her “Red Feather” identity in various burlesque houses where her singing was described as “the musical feature of the show.” There was no further reference to her husband in subsequent press coverage.⁴³⁷

While it is known that Burleigh’s maternal grandmother was half Scottish and half First Nations, Louise’s connections are less clear. Her father perhaps had Cherokee connections. But she seemingly either believed or conjured a full biography from scant familial history, enhanced with incredible claims. In June 1914, fully immersed in being a “real Indian,” she fabricated a history to anchor her claims by adding a fictitious but sensational familial connection as the “grandniece of a Custer Scout,” one of the only two survivors of the massacre at Little Big Horn.⁴³⁸

One must wonder how Burleigh was affected by his wife’s move into impersonation and burlesque. He was undoubtedly chagrined by the increasingly fantastic tales she spun to advance her career, especially in New York where both were well-known. His effort to distance himself from the stage was not about snobbery, for he supported his closest friends in theatre work. However, having his wife pursue such a career alone might have been the breaking point in their relationship.

⁴³⁶ “Pension for Mrs. Coleridge-Taylor.” *The Norwood News*. 1913.

⁴³⁷ “Burlesque Season,” *New York Tribune*, 1914; “Burlesque Theatres” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 1913; “The ‘Liberty Girls’ at the Empire.” *The Chat*. 1913.

⁴³⁸ “Beautiful Indian Prima Donna.” *Buffalo Times*. 1914; “Burlesque Season.” *New York Tribune*. 1914; “‘Big Jubilee’ for Brooklyn Casino.” *The Evening World*. 1915.

While likely not uppermost in Harry's mind at the time, Louise's performance in burlesque shows put Burleigh's vocal teaching career in jeopardy, especially with his several young White vocal students. Even upper-class Black families regularly preferred White instructors for their children's dance and music lessons, assuming they would deliver the desired culture and gentility. Therefore, Burleigh's position was already tenuous. Any known connection to "show people" was a severe detriment, as parents on both side of the color line eschewed anyone associated with the theatre's "awful reputation."⁴³⁹

Though the 1915 New York census still listed the couple as living together at 832 West 166th Street in the Bronx, this was a fabrication. Press notices showing Louise's extensive travel once they relocated to the Bronx in 1912 suggest that the separation began shortly after this move. By 1914, Louise had started a relationship with Albert Lowe of the Winnebago Nation in Wisconsin. Lowe came to work on the New York subway and began performing with Louise in her persona of "Princess Red Feather." Lowe served in the army during the war, after which the couple settled in Chicago where Lowe worked on the elevated train system. Their summers were spent in Mirror Lake, Wisconsin, where Louise began performing as an Ojibway, "Princess Nadonis Shawa." This time she purported to be the great-granddaughter of a ninety-six-year-old Ojibwe named Chief Black Eagle. Lowe left Louise to marry a First Nations woman, after which she continued as a solo act. She suppressed her African American identity and her connection with Burleigh for the rest of her life.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ Adelaide M. Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins: Boston's Black Upper Class, 1750-1950* (University of Arkansas Press, 1994.),57; Locke and Barr, *Cultivating Music in America*, 218–19.

⁴⁴⁰ "New York State Census 1915"; "Indian Princess One of Dancers at 'Rose Festival.'" *Montclair Times*. 1915; David Peterson, Research Materials on Princess Nadonis Shawa, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 8–10.

Figure 7.1 Louise performing as Princess Nadonis Shawa



Conclusion

So many marriages within the Marshall Circle ended prematurely through estrangement or death. Harry and Louise both lived long lives and had a child together, but the raising of their son, along with Burleigh's handling of his wife's ambitions, doomed their relationship from the start.

As successful and glittering as Burleigh's life appeared to outsiders at the time, the disappointment of their marriage prompted him to isolate himself in the Bronx. This was just when Harlem was becoming the home of most Black New Yorkers and a mecca for waves of immigrants from the South. Burleigh was a celebrity guest at the A'Leila Walker's famous salon, The Dark Tower, along with artists Zora Neal Hurston, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Wallace Thurman, Duke Ellington, Ethel Waters, W. C. Handy, and Paul Robeson, so he led a robust and busy career; but he became a lonely man.

On the one hand, New York was lit up with jazz and the literati of the Harlem Renaissance, carving new Black identities, sounds, and stories; but on the other hand, his belongingness was rooted in his work at G. Ricordi, singing at St. George's and Temple Emanu-El, and teaching vocal students and mentoring the next generation of Black singers and composers. It was a full and rewarding life, but one bereft of family life.

Chapter 8

Black Café Culture at Marshall Hotel – 1895 to 1912

Introduction

For a shining moment in his long career, Burleigh was part of a robust creative community pushing the boundaries in music and music theatre in New York. Just as friendship and geographic proximity were key ingredients in the generative space of White café culture into which Dvořák brought Burleigh, so the same elements produced a Black café culture of equal generative power. As a result, the creators of early Black musical theatre and minstrelsy wrestled a new measure of control from White impresarios, becoming genuine American celebrities who retained unprecedented economic control over their work.⁴⁴¹

The generative quality of this circle of collaboration was grounded in superb talent during a brief period when Black-produced theatre thrived in the city. Part of the success of this circle was the café culture they developed at the Marshall Hotel on West 53rd Street. That culture was playful, innovative, and supportive for the work each was interested in pursuing. Unlike the Black male clubs nearby, they were not homosocial. Many of the founding women of Black musical theatre were integral to its development and married Burleigh's closest friends. Unlike Louise, equally keen about a life onstage, these women had no children and were not isolated far away in Brooklyn.

Dallying with Black musical theatre

Around the same time that Burleigh was establishing himself at the National Conservatory, a migratory shift was afoot. While the "Great Migration" was not fully underway in the 1890s, a Black artistic migration had begun. From 1893 to 1910, Burleigh's circle of fellow creatives set their sights on conquering the capital of the nation's theatre industry, New York City.

⁴⁴¹ Riis, *Just before Jazz*, xx–xxiii.

They came from all over the country: Bahama then California (Bert Williams), Florida (James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson), Ohio (Paul Laurence Dunbar and Jesse A. Shipp), Illinois (Lottie Williams), Georgia (Bob Cole), Tennessee (Alex C. Rogers), Kansas (George W. Walker), Kentucky (Ernest Hogan), Virginia, New Jersey (Mattie Wilkes), Washington, D.C. (Will Cook), and some from New York (Abbie Mitchell, Aida Overton Walker). Burleigh, Cook, and Bob Cole were early members in developing this creative, collaborative friendship circle. In the late 1890s, they settled in the northern tip of the segregated Tenderloin district.

Together these composers, playwrights, actors, comedians, singers, dancers, choreographers, and conservatory-trained musicians created an effervescent blossoming of artistic possibility well before the better-known Harlem Renaissance. Furthermore, working within the confines allowed them by White gatekeepers, these creatives shifted expectations of minstrel performance by infusing their songs with the love, laughter, and hope of Black experience and away from derogatory Black types in minstrelsy such as razor-toting, watermelon-eating fools.⁴⁴²

For the first time, African Americans maintained control by writing, producing, and starring in vehicles of their creation. For Burleigh, this control was more limited by his job at St. George's, but he retained agency by composing and programming his recitals. On the surface, it may seem incongruous that Burleigh, who worked solely in art music, found deep friendships with the vaudevillians and Black-faced minstrels drawn to New York City at the end of the nineteenth century. However, together they worked in White-controlled industries where they disrupted expectations with exceptional creativity.

Scholars have studied the men of early Black theatre much more than the women. However, nearly all of Burleigh's friends and colleagues from the mid-1890s onwards were

⁴⁴² Ibid.

married to fellow artists. Many worked as professional partners before marrying, and had no children, perhaps by choice as two-person professional couples. While misogyny and men-on-women violence were as ubiquitous in this population as any other, Burleigh's work sphere was the opposite of the homosocial norm in many work environments of this period. Women were present, necessary collaborators in popular entertainment and musical performance, though their inequity in treatment and pay remained.

In 1898, Bob Cole and Billy Johnson produced their show, *A Trip to Coontown*, which was considered the first Black musical in America. Their efforts inspired Will Marion Cook, who had abandoned his career at the Conservatory by then. Cook and poet Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote a skit musical based on the popular "cakewalk" dance. *Clorindy, Origin of the Cakewalk* opened in 1898, starring popular comedian Ernest Hogan and his partner, Belle Davis. Early Black musical theater had a greater impact than just busting down the color line on Broadway. And they did so without blackface, which was both innovative and risky given the racial climate of the period, because they dared a more realistic representation of Black life, albeit attenuated with the comic tools of vaudeville.⁴⁴³

That was not the only daring aspect of these new productions disrupting the tropes of blackface minstrelsy. These early forays in Black popular music and theatre were in conversation with the musical discussion at the National Conservatory. The Black community began to recognize their unique contribution to representation in music culture. One 1899 commentary asserted the Black nationalist claim: "...America has a glorious musical future" based on the those whose "unparalleled sufferings in a strange land found voice in song," and "musical feeling...[which] must play some part...in this coming future." Interacting with Dvořák, Burleigh connected Black music with America's nationalist musical sound, whether in the music hall or onstage.

⁴⁴³ Abbott, *Out of Sight*, 151–63; Bert Williams, "I Want to Know Where Tosti Went (When He Said Goodbye)," composed by Smith, recorded September 7, 1920, Columbia A3305, David Giovannoni Collection, i78s.org, 33.

Mentorship and support

One of Burleigh's contributions to these early productions was musical mentorship, his life-long commitment to assisting musicians. Just as Thurber's requirement that only "talented" musicians receive Conservatory scholarships, so Burleigh had no time for middling talent and effort. Therefore, when he heard Abbie Mitchell audition for *Clorindy*, he immediately became her tutor.

Mitchell was born on the Lower East Side of New York to a German-Jewish father and African American mother; she was orphaned at twelve years old and went to live with her aunt on West 33rd Street, where she was discovered by the Black comedian Billy English who lived in the same complex. Abbie regularly sang on the fire escape, and upon hearing her, English told Mitchell's aunt, "That child's voice has money in it; she could easily earn fifty bucks – send her to Cook!" At fourteen years old, Abbie went to the Casino Theater Roof Garden where Cook was rehearsing *Clorindy*. She approached Cook, telling him English sent her. "Yes. Where's your music? What do you sing? Do you know any Negro songs?" asked Cook. 'No,' Abbie recalled replying quite pertly. 'I'm a nice girl. I only sing classics.' He laughed and pulled his hat further down over his eyes." Burleigh, however, pulled her aside, saying, "Come here, little girl, sing a scale for me." Cook and Dunbar listened while Burleigh coached her singing "Ave Maria."⁴⁴⁴

Cook hired her for 35 dollars a week to join the cast of *Clorindy*. Burleigh and Cook gave the young singer an "immersion course in music," taking her to the Metropolitan Opera, where in her enthusiasm she jumped up several times during the performance only to have Burleigh's hand gently remind her of the etiquette of the opera house. Promising to continue her schooling on the road with "Mrs. M.," who had two daughters in the show, Cook persuaded her family to let her join their tour. Mitchell was left vulnerable and alone

⁴⁴⁴ Carter, *Swing Along*, 47–48.

when “Mrs. M.” and her daughters left the production. But she persevered, earning the leading female role while touring with the show. With her as lead singer, the production was so successful that Cook was recognized as a marketable composer of musicals, earned royalties, and published his music with Witmark.⁴⁴⁵

In the summer of 1899, Cook took the thirteen-year-old Mitchell to London between tours. She returned pregnant and bore their daughter, Marion Abigail, in March 1900 when she had just turned sixteen. Writing to Alain Locke, Cook said, “Keep it quiet – I refused to marry her until long afterward [giving birth]. And even then twas a mistake. I’m no family man. Shall never ‘stay put’ even after I’m dead.”⁴⁴⁶

Cook’s abdication of responsibility left Mitchell bereft financially, so Burleigh arranged her audition with his agents, Brooks and Denton. She immediately received a job singing in a Fifth Avenue salon, which paid her 35 dollars. This led to recommendations for regular singing opportunities for the Astors, Belmonts, Morgans, and Vanderbilts. Apparently repentant, Cook began accompanying her recitals, and the couple married in 1901 when their daughter was seven months old.⁴⁴⁷

Mitchell and Cook divorced in 1908 after Abbie bore their second child, Mercer Cook. Despite Cook’s abusive and threatening behaviour after their divorce, Abbie continued working with him throughout her career. She also frequently collaborated with Burleigh. In turn, she became mentor and teacher to aspiring musicians, such as Margaret Bonds.⁴⁴⁸

Burleigh also assisted his fellow artists in material ways. When *Clorindy* premiered in July 1898, Cook, ever struggling to rub two pennies together, needed help attiring for his

⁴⁴⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 164; Carter, *Swing Along*, 50–51.

⁴⁴⁶ Carter, *Swing Along*, 53.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁴⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 181.

conductor role. One friend, Charles W. Anderson, lent him his oversized full-dress coat and Burleigh lent his vest, which did not fit well on the tall Cook.⁴⁴⁹

Publishers rushed to bring the *Clorindy* songs to market. The success of this modest, hour-long show caused Will Cook to declare, “Negroes were at last on Broadway, and there to stay.” Dunbar was embarrassed on the opening night: sitting in the audience, he heard his lyrics as “in the worst of the minstrel tradition,” but that did not discourage him from immediately trying again with Cook. They expanded *Clorindy* into the *Senegambian Carnival*, starring Bert Williams and George W. Walker, which premiered in August 1898. At that point, Burleigh may have considered throwing his lot in with Cook, Williams, and Walker. But everything changed when he fell in love with Louise, a dancer in the show, and got her pregnant.⁴⁵⁰

The Marshall Circle

The men of the Black theatre community coalesced not only around work but around play. In 1896, Bert Williams and his partner, George Walker, came to New York to star in the operetta *Gold Bug* by Burleigh’s friend, Victor Herbert. The duo set down roots in a large flat on West 53rd Street, the uppermost tip of the Tenderloin. They furnished it and “threw doors open to all colored men who possessed theatrical and musical ability and ambition.” Walker recalled that their apartment became the “headquarters of all the young artistic men of our race who were stage-struck.” Having this open and welcoming space changed the dynamic of the Black theatre world at the time, and also Burleigh’s life. As a result, Williams, Walker and fellow thespians Bob Cole, Ernest Hogan, and Paul Laurence Dunbar became more than professional colleagues; they became Burleigh’s inner circle of friends.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Carter, *Swing Along*, 41; Anderson was one of Burleigh’s Douglass Club companions who challenged compliance to the Malby law in 1895.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 43; Aida Overton Walker, “The Negro on the American Stage,” *The Colored American Magazine* 11, no. 5 (November 1906).

⁴⁵¹ Walker, “American Stage,” 274. *The Colored American Magazine*. 1906.

In 1900, two Black-owned hotels opened on the same block as Williams and Walker's flat. The Maceo Hotel catered to clergy and businessmen, while the Marshall Hotel attracted Black celebrities: musicians, actors, boxers, and jockeys. When J. Rosamond and James Weldon Johnson moved from Jacksonville to New York to pursue musical theatre, they saw the block as a gravitational center for Black elite life. James Weldon Johnson was effusive in his assessment: "A sudden social change" had occurred with the availability of this new space for "a fashionable sort of life" that did not exist before in Manhattan.⁴⁵²

Previously, establishments serving Black people in the Tenderloin were characteristically gin-soaked and rat-infested joints or all-male clubs. Now, Johnson observed, "the sight offered at these hotels, of crowds of well-dressed colored men and women lounging and chatting in the parlors, loitering over their coffee and cigarettes while they talked or listened to the music" was unprecedented. Sunday evening dinners, featuring a four-piece orchestra, became particularly well-attended and had to be booked well in advance. These new hotels also offered luxurious rooms for the Black elite, elsewhere restricted by Jim Crow. Johnson described West 53rd Street as a "Negro mecca," where people could bask in the vibrancy of Black life and entertainment twenty years before Harlem became their center.⁴⁵³

Burleigh and his friends became known collectively as the "Marshall Circle." Having arrived in the city before most of them and embedded with the Conservatory's renowned faculty, he had known the joy of intellectual exchange and sociability in White café culture in a generative and supportive atmosphere. Shared networks, resources, and vibrant exchange of ideas often could advance one's art and career.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Johnson, *Along This Way*, 171.

⁴⁵³ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 53; Jennifer Fronc. *New York Undercover: Private Surveillance in the Progressive Era* (University of Chicago Press, 2009); Johnson, *Along This Way*, 171.

⁴⁵⁴ Shannon King, "The Making of the Negro Mecca: Harlem and the Struggle for Community Rights," in Shannon King, *Whose Harlem is this, anyway?* (New York University Press, 2015), 28–29; Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 53.

Before café culture at the Marshall, the extent of Burleigh's community was Black Brooklyn and his few African American friends at the Conservatory. Now, he was amongst a large group of fellow performers familiar with the treacherous landscape of White patrons, bookers, producers, funders, and audiences. A founding member of "Negro Bohemia," James Weldon Johnson, the best chronicler inside the Marshall Circle, recognized that Burleigh had the pulse of the industry through his friendship with Dvořák and New York's musical elite. Burleigh experienced how geographical proximity was highly generative artistically, because lively debate around café tables enabled new ideas to emerge. Marshall's on West 53rd Street became such a place for these Black cultural figures.

As with White café culture's networking, the Marshall Circle not only played and celebrated together, but also shared insights gleaned from navigating White people and institutions to gain artistic and economic control in the marketplace. Often this information told them who to trust or avoid, because one of the key challenges facing Black artists in this period was protecting their work from appropriation or outright theft.

One such incident involved James and Rosamond leaving Florida for New York with their opera *Tolso* in hand. A friend cautioned them, "because New York was full up pirates waiting to plunder." Indeed, Harry B. Smith and Reginald DeKoven, two of the best White light opera writers at the time, invited the Johnsons to their studio to hear *Tolso*. The visitors were now well-prepared, so when the two White composers laughingly said, "Let's hear it; we might be able to steal something from it," the Johnsons left immediately. Thereafter they were careful whom they collaborated with and rarely shared their work.⁴⁵⁵

This demonstrates the ubiquity of casual theft of African Americans' creative labour. Johnson called that economic lesson "one of the determinative incidents" in his life. Another form of thievery shortened the life of Gussie L. Davis, the popular, prize-winning song

⁴⁵⁵ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 150–51.

writer who, despite his success in song writing, died in penury in 1899 at the age of thirty-three. Blues composer W. C. Handy wrote of Davis, “a great composer can write his heart on a page of notes that thrill the world, and that composer may starve to death...Why should such talent die of want?” True legal protection did not exist until the collective ASCAP was formed in 1914. Along with Burleigh, the Johnson brothers were founding members. Retaining copyright and getting recompense for their literary and musical work remained tenuous until then; they’d had to rely on one another to be informed and savvy about losing control of their work.⁴⁵⁶

Davis’s inability to sell his music was a cautionary tale for Burleigh. After composing some chamber music, he found “songs are the only things it pays publishers to issue. A chamber piece may be played once and forgotten. You can’t get it published. You get a little discouraged and go back to writing song.” Only at the end of his career, when he was financially secure, did Burleigh turn his hand to orchestrating his art songs and spirituals.⁴⁵⁷

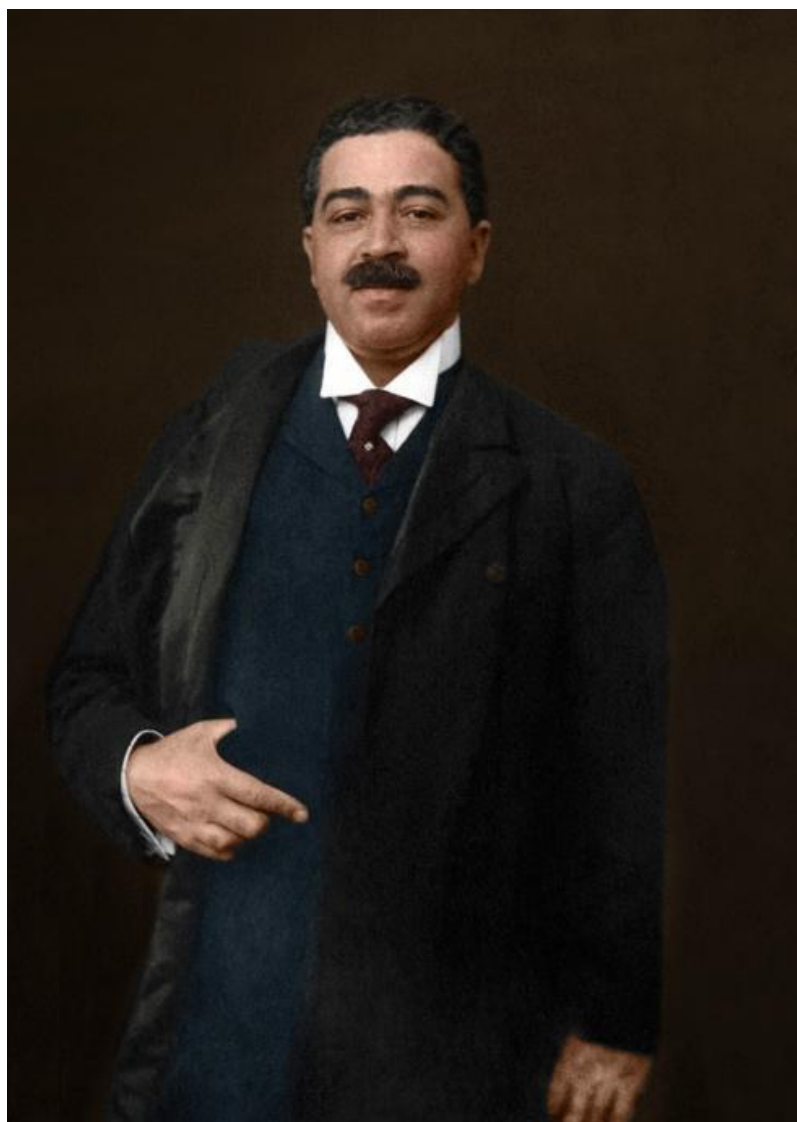
But the Marshall Circle was not solely a defensive space for Black musicians. It was a place to test out music, grapple with artistic ideals, and get feedback. Musically, Burleigh was considered the first among equals, due to what Johnson called his “unique position” as Conservatory-trained, his friendship with Dvořák, and the level of his musicianship. Johnson recalled, “Among us, however, it was as a master that [Burleigh] was held. He was the final authority on all questions in the theory and science of music. In this acceptance, both Cook and my brother, with their own very good musical training, always joined.”⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ W.C. Handy, *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography* (Da Capo Press, 1991), 261.

⁴⁵⁷ Bruce Bastin, *The Melody Man: Joe Davis and the New York Music Scene, 1916-1978* (University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 65–66; “NY Church Pays Tribute,” *Musical America*, 1924.

⁴⁵⁸ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 173–74; Eichler, *Time’s Echo*, 172.

Figure 8.1 Burleigh, looking confidently into the lens, a far cry from the hungry Conservatory student of early 1892



That erudite approach to mastering one's art form was a concept informed by *Bildung* philosophy which Burleigh absorbed during his time with Dvořák, with German and German-trained musicians at the Conservatory, and around the tables at Lüchow's, Fleischman's, and other centres of White café culture. Informed by his ethics, the Johnson brothers and their partner, Bob Cole, set themselves a strict work schedule in their rooms at the Marshall. Rigid rules against interruption were set. Only from Burleigh would they brook disruption, when he "brought along the manuscript of an art song he had just finished and

played it over and over.” Clearly, they saw an opportunity to learn from “a master” who, by sharing his work, challenged and elevated their own. However, within the framework of *Bildung*, artistic mastery was not solely about renovation of oneself through education and diligent work; it was what author Jeremy Eichler called “a life of aesthetic grace,” which carried an obligation toward uplifting the larger community.⁴⁵⁹

As a communal *Bildung* project, the Marshall Circle valued intellectual sparring over philosophical issues. Cole debated with Cook and Burleigh about the “manner and means of raising the status” of their creative community. There was lively interaction about how mastery of their mediums – music, literature, and theatre – was explicitly tied to “uplifting” the race by their artistic endeavours. Though Burleigh may or may not have introduced the German philosophy explicitly, the ethos was highly legible to the Circle, since racial uplift was the dominant strategy for resisting White supremacy at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴⁶⁰

Faced with New York audiences used to European concert pianists, the Marshall Circle sought their own unique orchestral keyboard sound. Moreover, they consciously tried to differentiate the keyboard techniques of Black pianists from other styles. So, they developed “orchestral piano” with “round, big widespread chords” and advanced harmonics and dynamics. James Weldon Johnson incorporated “concert effects” into songs that he, Rosamond, and Bob Cole were developing. The “piano in their hands was an orchestra,” observed jazz pianist Billy Taylor.⁴⁶¹

Burleigh’s deep musicianship situated him as an invaluable teacher, audience, and critic for their efforts. Burleigh’s experience with the Conservatory’s orchestra under the baton of European masters like Dvořák and Frank van der Stucken enabled him to challenge

⁴⁵⁹ Eichler, *Time’s Echo*, 26.

⁴⁶⁰ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 172.

⁴⁶¹ Gilbert, *Product of Our Souls*, 122–23.

and provoke Circle pianists to more adept musical achievements, knowing that keyboard virtuosity was a passport to more sophisticated and unique compositions when combined with the “ragged” music they were creating.

This emphasis on excellence impacted a debate about their role in racial representation. Between Bob Cole and Will Marion Cook there was a difference of opinion on the role of racial representation in their music. Cole, Johnson wrote, “strove for the fine artistic effect, regardless of whether it had any direct relation to the Negro or not,” because he was interested in “matching the White artist on the latter’s own field” – a Burleiguesque perspective. But Cook contended that Black artists should “eschew White patterns” in composition. The Circle was “unanimous on at least one point,” that they doubtlessly could compete against talented White artists. This fresh confidence for the community was an emotional and intellectual claim about Black giftedness and skill. Buoyed by success and the camaraderie of the Marshall Circle, they went on to demonstrate those abilities “on the boards” and in song.⁴⁶²

Like White music’s café society, the Marshall Hotel drew celebrities. However, it was differentiated from the German culture downtown by the White leisure culture of “slumming” or “sightseeing.” The Tenderloin was just north of many of the popular theaters, vaudeville houses, and Black-owned drinking and eating establishments, along with sections of the red-light district. And though 53rd Street was the height of Black sophistication, proximity to Black elites nonetheless felt tantalizingly transgressive to White New Yorkers. James Marshall, owner of Marshall’s Hotel, did not adopt a policy on race-mixing *per se*, but rather he had no policy. Consequently, chauffeur-driven cars dropped off

⁴⁶² Johnson, *Along This Way*, 172–75.

the White aristocracy from uptown mansions to mingle with wealthy Black elites, entertainers, and sport royalty.⁴⁶³

The success and celebrity of African Americans created the Marshall's appeal: it became a "Black-and-tan" establishment, a term used since the 1880s to describe establishments where racial mixing was permissible. The ubiquity of Black entertainers attracted their White counterparts who, as seen in the interaction with the Johnson brothers, often came to steal Black culture. Other White performers who imitated Black people in their performances arrived at the Marshall "to secure firsthand imitations," to further monetize their blackface acts.⁴⁶⁴

Besides the professional camaraderie at the Marshall, it was also a place for these artists to relax in a safe place and have fun. One anecdote, related by Bert Williams, offers a fresh image of Burleigh. William's shabby apartment house on 53rd Street became a meeting place for performers like Will Accooe, Bob Cole, the Johnson brothers, Jesse Shipp. Burleigh, playfully nicknamed "Burly Harry," sat around in his shirt sleeves drinking, talking, and playing endless hands of a poker game called "smut." As Bert Williams explained, "In the center of the table had a sooty plate that we smoked up over the lamp, and the loser of each hand had to smear a daub of the soot on his face as a penalty. Then we would sit around and howl at the grotesque appearance."⁴⁶⁵

Besides diversion and escape, "smut" was part release: they could laugh at the arbitrary way race was used as both determinative and diminishing. Williams, the master comic, observed that the center of his comedy was that "the sight of other people in trouble

⁴⁶³ Mara L. Keire, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890–1933* Studies in Industry and Society (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 51–52; Heap, *Slumming*, 110–11; Jessica Baldwin et al., "Sullivan-Thompson Historic District Designation Report," NYC Landmarks Preservation District, December 13, 2016."

⁴⁶⁴ Dorothy Berry, "When Black Celebrities Wore Blackface," *JSTOR Daily*, March 3, 2021; Jonathan Daigle, "Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Marshall Circle," *African American Review* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 409–426; Jessica Baldwin, Corrine Engelbert, Sarah Moses, and Barrett Reiter, "Sullivan-Thompson Historic District Designation Report," NYC Landmarks Preservation District, December 13, 2016.

⁴⁶⁵ Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 475; Ann Charters, *Nobody: The Story of Bert Williams* (Macmillan, 1970), 35.

is nearly always funny.” The trouble faced by Williams and Walker was the expectation by White audiences of White minstrelsy performed with cork-blackened visages. Therefore, Bert Williams and George Walker had to “cork up” because their skin tone was light. “Smut” was a way of laughing at the “trouble” they were in due to arbitrary racial categorization and unexamined perceptions by White folks.

Black artists working across the color line wore protective masks that accommodated White prejudice while blunting the pain of constantly being racially stereotyped by the dominant White world. Burleigh developed an interiority hidden behind the protective mask of verbal, behavioural, and sartorial self-representation in White spaces. He never slipped but kept his personal life largely out of view.

If one wanted access to the wealth in the White marketplace, navigating White stages with a protective mask was essential. Bert Williams wrote about working within the White Ziegfeld Follies: “I always get on perfectly with everybody in the company by being polite and friendly but keeping my distance.” So, in the emotional comfort and release Burleigh and friends found around the poker table in Williams’ apartment, Burleigh no longer had to pretend and keep up that facade.⁴⁶⁶

Since no letters or diaries of Burleigh’s are currently available, we cannot know what distressing and fraught experiences he had working at St. George’s and in the salons of the Gilded Age aristocracy. But it is reasonable to surmise that it was often emotionally dehumanizing, despite the praise and money he garnered for his singing. So, the collegiality, support, and recreation he enjoyed in the Marshall Circle was essential relief from unremitting racism, not only at St. George’s but on every sidewalk in New York. Also, Black Bohemia was a bulwark against White supremacist violence.

Racial terror, 1900

⁴⁶⁶ Williams, “The Comic Side of Trouble,” 61, *American Magazine*, 1910.

Within six months of the two posh Black-owned hotels opening on West 53rd Street, racial violence engulfed the Tenderloin. It began on Friday August 17 when a Black man knifed a White off-duty policeman who tried to arrest his wife with solicitation. The policeman subsequently died, reputedly from those injuries, and intense White-on-Black attacks ensued.⁴⁶⁷

Rumours about the incident made the next day worse. Black men and women were assaulted, chased, and in one case nearly lynched until intervention by a police squad. In response, small pockets of spontaneous assaults sprang up across the city, which had not seen so much racially targeted violence since the Draft Riots of 1863. Only a summer thunderstorm brought the violence to an end, but not before members of the Marshall Circle were targeted.⁴⁶⁸

Up in their rooms on 53rd Street, Marshall Circle members Bob Cole, Rosamond Johnson, and Billy Johnson were unaware that White-on-Black assaults were happening on the blocks surrounding the Marshall until someone came to their door. They reported that Barry Carter, a friend of Rosamond's, had been beaten and arrested. The messenger warned them to avoid the police station, because a mob was "raging up and down" nearby Eighth Avenue, "attacking any Negroes they found." In the morning, they made their way to Jefferson Market jail to pick up Carter, who never recovered from the severe head beating he received.⁴⁶⁹

According to newspaper reports, police were "not too active in stopping attacks" on African Americans. Indeed, many were seen clubbing those already arrested. The Black-owned *Baltimore Sun* reported that White bystanders were expressing an opinion that this was a result of Black citizens who "had too many privileges and that they abused them." The *New*

⁴⁶⁷ G. Osofsky, "Race Riot, 1900: A study of Ethnic Violence," *Journal of Negro Education* (1963): 20.

⁴⁶⁸ "Where Difference Lies," *The Baltimore Sun*, 1900; "Police in Control of Riotous District," *New York Times*, 1900.

⁴⁶⁹ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 1990, 157–58.

York Times wrote that so many Black residents of the Tenderloin were targeted that it required fifteen police wagons to take all the prisoners to court on 54th Street.⁴⁷⁰

Those “privileges” of money and celebrity on display at the Marshall incited White rioters. Posters advertising the wildly popular minstrel act of Williams and Walker were furiously torn down. Johnson recalled Circle people being threatened by mobs yelling, “Get Hogan, Williams and Walker, Cole and Johnson” as they rampaged. The better known the victims were, the more endangered by mob violence. The *New York Journal* reported that Walker himself was dragged off a Sixth Avenue streetcar by a growing crowd who recognized him. He was knocked senseless and trampled by the crowd until a group of police beat them back and carried him to a nearby hotel. However, other victims who fled to the police for protection were simply pushed back toward the mobs.⁴⁷¹

Ernest Hogan was initially unaware of the rioting and emerged from his show at the Winter Garden Theatre to face a mob at 44th Street and Eighth Avenue. On recognizing him, they cried, “Get the nigger.” Hogan dropped his cane and ran towards Broadway, escaping only when he reached the lobby of the Marlborough Hotel where the house detective held the mob off with his revolver. As one scholar has argued, these blackface minstrels and vaudeville performers were conflated with the “coon” characters they portrayed. One review of Hogan’s show, for example, said his onstage character was “representative of a particular quality of his race in real life, making him a particular target as well.”⁴⁷²

During the riots, African Americans who appeared to White folks as ostentatious were especially targeted. Paul Dunbar was drugged in a bar and robbed of his \$150 diamond ring and watch. Another man, whom the *New York Sun* described as a “sassy, chesty coon”

⁴⁷⁰ “Where Difference Lies,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1900; “Riots Speedily Stopped,” *New York Sun*, 1900; “Police in Control of Riotous District,” *New York Times*, 1900.

⁴⁷¹ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 41; Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 126–28.

⁴⁷² Daigle, “Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Marshall Circle,” 340–41; Sampson, *The Ghost Walks*, 221–22.

because of his “most distinguishing sartorial appointment,” was chased by a mob until the police intervened. Though Burleigh was a fine dresser, he chose to present himself with understated elegance, in contrast to Dunbar’s ostentatiousness. The terrifying response to Black fame and wealth taught Burleigh to always keep a low profile.⁴⁷³

There is currently no information about Burleigh’s whereabouts during the riots. At this point he and Louise were living in Brooklyn. In the aftermath, however, he and the Marshall Circle discussed these terrifying experiences. The violence undercut some of the confidence they gained from early career success and a sense of safety in the Black Bohemia.

These incidents also drove home to Burleigh that his dalliance in musical theatre should end. He later reflected that the large salary and celebrity of musical theatre and vaudeville had tempted him, but following the riots, he took seriously his mother’s admonition to turn down such offers which inevitably came his way. Without such a steady patronage position, Burleigh may well have taken the path of popular music to make a living, despite the perils that sort of stardom attracted from White folks.⁴⁷⁴

The year 1900 became a pivot in Burleigh’s life. First, the riots reoriented his attention to an art music performance career, which took off when he earned two more prestigious singing positions. He began twenty-five years of singing in the choir at Temple Emanu-El, known to be as consequential in wealth and Gilded Age congregants as St. George’s. And for fifteen summers, beginning this year, Burleigh travelled with the best-known “race man” in America, Booker T. Washington, on his summer fundraising trips in the North.

Also, Burleigh’s music publishing career improved exponentially once he shifted publishers from G. Schirmer to Maxwell Music. Between 1896 and 1900, he had published only five songs; but from 1901 to 1907, he published eighty-four more. His flirtation with

⁴⁷³ “Paul L. Dunbar Drugged,” *The New York Times*, 1900.

⁴⁷⁴ Walton, “Burleigh Honored,” 83.

Black musical theatre, impacted by the virulence directed at its celebrities, refocused his energies on a more predictable but lonelier path to provide for his new family.

Despite these successes, Burleigh remained an integral member of the Marshall Circle. His Conservatory background enabled him to play a particular role amongst musicians without such privileges. One such was a young, aspiring art musician from Washington, D.C.: James Reese Europe. Europe became a seminal figure in ragtime music, as well as the famed leader of the 369th Infantry Regiment, a Black group of World War I soldiers known as the “Harlem Hellfighters.”

In 1902 Europe moved to New York, as Black Washingtonians considered it the “Mecca” for “refined concert talent among colored people.” He initially sought work as a violinist, but as concert violin recitals were out of vogue and orchestras were closed to Black players, in despair he took up the piano. Once he found his way to West 53rd Street and the musicians of the Marshall Circle, Europe began studying music theory, instrumentation, and conducting with Burleigh and Melville Charlton. While playing the piano at the Brevoort Hotel, he bought the book of lessons that Burleigh assigned to work and studied the piano on his breaks.⁴⁷⁵

By 1904, Europe had moved into the hotel and was immersed in the Black music theatre world of the Circle. He was hired to conduct the orchestra and compose for Cole and the Johnson brothers’ new musical, *The Shoo-Fly Regiment*. In the years following, Europe worked with all the leading lights of the Marshall Circle and established himself amongst them as a central figure who would shape the future of Black music. By the 1910s, Europe had a relationship with the Wanamaker family, owners of one of New York’s largest department stores, and this opened many doors. Burleigh’s contacts also helped, and together they performed at several landmark Carnegie Hall concerts and fundraisers.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ Badger, *A Life in Ragtime*, 23–27.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 44, 31.

In 1910, Europe founded a small ensemble to play at elite White social events, clubs, restaurants, and hotels. Their popularity increased performance opportunities. Europe's group alone could not fulfil the demand for ragtime ensembles. Europe saw an opportunity to establish the Clef Club with the purpose to "inculcate the science of vocal and instrumental music, technique, and execution of vocal and instrumental music, and to promote good fellowship and social intercourse." This sounded like the musical *raison d'être* and ethos of the Marshall Circle.⁴⁷⁷

Burleigh's art music influence on Europe was evident when he created an "American Negro Symphony Orchestra" to train musicians to specialize in Black music by Black composers. This echoed the aspirations of Dvořák and Burleigh for Black music as source material to "make symphonic arrangements of our Negro melodies in original compositions." Burleigh and Europe moved from master–student relationship to collaborators as the young conductor's career took flight. Like Burleigh, Europe's Clef Club orchestra performed frequently for New York's "Four Hundred." The elder Burleigh's well-established relationship with wealthy White New York opened additional performance opportunities. Despite lack of documentation, it is apparent that Burleigh was the turnkey for Europe's performances in aristocratic homes.⁴⁷⁸

Lucky Roberts was one of Europe's "Hellfighters," and famous for developing the stride piano style. He credited Burleigh with his publishing success at G. Ricordi. Burleigh brought Roberts to the Ricordi office to play some of his compositions for George Maxwell, and those published by Ricordi became bestsellers. Europe had even more success at Ricordi. Between 1914 and 1915 Burleigh's office published twenty-two of Europe's compositions.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 152–53.

⁴⁷⁸ Gilbert, *Product of Our Souls*, 141–42; Noble Sissle, "Memoires of Lieutenant 'Jim' Europe," (Library of Congress, 1942), 28–9; Gilbert, *Product of Our Souls*, 141–42.

⁴⁷⁹ "'Lucky' Has Played for Society's '400,'" 12, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1938.

After Europe's tragic death in 1919 at thirty-eight years old, Burleigh sang his 1919 composition "The Victor" at Europe's funeral. Written to honour those fallen in the war, Burleigh's epigraph read: "For all those who gave their lives for the Right: *REQUIESCANT in PACE.*"⁴⁸⁰

Disruption and Demise

Burleigh's compositional output dropped precipitously between 1909 and 1914. Those intervening years were distressing and dark for him – both professionally and personally. Yet they also enabled a period of creative gestation, for from this relative lacuna he emerged with some of the most revered art songs, song cycles, and the first spiritual arrangements of his career.

Professionally, Burleigh's close-knit Marshall Circle experienced significant loss and disruption. The first blow came in 1909 when Ernest Hogan died. A talented comedian, composer, and player, he worked with Burleigh, Cook, and Dunbar, starring in the first full-length Black musical theatre show, *Clorindy*, and other shows where he became an integral figure in the shift from Black vaudeville to musical theatre. That same year, George W. Walker fell ill and subsequently died of pneumonia in 1911. Along with his partner, Bert Williams, Walker was also responsible for elevating early Black comedic theatre as a viable, respected, and lucrative profession. Aida Overton Walker, his talented wife and co-star, also left the stage to undertake his care. She never recovered from the strain and died herself in 1914. Another talented duo, Cole and Johnson, ended with Bob Cole's untimely death in 1911. These losses and the White market forces controlling nascent Black musical theatre portended a death knell for Black productions on Broadway, until a resurgence in 1920.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ Burleigh and George O'Connell, *The Victor* (G. Ricordi & Co., 1919), Library of Congress": Europe biographer Reid Badger and Burleigh biographer Dr. Jean Snyder refer to this as "Now Take Thy Rest," which is the beginning of lyrics not the title.

⁴⁸¹ Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows*, 2 vols. Rowman & Littlefield, 1980, 9.

Further grief came in September 1911 from the demise of the Marshall Hotel. This “center of Black bohemians,” as Johnson called it, had been an unofficial club that birthed and sustained much of New York’s popular Black entertainment at the turn of the twentieth century. James Marshall was harassed out of existence by the Committee of Fourteen, in collaboration with Black political actors who attempted to appease White investigators by urging their community to operate “orderly and within the bounds of propriety.” Their appeasement led to the demise of this creative center for professional Black musicians.⁴⁸²

On hearing of its closure, Jim Europe said it was a “body blow” to Black performers. The Marshall had been an intellectual, creative space and refuge amid Jim Crow New York. Practically speaking, W. E. B. Du Bois found it “the only place downtown where a colored man can be decently accommodated.” James Weldon Johnson said that all this profound loss of people and institutions inaugurated “a term of exile.”⁴⁸³

That feeling of exile influenced another household move for the Burleighs. Harry and Louise moved to Harlem with Bert and Lottie Williams. Williams and Burleigh were “Black aristocracy” in the “vanguard” of those relocating to a predominantly White uptown area. This was decades before Harlem became what Johnson called a “Black city in the heart of White Manhattan,” around 1930.⁴⁸⁴

However, the familiar shadow of Jim Crow followed the Burleighs and Williams in their northward move. The White “Harlem Property Owners Improvement Association” was founded the same year that the two couples moved. The Association aimed to “improve” African Americans right out of the neighbourhood. The painstaking work of activists like Phillip A. Payton, Jr. stymied their segregation efforts, in part through his Afro-American Real Estate Company. Established in 1904, Payton purchased property during the

⁴⁸² James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, (Sherman, French & Company), 102; Fronc, *New York Undercover*, 109–12.

⁴⁸³ Keire, *For Business and Pleasure*, 65; Sacks, *Before Harlem*, 54; Gilbert, *Product of Our Souls*, 161.

⁴⁸⁴ Ottley, *New World A-Coming*, 27–31; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 127; Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 4.

speculative construction of apartment buildings which led to a real estate bubble in 1904 and 1905. This meant that rental apartments began filling with many Black New Yorkers from the Tenderloin and San Juan Hill districts.

Conclusion

The Marshall Hotel played a crucial role in aggregating the most talented Black musicians in New York at the turn of the twentieth century. There they played, dined, drank, danced, debated, and dreamed together about the significance and impact of their work on American music and theatre. The synergy of proximity and sociability enabled unprecedented productions by Black artists on the White stages of New York. Though Burleigh briefly participated in these productions, family pregnancy and marriage necessitated redoubling his commitment to patronage jobs at St. George's, Temple Emanu-El, and the new role of fundraiser with Booker T. Washington.

As a Conservatory student in the mid-1890s, Burleigh's experience of White café society had been as a master of Black folk music when Dvořák and his circle sought an American national sound in music. In the Marshall Circle, Burleigh became considered as teacher and "master" of art music amongst peers equally familiar with spirituals but interested in creating a different American musical sound – syncopated music and musicals. Within White café culture, industry knowledge and networks had led to expanding performance opportunities for Burleigh in White spaces. And now, the Marshall Circle created their own pathways to performance. It provided access to White spaces through collaboration, mutual support, and talents, all enhanced by the teaching, mentoring, and connection to White insiders and patrons that Burleigh brought with him. In turn, Burleigh enjoyed the most durable sense of collective belonging and camaraderie that he experienced in his career.

Burleigh and his colleagues had intractable and violent industry issues to consider – navigating people and institutions beholden to the Jim Crow mentality of extraction and

exclusion. However, the Marshall was also a space where they could rest from a defensive posture for a time, and be refreshed by one another's company, so that they could create music and productions that fed them, body and soul.

However, White supremacist ideology stubbornly resisted their ascent to musical power. In May 1919, even as they buried one of their own, James Reese Europe, the front page of the *New York Age* carried a story encapsulating White America's practice of extractive labour from Black Americans while situating them as lesser humans. Black soldiers who had serviced in France were deemed ineligible as officers in the regular U.S. Army, because the government thought them "unqualified by reason of the qualities inherent in the Negro race...deficient in moral fiber, rendering them unfit as officers and leaders of men." Despite the heroism of Jim Europe and his "Hellfighters" of the 369th U.S. Infantry Band, White supremacy hounded the courageous and qualified at every turn.⁴⁸⁵

In this light, the achievements of Burleigh and the Marshall Circle from 1898 to 1900 were heroic, as together they assailed the barriers in art, music, and musical theatre. While Burleigh created and maintained many lifelong friendships with his fellow artists, he never again enjoyed such quotidian restorative and collegial community as in the Marshall Circle. Yet, through tenacity and talent, he continued to rap on the gates of the White art music industry and gained a measure of power through his composition career and editorship at *G. Ricordi*.

The tragedies of the illness and deaths of so many friends, his only son's absence, his marriage's disintegration, and the loss of the Marshall Hotel as a generative Black café culture made for a compositionally disruptive period from 1909 to 1913. Yet the period's emotional upheaval also fuelled an unprecedented and creative compositional outpouring of his most revered art song and art song spirituals from 1914 onwards.

⁴⁸⁵ Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, "Racial Orders in American Political Development," *American Political Science Review*, April 4, 2005."

Chapter 9

Booker T. Washington and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Introduction

In 1900, Burleigh and Louise had their first wedding anniversary, and their son Alston was a year old. The Marshall Hotel had just opened, providing Black musicians with a place of creative collaboration and friendship. Although a possible European concertizing career seemed unlikely, patronage at St. George's seemed secure, despite Burleigh's 1895 civil rights activism. Then in 1900 an extraordinary opportunity was presented: to join Booker T. Washington, the "Wizard of Tuskegee," on his fundraising tours in the north-east. Burleigh travelled with Washington from 1900 to 1915.

White patronage at St. George's involved a complex tightrope: Burleigh was prized as a "negro" singer in the progressive church, while also ostracized by some members. His patronage amongst Black Brooklynites presented a different but equally tricky tightrope, and Burleigh learned in 1895 how easy it was to fall from it. Washington's patronage was a third fraught tightrope, because it involved both the White church and Black Brooklyn. Should Burleigh misstep in his relationship to Washington, he could easily have fallen off the other two.

When the Black British composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, came to tour the United States, Washington tasked Burleigh with managing the tours. In turn, Burleigh helped Coleridge-Taylor manage Washington. Talent attracts power, which can confer patronage. Burleigh needed all his intelligence, charm, and savvy to keep his patrons happy. Without a supportive network of patronage, any singer's career was precarious, and Burleigh's career, despite all his successes, remained fragile in Jim Crow New York.

New York's Black and White support

In September 1895, Booker T. Washington delivered his famous speech at the Atlanta Exposition about racial separation and industrial education. Though this speech brought him into wider White American consciousness, Washington was well-known in both New York's Black elite and White Episcopalian circles. Broadly speaking, these constituents aligned with Washington's conservative approach to race relations.

Since before the Civil War, the Reform-minded New York Episcopal church was politically active in abolitionism and then progressivism. At the turn of the twentieth century, church members embraced the ideology of the "social gospel," which held that "the end of Christianity is twofold, a perfect man and a perfect society... These purposes are never separated; they cannot be separated." They believed that engaging with politics was consistent with this goal.⁴⁸⁶

The Bishop of New York, Henry C. Potter, attended the ceremony at Hampton when Washington, at the age of sixteen, graduated in 1875. After hearing Washington's graduation speech, Potter clasped his hand and promised him, "If you ever come to New York and want a friend, come and see me." Potter advocated tirelessly for Washington's educational ideology, which comported with his own patronizing view of Black Americans.⁴⁸⁷

Potter had a long association with the American Colonization Society. He believed in their mission to "rejuvenat[e]" the character of Black Americans by sending them to Liberia "to build a society, win the ignorant, and to open a path for the light and truth." White clergy like Potter focused on moral and practical education with the goal of self-sufficiency. This approach aligned with Washington's goal of modest reform.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 20; Williams, *Religion, Art, and Money*, 122–26.

⁴⁸⁷ *Memorial to Henry Codman Potter by the People's Institute* (People's Institute, 1909), 60–61, Internet Archive.

⁴⁸⁸ Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*, 46; Michael Bourgeois, *All Things Human: Henry Codman Potter and the Social Gospel in the Episcopal Church* (University of Illinois Press, 2004), 67–8.

Potter regularly invited New York's leading reformers to his home to consult with Washington, including St. George's rector, Rev. William S. Rainsford. In 1899, Rainsford and Washington spoke together at Brooklyn's Plymouth church. On the dais with Rainsford and Washington sat St. George's vestryman William J. Schieffelin. Regarding their oratory, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* commented, "The speakers seem to have reached the conclusion that it is a mistake to devote much money and energy to providing higher education for the negroes at this time."⁴⁸⁹

Schieffelin, a wealthy industrialist from a powerful "first family" of New York, and Seth Low, former mayor of Brooklyn and later a consolidated New York, were powerful Washington allies. Low was elected in 1889 to the Board of the John F. Slater Fund, which funded institutions of industrial education. He also served as a trustee of Tuskegee. Schieffelin was president of the Armstrong Association, whose primary work was funding Hampton Institute, another industrial education school. After Low died, Schieffelin took his place on the Tuskegee board, where he remained until his own death.⁴⁹⁰

From bishop to rector and vestrymen, Burleigh found himself in a White institution in thrall to the narrative that freed men and women were shiftless incompetents burdening society and needing White charity and Christian guidance to evolve into worthy, moral citizens. It is unlikely that class prejudice shaped Burleigh's perspective on the waves of Black agricultural migrants coming to New York, because he identified strongly with his humble beginnings; so these racist characterizations contrasted with Burleigh's family's dogged pursuit of higher education.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁹ "Carrying on Lincoln's Work," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1899; Bourgeois, *All Things Human*, 69–70; "Aid of Negroes," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1899.

⁴⁹⁰ *Proceedings of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen*, vol. 11, Library of Congress (John Murphy & Co., 1891), 11.

⁴⁹¹ "Aid of Negroes," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*; Bourgeois, *All Things Human*, 210–12.

Washington's philosophy focused on "brains and skill in the common occupations of life," rather than the seemingly frivolous pursuits of cultural advancement. Burleigh's presence as a highly educated art musician did nothing to shift the perspective of Rainsford nor his vestrymen on the competence of Black Americans to excel through higher education. Collaboration with Washington's agenda enabled many Northern industrialists to keep with prevailing winds of national reconciliation, while also gaining labourers with fewer rights and less political power than their White counterparts. Washington developed a deft handling of the two powerful special interest groups. White industrialists were pleased with his approach, which maintained the status quo of educationally disempowered Black workers. White religious progressives also were aligned with Washington's agenda of moral and character reform.⁴⁹²

On the other side of New York's color line, Brooklyn's Black elite who had criticized Burleigh's civil rights activism – Matthews, Fortune, and McCants Stewart – all associated closely with Washington. While they remained committed to Black political power, they earned a seat at the table with White progressives by accommodating Jim Crow customs in New York to preserve the fragile gains made by their community over the previous two decades. Even W. E. B. Du Bois initially supported Washington's Atlanta speech in the 1890s, calling it "a word fitly spoken." Knowing Washington's influential power, he rather enthusiastically sought a job at Tuskegee when he returned from European studies in 1895.⁴⁹³

By April 18, 1897, Burleigh had enough social capital to ask Washington to appear at a Carnegie Hall fundraiser for the Pickford Sanitarium for Consumptive Negroes. Though his schedule was relentless, Washington showed up at Carnegie ten days later. In April 1898,

⁴⁹² August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (University of Michigan Press, 1963), 98–9.

⁴⁹³ Carle, *Defining the Struggle*, 49–55; Michael Harlan and David Smock, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Booker T. Washington, July 27, 1894," in *Race and Education: The Booker T. Washington Era*, ed. James D. Anderson (Howard University Press, 1988), 45–47; Harlan and Smock, "Letter W.E.B. Du Bois, September 24, 1895."

Washington and Burleigh appeared again at Carnegie, this time raising funds for the Free Kindergarten for Colored Children, run by activist and educator Elizabeth Jennings. Despite Washington's commitment to industrial schooling, he appeared to support early childhood education, perhaps out of respect for Jennings' decades of liberatory work.⁴⁹⁴

Washington's stance tended to oversimplify the educational debate. He contended that there was as much "dignity" to farming as there was to "writing a poem." This dismissal of art as a purview of African Americans clashed with Burleigh's *Bildung* sensibilities and professional dreams. The ethos of White café music culture, in which he was still embedded at this time, valued education as a way for artists to create art that could effect societal change. Ironically, Burleigh's cultured musicianship inspired Washington to recruit him for fundraising in the North. Burleigh's virtuosity and artistry demonstrated the ability of African Americans to White audiences, who had been more moved to support industrial education.⁴⁹⁵

By clasping the hand of Washington's patronage, Burleigh broadened his career paths; but Washington's national reach and the power of his patronage required deference and care on Burleigh's part. He knew that Washington had the ear of the wealthiest Gilded Age philanthropists. Retaining his patronage garnered funding for Black schools and institutions from people like Andrew Carnegie.⁴⁹⁶

The celebrated singer was a savvy addition to Washington's tours. Burleigh had performed on the national stage with another race leader, Frederick Douglass, at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. The White press had covered his scholarship at Thurber's Conservatory, his very public connection with Dvořák, and his high profile hiring at St.

⁴⁹⁴ *Grand Concert in Aid of the Pickford Sanitarium*, Carnegie Hall, New York, April 28, 1897, program, Carnegie Hall Rose Archives; "Free Kindergarten Concert."

⁴⁹⁵ Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Exposition Address," speech delivered at the Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, GA, September 18, 1895, *Voices of Democracy*.

⁴⁹⁶ Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 136–37.

George's; these all gave Washington's fundraising events cultural cachet. Burleigh's talent and diplomacy in navigating the color line prepared him well for working with the "Wizard of Tuskegee."

Starting in 1900, until Washington's death in 1915, Burleigh regularly accompanied him on his summer trips to the various retreats of the monied classes in Maine, New Hampshire, and New York. The resorts varied widely: from the Quaker retreats of Mohonk and Cliff House in New York, to the transcendentalist, progressive, and ultimately Bahá'í community of Green Acre, Maine, and the spa town in Poland Spring, Maine. Wherever the wealthy sought relief from the summer heat, Washington and Burleigh went to fundraise for fifteen years.⁴⁹⁷

At his first appearance with Washington in 1900, Burleigh offered the Quakers at Mohonk Mountain House quite a different musical program. He led with Beethoven's *Lied*, "Die Himmel rühmen des Ewigen Ehre," and likely astonished the crowd by singing in German. He followed with a romantic song, "A Red, Red Rose," based on the poem by Robert Burns. His second grouping was "Kentucky Babe" and "Doan You Cry Ma Honey," both popular plantation songs by White composers. Finally, he sang one of his first art song compositions, a piece based on Rudyard Kipling's "The Absent-minded Beggar." The audience, accustomed to hearing Tuskegee quartets, doubtless found Burleigh's virtuosity across these varied genres dazzling.⁴⁹⁸

In August 1901 Burleigh wrote to Washington pleading for inclusion in a Mohonk engagement:

I will pay all my own trip for I feel that it is such an excellent opportunity for me to sing at Lake Mohonk and it will undoubtedly yield me some fruit in the coming winter season in the shape of engagements to sing at receptions, at homes and the like. I am just starting this line of work and as you well know

⁴⁹⁷ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 119; William Arms Fisher, ed., *Seventy Negro Spirituals* (Oliver Ditson Co.; Theodore Presser Co., 1926).

⁴⁹⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 146.

being a man of color - it is not all clear sailing for me; but you have been so true and real a friend to the man of color, that I feel that you will further confer your kindness by permitting me to give a recital... I will give a program of English, German, Scotch, and Irish songs - interspersed with some real old plantation melodies and modern negro songs and am sure you will be well entertained.⁴⁹⁹

The correspondence demonstrates Burleigh's deference toward Washington and gives a sense of the economic insecurity he still felt, despite his St. George's position and his new singing post at Temple Emanu-El in 1900. He may have felt financial pressure to move back to Manhattan, since Louise felt isolated with her young son in Brooklyn. Burleigh's tone suggests a certain urgency for finding new, wealthy audiences for his concertizing career.

Normally Burleigh's agents handled his bookings. Brooks and Denton, renowned White banjo soloists, became Burleigh's booking agents in the year he began touring with Washington. Burleigh's supplicating tone might indicate that his agents were not sufficiently deferential to Washington, while protecting their client's interests. If they had bungled the relationship, Burleigh may have been making amends by offering to appear *gratis*. Burleigh evidently felt the need to go over their heads to advocate directly with Washington. Throughout his fifteen years of working with Washington, he kept his agents out of the relationship, preferring to arrange events directly with Washington via letter and telegram. There were benefits to this arrangement. In some places they fundraised together, while in others Burleigh performed recitals without the agents' contractual cut out of his compensation.⁵⁰⁰

Yet Burleigh's supplicating tone seems surprising, given that he had a fair concertizing schedule in White spaces. In the preceding year alone, he sang for Theodore Roosevelt at the New York governor's mansion in Albany; he performed at the Vanderbilts' Newport mansion with Abbie Mitchell; he sang again with Mitchell and Will Marion Cook at

⁴⁹⁹ Harry T. Burleigh, "Letter to Booker T. Washington, August 13, 1901," in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, vol. 6, 1901–1903 (University of Illinois Press, 1977), 45–6.

⁵⁰⁰ Harry T. Burleigh, "Letter to Booker T. Washington, August 8, 1902," in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, edited by Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, vol. 6, 1901–1903, (University of Illinois Press, 1977), 145–46: Courtesy of Dr. Jean E. Snyder.

the White Nassau Country Club, and one press account reported “he has appeared before social gatherings at the many well-known Fifth Avenue mansions” and “commands \$500 to \$100 a night for singing at private musicales.” Over the next twelve years, he appeared with Washington at Mohonk ten more times. The tone of his entreaty demonstrates Burleigh’s desire for Washington’s support, and the compliant stance expected by his patron.⁵⁰¹

If the reportage about his fees is correct, the sense of constant financial pressure Burleigh frequently expressed is curious. We are not privy to the politics of his home life nor familial needs back in Erie. Burleigh was also ever mindful of the fickle nature of White patronage and the fiat power Washington enjoyed as the preeminent race leader of the day.

In a 1902 letter, Burleigh responded to Washington readily about the summer schedule, even when Washington had not yet engaged him. He also delineated clearly the demands of his “day jobs” at St. George’s and Temple Emanu-El, which he used to dodge Washington’s invitations to teach music at Tuskegee. Burleigh was both deferential and businesslike in his correspondence; however, the tenor of their exchanges changed over time, as criticism of Washington mounted.⁵⁰²

Slippage in their power differential began with the 1903 publication of Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folk*, which critiqued Washington’s position. Subsequently, the Niagara Movement, which formed in 1905, and agitation in Boston by Monroe Trotter, grew intense, destabilizing Washington’s previously undisputed leadership. In retaliation, Washington co-opted the Black and White press to spread his message that “the only way to stop [White supremacy] is . . . to bring about such general education, not only in books, but in industry and thrift, as will make such acts as that which provoked the lynching fever abhorrent.”

⁵⁰¹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 145; Carter, *Swing Along*, 52–3; “Brooklynites and Their Summer Homes,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1900; “Burleigh in New York Society,” *The David City News*, 1900.

⁵⁰² Burleigh, “Letter to Booker T. Washington, April 15, 1902: Courtesy of Dr. Jean E. Snyder.

Trotter, a firebrand journalist who had a broad, populist, liberatory vision, called out White supremacy, leading to inevitable confrontation with Washington.⁵⁰³

In 1903, Washington clearly anticipated such a confrontation with Trotter at a Boston event. Washington imperiously summoned Burleigh by telegram: “You are expected to sing tonight where I speak...Do not fail to be present.” Washington’s lawyer, William L. Lewis, had police at the ready. When Trotter and his fellow journalist George Forbes asked pointed questions after Washington’s speech, a tumult ensued as they were arrested. At the height of the uproar, Burleigh rose and began to sing the hymn “King of Kings,” which had a “quieting effect.” Later he wrote to Washington remarking that he approved of the thirty-day sentence Trotter received. Burleigh may have disapproved of Trotter’s tactics, but he could very well have placated Washington to preserve his valuable patronage. Ironically, Burleigh’s fellow 1895 civil rights agitator, Charles W. Anderson, allied with T. Thomas Fortune to quell anti-Booker dissent fomenting in Boston and Chicago. A wave of racial terror spread with lynchings in the South and Midwest, and riots including the New York riot of 1900 and the Atlanta riot of 1906. This violence eroded support for Washington’s strategy to combat racism.⁵⁰⁴

Burleigh’s political views remain difficult to parse given the lack of personal archives and the courteousness with which he corresponded with his patron. Historian Louis R. Harlan pointed out that Washington’s fear of losing power “made him prize loyalty above talent.” Despite challenges to his leadership, Washington remained a formidable figure until his death in 1915, “ruling as a monarch or political boss.” Washington’s qualified favour combined with his powerful connections kept Burleigh in a dependent position when he sang for the “Tuskegee Machine.” If Washington withdrew his support, Burleigh would

⁵⁰³ Kerri K. Greenidge, “Holding a Mirror up to Nature: William Monroe Trotter, the *Boston Guardian*, and the Transnational Black Radical Press, 1901–19,” *Radical History Review* (141) 2021: 103.

⁵⁰⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 121; W. E. B. Du Bois, “William Monroe Trotter,” *The Crisis* 41, no. 4 (April 1934): 87–88; Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 164.

suffer. Washington had as many kings, princes, and aristocrats in his network as Burleigh's other patron, J. P. Morgan. And like Morgan, he did not hesitate to use his influence.⁵⁰⁵

Beginning from their initial collaboration in 1900, Burleigh donated his work for Washington, only claiming travel expenses. In 1912, Washington offered him compensation for the first time: a fee of \$25 plus travel expenses, which was well below his standard rate. Even back in 1903, Burleigh received \$300 to perform in Mr. and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt's home. Washington, however, took advantage of the social capital Burleigh accrued from his support, and evidently felt \$25 was sufficient recompense.⁵⁰⁶

Burleigh replied to the Tuskegee Board acknowledging this increased disbursement and said he gladly accepted compensation according to the school's ability to pay. He enumerated his labour for the Board and listed the twelve engagements he had made on his own or with Washington while fundraising for the school from June to September 1912. It is not clear how Tuskegee eventually recompensed him, however, his detailed invoice for payment showed how Burleigh navigated the choppy waters of patronage with increasing confidence.⁵⁰⁷

Touring Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Burleigh was not the only musical exemplar whom Booker T. Washington engaged for the Tuskegee cause. When the British composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, planned an American visit, Washington eagerly approached him, because his "conspicuous success" demonstrated "to the colored people the possibilities of their race." As a result, in 1904 Burleigh took on

⁵⁰⁵ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 33.

⁵⁰⁶ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 253, 220.

⁵⁰⁷ "Letter to Harry T. Burleigh from Booker T. Washington," September 9, 1912; "Letter to Mr. Logan from E. J. Scott," n.d.; "Letter from Harry T. Burleigh to Booker T. Washington," September 13, 1912; "Letter to Harry T. Burleigh from Booker T. Washington," September 29, 1912; "Letter from Harry T. Burleigh to Booker T. Washington," October 7, 1912, in *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance* (University of Illinois Press, 2016): Courtesy of Dr. Jean E. Snyder.

two quite different roles in the Washington story: tour manager for Coleridge-Taylor and ghost writer for Washington.⁵⁰⁸

The celebrated British composer wrote to Washington for advice on booking engagements while he was in the country. Washington warned against using agents and instead recommended placing the whole matter with Burleigh: his “judgement is sound” and he was “a man on whose word you can depend.” Though they had not yet met, Burleigh and Coleridge-Taylor knew one another through a constellation of common friends based in London.⁵⁰⁹

Frederick J. Loudin, who in 1891 had tried to recruit Burleigh for the Fisk Jubilee Singers, lived in London during the 1890s and was close friends with Coleridge-Taylor. In 1897, the composer arranged nine poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar, who was also living in London. Then Dunbar and Coleridge-Taylor performed together at a music salon given by the American ambassador, John Hay. Marshall Circle colleagues James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson, Bert Williams, and George Walker visited the composer on their various trips, performing in London around the turn of the century.⁵¹⁰

Besides hearing about the composer from these friends, Burleigh probably followed Coleridge-Taylor’s career in Novello’s *Musical Times*. Upon learning of the success of the composer’s third instalment in the *Hiawatha* trilogy – *Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast* – Burleigh sent the score to Mamie Hilyer, a doyen in Black Washington society. She inaugurated the S. Coleridge-Taylor Choral Society in 1900, which premiered an African American musical, and produced and performed *Wedding Feast* in 1903. Coleridge-Taylor must have relished

⁵⁰⁸ W. C. B. Sayers, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Musician: His Life and Letters* (Legare Street Press, 2021), 281.

⁵⁰⁹ Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, eds., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 10, 1909–1911, assistant eds. Geraldine E. McTigue and Nan E. Woodruff (University of Illinois Press, 1981), 527–28.

⁵¹⁰ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 54; Green, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*, 710.

Burleigh performing as baritone soloist, since the composer knew from their mutual friends that Burleigh was “a splendid singer, and also – more rare – a splendid musician too.”⁵¹¹

In a letter to Burleigh in June 1904, Coleridge-Taylor wrote fearfully about engaging with Washington, who “did offer a Correspondence with me but I have heard fearful things about him from *every* musician I have met here and who had had any connection with him that I closed all negotiations as far as he was concerned.” He no doubt knew that Burleigh learned to manage his relationship with Washington. He must have also heard from their mutual friends that Burleigh was a trustworthy confidant. In turn, Burleigh used his relationship with Washington to speak on Coleridge-Taylor’s behalf in ways that genuinely represented his musical genius and softened Washington’s expectations.⁵¹²

Burleigh’s lack of archives makes assessment difficult about the extent of his tour management, but the two travelled together for all the composer’s American tours in 1904, 1906, and 1910. In addition to the Hilyers in Washington, Burleigh drew on his social network to coordinate Coleridge-Taylor’s three tours in the United States. These people included such luminaries as Ida B. Wells, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Clarence Cameron White, Felix Weir, and Kemper Harrold, who facilitated Coleridge-Taylor’s stops in Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, and Boston.⁵¹³

Coleridge-Taylor first learned about spirituals from Frederick Loudin, who reorganized the Fisk Jubilee Singers, toured with them around the world in the 1880s, and settled as an expat in London in the 1890s. In 1903, Coleridge-Taylor thought to compose a collection based on spirituals, should a publisher in the United States pay for it. William Arms Fisher, Burleigh’s good friend from their Conservatory days, was on the staff of the

⁵¹¹ Green, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*, 104, 130.

⁵¹² Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 123; “Letter from Booker T. Washington to Harry T. Burleigh,” October 17, 1904. Courtesy of Dr. Jean E. Snyder in *Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance* (University of Illinois Press, 2016).

⁵¹³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 132–50.

Boston publisher, Oliver Ditson, when it commissioned *Twenty-Four Negro Spirituals* from Coleridge-Taylor. Fisher, who took Dvořák's elite composition class, staunchly defended Burleigh as the Bohemian's "first direct contact" with spirituals. Dvořák, he wrote, was "engrossed" with them as "something new and distinctive" and "the most striking and appealing melodies that have yet been found on this side of the water." Perhaps Fisher had taken the initiative to commission this work; so, both Burleigh and Washington were keen for Coleridge-Taylor to gain an American publisher.⁵¹⁴

Coleridge-Taylor's London publisher, Novello, exploited him horrifically. They underpaid him consistently and bought the rights to some of his most performed works when Coleridge-Taylor was in financial straits. By 1904, Burleigh was getting savvy about protecting his publishing rights, as they augmented his performance income. He conceivably encouraged Fisher to make the offer to Coleridge-Taylor, to procure an American publisher who would offer him some financial stability.⁵¹⁵

Washington requested Burleigh's assistance in writing the preface to the forthcoming *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*. He intimated that Burleigh should write it himself. Washington wrote, "anything that you will let me have in print or over your own signature...will be very gratefully received." Burleigh responded a few days later with a letter full of robust cultural and musical information about Coleridge-Taylor's compositions and graciously told Washington to "put it in your own language." He highlighted for Washington how musicians and audiences would appreciate the publication for learning about these melodies.⁵¹⁶

Alston Burleigh confirmed in 1933 that although his father had been working on arranging spirituals while at the Conservatory, he did not perform them publicly until he

⁵¹⁴ Green, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*, 98, 130; Fisher, *Seventy Negro Spirituals*: Loudin tried unsuccessfully in 1891 to recruit Burleigh to the revamped Fisk Jubilee Singers.

⁵¹⁵ Green, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*, 63–4.

⁵¹⁶ "From Booker T. Washington to Harry T. Burleigh," October 17, 1904: Courtesy Dr. Jean E. Snyder.

started traveling with Coleridge-Taylor. While fundraising with Washington, Burleigh tested out his compositions on White audiences. However, something kept him from publishing his arrangements until near the end of Washington's life. Coleridge-Taylor credited Frederick Loudin with first teaching him to appreciate "the beautiful folk-music of my race." He incorporated a Fisk Jubilee standard, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See, Lord," into the overture *The Song of Hiawatha*, the first time the cantata trilogy was performed in London in 1900.⁵¹⁷

Burleigh and Coleridge-Taylor were committed to rescuing spirituals from being co-opted for White-facing popular entertainment. In his letter to Washington regarding Coleridge-Taylor's Ditson collection of negro spirituals, Burleigh argued for a "well-defined effort to chronicle and thereby perpetuate these old tunes that are rapidly passing away." Though Burleigh was seventeen years from publishing his own spiritual arrangements, the preservation was a career-long quest, because he believed that their use in popular dance undermined their sacredness of creation and expression.⁵¹⁸

Burleigh explained to his patron that Coleridge-Taylor's arrangements were "developed in a musicianly manner" and not in danger of "descending to the level of the so-called 'rag-time'; and more reprehensible 'coon' songs." Both Burleigh and Coleridge-Taylor shared this concern: not only to preserve the spirituals, but to "bring a music of the future out of the music of the past." While in New York, Coleridge-Taylor gave an interview in which he called "coon" songs "the worst sort of rot," arguing that they were neither musically worthy nor historically original "negro melodies."⁵¹⁹

Based on the timing of their compositions, Burleigh and Coleridge-Taylor were in communication before the 1904 tour. While Coleridge-Taylor was arranging spiritual

⁵¹⁷ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 298; Green, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*, 97–98.

⁵¹⁸ "Washington to Burleigh," October 17, 1904.

⁵¹⁹ "Calls 'Coon Songs Rot.' S. Coleridge Taylor Says They Are Not Negro Melodies." *New York Times*. 1904.

collections for Ditson, Burleigh was simultaneously working on his six piano sketches “From the Southland.” Published by G. Schirmer in 1904, he dedicated these compositions “To my friend, S. Coleridge-Taylor, Esq., London, England.” Burleigh’s biographer has wondered how they influenced one another, because both used similar musical themes; but Burleigh used syncopated rhythms rather more than Coleridge-Taylor.⁵²⁰

The two men grew in admiration and friendship as they toured together. In 1906 and 1910, Burleigh tapped his growing network to arrange appearances in St. Louis, Detroit, Pittsburgh, New York, Boston, Washington, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Toronto. Burleigh sang many of Coleridge-Taylor’s art songs, as well as solos from his cantatas and operas. Both the Black and White press lauded the promise of the British composer’s musical imagination and the virtuosity of Burleigh’s performances. A treasured photograph of his friend sat on the mantle of Burleigh’s apartment for the rest of his life. Coleridge-Taylor inscribed it: “My true friend and greatest singer of my songs.”

Back in England, on his way to work on August 28, 1912, Coleridge-Taylor collapsed from exhaustion on the West Croydon railway platform and died three days later of pneumonia. The Black community mourned his loss. Burleigh in particular grieved deeply for his close friend, collaborator, and shining light of Black possibility and achievement.

London’s *Musical News* wrote, “His death removes from the ranks of British composers one possessed of a sense of beauty, and undoubtedly originality.” Being gifted and prolific had not financially sustained Coleridge-Taylor in life, nor supported his family after his death. His wife, Jessie, and their two children faced destitution until fundraising by Black Americans gave them a modicum of financial security.⁵²¹

⁵²⁰ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 262–63: It is of note that Coleridge-Taylor plucked “Deep River” from relative obscurity at the time. Burleigh’s 1913 choral version in 1913 is the next known copyright of the song. (see Wayne Shirley’s “Coming of Deep River,” *American Music*, Vol 15, Issue 4, Winter 1997).

⁵²¹ “Afro-American Cullings,” *Colorado Statesman*, 1912; *London’s Musical News*, quoted in Jean E. Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh, Harry T. Burleigh: From the Spiritual to the Harlem Renaissance* (University of Illinois Press, 2016; Robert Fikes Jr., “Profound Mutual Admiration: Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Black Americans,” *Afropean*, July 12,

The press publicly shamed Coleridge-Taylor's London publisher, Novello, for the huge profits they made from performances of the popular *Hiawatha* trilogy; these did not accrue to his survivors because while in financial straits, he had sold the rights for a flat fee of 15 guineas. Novello refused to offer a royalty income to Coleridge-Taylor's heirs, so the British government stepped in on the first anniversary of his death to award his widow an annual pension of £100.⁵²²

Death of patrons

J. P. Morgan died while abroad on March 13, 1913. Booker T. Washington died two years later, on November 14, 1915. Both events were crucial for Burleigh's career. Both patrons helped him establish economic stability by providing performance opportunities through their networks. They also constrained him in other ways. His post at St. George's and summers traveling with Booker T. Washington precluded a European concert career, which Burleigh's protégé, Roland Hayes, achieved. On the other hand, the financial stability from concertizing for the wealthy and influential people in his patrons' circle enabled Burleigh to stay in art music while most of his cohort left to make their mark in popular music and musical theatre.

While Morgan lived, Burleigh never sang spirituals at St. George's or arranged any for the choir to perform. No spirituals were performed at Morgan's annual Christmas concert. Perhaps Burleigh knew Morgan's views on Black folk music as too culturally "low," or conflated it with minstrelsy. Morgan's death may have given Burleigh compositional freedom. His first published spirituals, "Deep River" and "Dig My Grave," were performed by Kurt Schindler's Schola Cantorum after Morgan's passing.⁵²³

2025; Kim Smallwood, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor: An Unjustly Neglected Composer," *Shar Music Blog*, February 11, 2019; "A Great Musician," *The Crisis*. 1912.

⁵²² Green, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*, 207, 219.

⁵²³ "Schola Cantorum of New York" (April 1, 1914), Carnegie Hall Rose Archives, Programs Collection.

Washington acted as though he had proprietary rights over those on whom he bestowed his patronage. Samuel Coleridge-Taylor expressed trepidation about Washington's demands before his first U.S. tour. Burleigh may also have feared Washington's co-option of his publishing efforts to benefit Tuskegee.

As the next chapter shows, Burleigh commenced a robust period of publishing from 1913, after a fallow period from 1909 to 1913. While these two powerful figures were not the only factor influencing Burleigh's artistic production, the long shadow of their power hung over his career while they lived.

Conclusion

Burleigh and Coleridge-Taylor shared a deep friendship that they found creatively generative. They also shared the quandary that attends patronage by an international figure like Washington, who simultaneously enabled opportunities but constrained their creative space and performance options. As a musician dependent on patronage, Burleigh could not afford to make enemies of the people who enabled him to stay in his chosen field of art music and extended his network for performing.

Burleigh started publishing later than his friend. Unlike Coleridge-Taylor, he had powerful mentors inside the White art music industry who cared for his career and taught him to negotiate his rights and remuneration. He also had multiple jobs which gave him the financial stability to compose and wait for the right time to publish, when he found the most advantageous industry outlet.

Artistically, both men looked to German high culture as exemplary. Coleridge-Taylor learned to speak and write fluent German and hoped to travel to Germany and publish there. They must have discussed their hopes and dreams to make a musical mark in keeping with their *Bildung* commitment to self-education and artistic mastery. Their shared belief in preserving Black sacred and folk music gave their *Bildung* ideals an additional urgency to

honour their predecessors, even as they used their music to inspire future Black cultural excellence.

Burleigh's relationship with Washington and Coleridge-Taylor shifted the ways he approached patronage and payment for his labour. Burleigh clearly decided early on that he needed as much tact and integrity to manage Black patrons as he did powerful White patrons and publishers. He was able to make a financially viable career performing and composing art music, a security his friend never achieved. Burleigh must have felt his death keenly. Coleridge-Taylor died far too young, perhaps partly from not having the experience and resources that Burleigh did.

Chapter 10

*Developing as a Composer 1896–1915*⁵²⁴

Introduction

By the mid-1890s, both the White and Black communities of New York recognized Burleigh's exemplary vocal talent. Through his patronage positions at St. George's and Temple Emanu-El, he had gained achieved a rare economic security compared to his peers in the Marshall Circle. As Will Marion Cook noted, Burleigh's small salary allowed him to help his friends, provide for his young family, and pursue composing. Metaphorically, if his friendships from the Conservatory and White café culture supported and encouraged him to take up a blank musical sheet, then patronage allowed him to draw the staves to compose on. The economic protection through ASCAP of his published work empowered his notation. Burleigh could develop his craftsmanship into mastery because of his strong economic foundation. As Cook discovered, a successful composition career required more than artistic ability.⁵²⁵

Gaining a foothold in the White publishing industry was fleeting for a composer without economic protection. Burleigh exhibited proficiency in his early compositions, but over the next two decades his artistry deepened as he gained more experience and drew on more sophisticated literary texts. His compositional breadth widened from simple liturgical pieces and popular ballads to lush and more layered art song arrangements. Once signed by G. Schirmer, he never lacked publishers eager for his work.

His friend, the prolific composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, died in poverty in 1912 due to exploitation by his London publisher. This tragedy proved to Burleigh how critically he needed legal protection for his work. Two years later, Burleigh was a founding member of

⁵²⁴ **Note to the reader:** Kindly refer to Appendix B for infographic on Burleigh's compositions.

⁵²⁵ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 21.

ASCAP, which fought collectively for these protections. Many of his fellow founders were also members of White Music café culture, including all his future publishers. This chapter illuminates how musical rights protection shaped this first era of his compositional career. Without publishers and ASCAP, neither Burleigh's talent nor perseverance in publishing would have given economic security over his fifty-year composition career.

The power of publication

Burleigh's compositional career started, as it did for many church musicians, with liturgical music. He wrote his first published work, "Christmas Bells," in 1896 for the Sunday School at St. George's. No extant copy survives, but it was likely for mixed choral singers at the holiday service. His publisher, Luckhardt & Belder, located at 10 East 17th Street, was steps away from St. George's and the Conservatory amid the music publishing hub at Union Square. Perhaps the young composer walked into various offices until he found a publisher for his Christmas piece.

Two years later, Burleigh's prolific composition career gained momentum when G. Schirmer, a recognized leader in the field, took him on. Burleigh's counterpoint teacher at the National Conservatory, Max Spicker, likely opened doors for the aspiring composer. Considered a critical nineteenth-century author of vocal methodologies, Spicker edited operatic scores, oratorios, and sacred music at Schirmer.⁵²⁶

Schirmer published Burleigh's three romantic art songs in 1898, which he wrote while falling in love with Louise. A lull in publishing till the end of 1899 coincided with the tumult around their pregnancy, marriage, and the birth of their son Alston in August 1899. Burleigh was also busy on multiple professional fronts. He continued cultivating a robust recital career, concertizing in the home of the White Gilded Age circles, for Black churches, and at fundraisers for various causes in his community. In 1900, Burleigh started work as

⁵²⁶ Matthew Hoch, "Historical Landmarks in Singing Voice Pedagogy" *Voice and Speech Review* 13, no. 1, 2019, 47–8.

Spicker's choir member at Temple Emanu-El and began traveling with Booker T. Washington.⁵²⁷

As a well-known musical perfectionist, between 1898 and 1901, Harry must have been quietly composing between singing engagements and his two sacred music jobs, because in 1901 a flurry of songs came into print. He set ten plantation melodies as art songs, packaged by Schirmer as "Plantations Melodies Old and New," highlighting the vernacular poetry of three Black poets: Paul Laurence Dunbar, R. E. Phillips, and James Edwin Campbell. These pieces expressed his hope for Black music and poetry to slip across the color line and into White art music.

Burleigh brought contemporary Black poets into conversation with Black folk melodies. Publishing these as art songs followed what musicologist Joseph Horowitz called "Dvořák's prophecy" that Black musical idioms provided the basis of uniquely American art music. During this period, Burleigh tried out different parts of Black vernacular culture as he considered whether to center poetry, oral tradition, spirituals, or all three in his American music.⁵²⁸

Burleigh acted on this "prophecy" compositionally. A casual hearing of Burleigh's folk music compositions might suggest he was alluding to the popular entertainment of minstrelsy with these songs. However, as early as 1904, the popular concert singer Kitty Cheatham credited Burleigh with "being of great help to me in preparing [negro songs and stories] for public performance" to "keep them alive." Preserving Black music culture proved a guiding precept throughout Burleigh's life.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 71, 193.

⁵²⁸ Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Duke University Press, 2001), 164.

⁵²⁹ "Entertainments—New York," *Town and Country* (New York, April 15, 1904); "Kitty Cheatham's Summer Abroad," *Musical America*, May 11, 1912, accessed via Internet Archive.

Given the density in the Rialto area around Union Square Park of music publishing, education, and the domiciles of many of New York's star performers, people encountered one another daily. In early 1902, Burleigh ran into William Maxwell, who had recently started William Maxwell Music at 8 East 16th Street and was looking for new songwriters. Burleigh pulled out a work-in-progress from his pocket and Maxwell told him to bring it to their offices for consideration. Burleigh recollected that Maxwell was in the process of "building his catalogue and was generous enough to be willing to give me a chance."⁵³⁰

William and his brother George worked at Boosey during the 1890s and were part of the musical café culture at restaurants like Lüchow's and Fleischmann's. Knowing Burleigh in that context probably influenced Maxwell's decision to publish a Black composer writing love songs marketed to White consumers. His first piece for Maxwell Music was "Love's Garden" (1902). But when the song "Jean" (1903) sold "like wildfire," Burleigh became a marketable art song composer.⁵³¹

Burleigh's art songs became popular in part for their inherent singability for amateur musicians who devoured new art songs. They also attracted professional singers, because he never allowed the piano accompaniment to outshine the vocal line. The quality of his early ballads attracted top recitalists, like tenor Evan Williams and Ernestine Schumann-Heink, who sang "Jean" and his other early songs.⁵³²

In the first years of the new century, perhaps intoxicated by his new relationship with Louise, Harry's art songs revolved around love, which fitted his taste for romanticism. As his biographer observed, "Burleigh was fond of dramatic narrative, even semi-operatic scena."

⁵³⁰ Kramer, "H. T. Burleigh: Composer by Divine Right."

⁵³¹ "Maxwell in Charge," *Music Trade Review*, September 8, 1900, International Arcade Museum Library; "Maxwell Songs," *Music Trade Review*, August 18, 1894, 1903; "Maxwell In Charge," *Music Trade Review*, September 8, 1900.

⁵³² Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 245.

The sentimental lyrics and the animated framing were akin to famous works by Victor Herbert and Reginald De Kovan. Burleigh knew his market.⁵³³

For lyrics, Burleigh chose from an eclectic mixture of poetry by Western European and American, male and female, Black and White poets. Some were relatively obscure, others famous, like the British Christina Rossetti, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Burns, Laurence Hope (Adela Florence Cory); and Americans Walt Whitman, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Anna Julia Cooper, James Weldon Johnson, and Jesse Fauset. The poets Burleigh favored for many of his art songs included Arthur Symons, Laurence Hope, and James Weldon Johnson. Other times he worked with professional lyricists, such as Fred G. Bowles, Frank L. Stanton, and Madge Marie Miller. Burleigh thrived creatively at Maxwell from 1901 to 1909.

Transitions

From 1896 to 1908, Burleigh published over sixty art songs and sacred music compositions. A dramatic shift occurred when Alston went to boarding school. Louise began performing again, and many in the Marshall Circle became ill or died. From 1909 to 1912, he published only three art songs, two choral pieces, and a piano suite. During this relative lacuna, his *Bildung* mindset drove him to mature into an artist of the highest order. He honed his musical craft, studied literature and philosophy, and composed many of his art song masterworks, which he published after the founding of ASCAP. During this period, Burleigh also worked on two prestigious anthology projects.

In 1908, Burleigh started the immense task of arranging for the anthology of *Negro Minstrel Melodies* (1909). The twenty-one songs he arranged partially account for the shortage of his compositions during this period. These arrangements of White songs mimicked Black folk music and life. While their tunes were uniquely American – often degrading White caricatures of African Americans – they were not a historical representation of Black music.

⁵³³ Ellsworth. Janifer, "H. T. Burleigh Ten Years Later," *Phylon*, Vol. 21, no. 2 (1960): 144–54.

Yet the assignment signified the respect of Schirmer and the music aristocracy of New York for Burleigh's musicianship. And Burleigh was tapped to work with W. J. Henderson, the influential music historian and critic for the *New York Sun*.

This pairing complicated Burleigh's assignment, because Henderson's introductory essay claimed, "the negroes have received a great deal of glory to which they are not entitled." His reiteration of White supremacist views that music sung by enslaved people was "imitative rather than creative" was, for Burleigh, the gravest of insults. He grew up learning about his ancestors' creative and religious expression crafted into their music. Equally galling was the whole project's effort to anthologize White minstrel music, because the collection sought to preserve and forward concepts of White intellectual and artistic superiority and preserve White-washed memory of the past. Still, Burleigh must have found it heady for "H. T. Burleigh, Editor" to appear on the title page above Henderson's.⁵³⁴

Burleigh would have acted with scholarly efficiency. Given the ongoing conversation amongst his friends in the Marshall Circle about the promise of Black music, he may very well have expressed his frustrations to them. Yet his community certainly empathized with his position. For many Black artists, economic necessity frequently clashed with the integrity of their musical aspirations. They needed to find a balance between White demands and Black financial sustainability and goals. This irrefutable economic fact could mean the difference between sustaining or crushing a career. James Weldon Johnson amplified this conundrum in his essay, "Dilemma of the Negro Author," noting that the power of the White market made "it impossible for a sane American Negro to write with total disregard for nine-tenths of the people in the United States," for they were the marketplace. Johnson knew that Black artists gained cultural power only if their products attracted the White market.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 299.

⁵³⁵ Johnson, "The Dilemma of the Negro Author," *The American Mercury*, 1928.

In 1910, Burleigh's publishing options multiplied when William Maxwell Music closed after Maxwell left for a sales job at Thomas A. Edison, Inc. From 1910 to 1912, three publishers vied for Burleigh's work: Thomas Presser, G. Schirmer, and G. Ricordi. Philadelphia's Thomas Presser Company published one of Burleigh's rare instrumental pieces, "From the Southland" (1910), a set of six piano sketches based on his wife's poems and dedicated to his friend, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.⁵³⁶

When Maxwell Music shuttered, a move to G. Schirmer would seem logical, as editors there knew him. When his friend Max Spicker died in 1912, another German-born friend, Kurt Schindler, took over the position at Schirmer and Spicker's music directorship at Temple Emanu-El. Nonetheless, Burleigh took over two years to choose a publisher – a critical hiatus for any composer. The death of his friend Samuel Coleridge-Taylor in the autumn of 1912 brought home the enormity of choosing a publisher who would treat him properly and recompense him fairly. Burleigh waited while George Maxwell negotiated with G. Ricordi to open their New York office. The prestigious European publisher offered the most long-term benefit.⁵³⁷

G. Ricordi hires Burleigh, 1912

At the turn of the twentieth century, patronage of art and music came predominantly from White folks. Burleigh learned to handle with tact the racialization that confronted him everywhere he moved in White spaces. Burleigh's charming, self-deprecating, and tactful manner, combined with his well-known musicianship, opened opportunities.

In 1912, William Maxwell's brother, George Maxwell, opened G. Ricordi's first North American office. Even before the official opening, George employed Burleigh as a freelance music editor. In a letter dated December 10, 1911, Burleigh wrote to Jeannette Thurber to say he could not assist her at the Conservatory as requested as "I am doing

⁵³⁶ "William Maxwell," *Music Trade Review*, 1921.

⁵³⁷ "Kurt Schindler, Musician, Is Dead" *New York Times*, 1935.

editorial work for Ricordi & Co.” This confirms both Burleigh’s long-standing personal relationship with Maxwell in White music café culture and his brother’s assessment of Burleigh’s musicianship.⁵³⁸

Burleigh’s personal qualities gave Maxwell the confidence to hire Burleigh, because as a Black music editor he would interact predominantly with White composers. However, his professional qualities were of equal import. As one contemporary observed, it was Burleigh’s “capacity for critical analysis and synthesis” that made him such a valued member of staff, and “no piece of music was submitted to [Ricordi New York] that did not pass through his hands and rest its fate on his judgment.” His position in this prestigious European firm gave him another reliable income stream and helped him learn how a publisher would market his work. His status as an editor also increased his respect in the field. The popularity of his music, and the music he chose, provided ample reward for G. Ricordi as well.⁵³⁹

Incorporation documents filed in March 1912 show George Maxwell, Nathan Burkan, and Aloph Bangser as the initial employees. While Maxwell had expertise in music, Bangser and Burkan were both attorneys who would defend Ricordi’s rights in the United States aggressively. G. Ricordi New York made those intentions known through articles in early 1911 profiling their dominance of the Italian “music trust” that controlled rights for the operas of Verdi, Donizetti, Bellini, Gounod, and the composer of the moment, Puccini. By summer 1911, the new office had staked out its territory by putting opera companies in Chicago and Philadelphia on notice that Puccini operas required significantly higher royalties.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁸ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 54.

⁵³⁹ Murray, “The Story of Harry T. Burleigh,” 10; R. W. Bullock, *In Spite of Handicaps: Outstanding Negroes Achieving Distinction*, Association Press, 1927, 41–42.

⁵⁴⁰ “Italian Opera,” *The New York Times*, 1911; G. Ricordi, “Ricordi to Maxwell,” 12 (Casa Ricordi, 1911), 101–3; “May Not Use Puccini’s Opera’s.” *Music Trade Review*. 1911.

During this period of low compositional output, Burleigh continued his family's tradition of multiple, simultaneous forms of employment. First, he juggled new editorship responsibilities, new residences, and deep relational tension at home. Second, he managed two weekly singing jobs and their rehearsals alongside his busy private vocal teaching schedule and another role as the advanced vocal instructor at Will Marion Cook's new Marion School of Vocal Music. Lastly, he maintained a recital career, including multiple rehearsals for guest soloist events such as the consecration of the new St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York.⁵⁴¹

Burleigh also knew something was afoot in the art music business. Conversations between Burleigh and the Maxwell brothers regarding musical rights likely factored into his lessened published output. Burleigh continued to compose during 1909 and 1913, but he withheld his work from the marketplace until conditions existed to protect his musical rights.

ASCAP

The founding mythology of ASCAP, the American Society of Composers and Publishers, situates Victor Herbert and George Maxwell as leading the initiative. This version largely ignores the contributions of Black composers. Herbert was indeed instrumental in founding ASCAP: through his early association with Victor Talking Records, he recognized the potential of this new technology to replicate and disseminate music and the attendant problem of collecting royalties. As an influential figure of the day, he gained the support of a large collective of musicians to protect performance rights.⁵⁴²

Knowing about the friendship and collegiality between Herbert and Burleigh, the founding story of ASCAP becomes more nuanced. Burleigh was the bridge between Herbert

⁵⁴¹ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 50–1.

⁵⁴² Once again, pertinent archives around Burleigh are non-extant or inaccessible. Though the Library of Congress holds ASCAP founding documents, the collection remains off-site and unprocessed despite many requests to make it available—author emails with James Wintle, LOC, November 2020, January 2022, October 2023; Email with Vincent Novara, LOC, November 2023.

and many Black composers with less economic power in the White-dominated industry, who had little recourse about frequent theft of their work. Before ASCAP, only wealthy composers could investigate where their music was being uncompensated. Even if Black composers knew that information, they had no financial ability to fight a hotel or record company for proper compensation. Furthermore, enforcement of existing copyright law was not a priority for the U.S. Attorney's Office.⁵⁴³

According to the musician, composer, music publisher, and "Father of the Blues" W. C. Handy, he and Burleigh, Will Marion Cook, James Weldon, J. Rosamond Johnson, Cecil Mack (R. C. McPherson), and Will Tyers participated in ASCAP's inception. Handy recalled the first meeting in February 1914 when "New York composers, out of a desire for intimate acquaintance and more good fellowship, met at Lüchow's on 14th Street and formed an organization without regard to race, creed or color." James Weldon Johnson wrote about sitting at the speakers' table with Victor Herbert.⁵⁴⁴

Handy credits George Maxwell with the know-how to put ASCAP on a firm footing. As a result of his international work for Boosey & Company, Maxwell knew to model their new rights organization on the French Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de Musique (SACEM), the first organization to pool copyrights. ASCAP adopted this same approach to defending members' rights. Once composers assigned their performance rights to ASCAP, it would issue exclusive licenses to establishments, and any transgression they would collectively fight through litigation.

Nathan Burkan, Ricordi's lawyer, "took an active and brotherly interest by giving advice which transformed the group into more than a social organization." Their concerns coalesced around performance rights for their compositions. Though Congress had passed a

⁵⁴³ Gary A. Rosen, *Adventures of a Jazz Age Lawyer* (University of California Press, 2020), 89.

⁵⁴⁴ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 304; Handy, *Father of the Blues*, 265–8.

new copyright law a few years earlier, in 1909, the penalties for infringement did not deter restaurant and hotel bands, nightclubs, and the early recording industry.⁵⁴⁵

But the “brotherly interest” of White industry leaders did not extend to naming Burleigh and fellow Black composers as founders, even though Burleigh had made his mark in the industry despite White supremacist customs. Instead, they segregated them as “charter members.” Maxwell as ASCAP’s first president and Herbert as vice president likely bowed to segregationist pressure, for the recruitment of many White composers to their cause had made the organization viable. Yet, by agreeing to designate Black founders as “charter members,” they erased their foundational participation.⁵⁴⁶

Racial tensions remained in the organization. In 1930, Black ASCAP members were excluded from an outing to Montauk Point on Long Island. When they protested, White members told them that the chosen hotel “would not accept colored people.” The President, Gene Buck, claimed he was surprised to hear objections. Even being inside ASCAP, Black members suffered outsider status.⁵⁴⁷

Yet ASCAP developed a modicum of racial inclusion. In 1950, the composer William Grant Still wrote, “ASCAP is an organization which does not practice segregation.” When he queried how ASCAP membership was recorded, officials could not say the number of Black members, as each member was admitted solely based on their qualifications. Race had no designation on their ASCAP membership cards.⁵⁴⁸

Still saw Burleigh as directly contributing to the creation of this liberated space. Writing one year after Harry’s death, he said: “It is not strange, therefore, to realize that one of ASCAP’s charter members, when the society was founded in 1914, was none other than Harry T. Burleigh. The respect he inspired among his associates then, and continued to

⁵⁴⁵ Handy, *Father of the Blues*, 265–68.

⁵⁴⁶ Maria A. Pallante, “ASCAP at 100,” *Joint Copyright Society of USA*, 61: 545.

⁵⁴⁷ Bastin, *The Melody Man*, 65–66.

⁵⁴⁸ William Grant Still, “Progress in Music,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1950.

inspire during his lifetime, is paying dividends to all of us today.” As a younger composer fighting for his publication and performance rights, Still recognized how Burleigh had helped forge an economic path for Black composers.⁵⁴⁹

Burleigh’s reputation, musicianship, and friendships across the color line accrued great economic benefit to composers in general, and Black composers in particular. His relationship with Maxwell and Herbert made them attentive to the unique problems Black composers faced, because they had no ability in Jim Crow America to wage war on exploitive practices on their own. ASCAP’s White attorneys advocating for them mitigated the racial prejudice in court over their property rights. Deep racist disparities existed in the music industry, nevertheless ASCAP changed the trajectory for Black composers.

One anecdote demonstrates how deeply grateful Black composers were for these protections. In the offices of ASCAP, Victor Herbert’s piano and a large photo were given a place of honour after he died in 1914. When jazz and musical theatre composer Eubie Blake entered the offices, he would bow before Herbert’s picture. “If it weren’t for that man, I’d be out in the street.” His only option without ASCAP protection was to “Tote that barge. Lift that bale,” he believed. While Burleigh’s economic position was much less precarious than Blake’s, ASCAP protection figured in his calculation of when to bring to market the compositions he was writing between 1909 and 1914. After ASCAP’s formation, a pent-up flood of Burleigh’s music flowed freely.

First choral art music spirituals

Some of the compositions Burleigh held back in anticipation of ASCAP were his choral versions of two spirituals, “Deep River” and “Dig My Grave.” Treating spirituals as American art music was a long compositional journey for Burleigh, with encouraging voices along the way. Twenty years had passed since Dvořák’s admonition that Burleigh “give these

⁵⁴⁹ Still, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1950.

melodies to the world,” and called “Go Down Moses” “as good as a Beethoven theme.” When the American composer Edward MacDowell heard Burleigh sing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” he posited, “Why not give that melody a setting that will make it available to all musicians...to the Caucasian interpreter as well as the Negro creator?” These affirmations fortified Burleigh’s hopes for Black music to emancipate American music from its European cousins through broader cultural inclusion.⁵⁵⁰

Alston Burleigh confirmed that his father worked on arranging the spirituals after his Conservatory days and began singing his unpublished solo arrangements while touring with Booker T. Washington. Yet he did not publish any spirituals until 1913, which Kurt Schindler’s elite choral ensemble, Schola Cantorum, performed. Burleigh had a close friendship with Kurt Schindler, who firmly believed in Burleigh’s ability. James Weldon Johnson recalled, “on a question of the theory of music, [Schindler] would accept Mr. Burleigh’s decision as quickly as any other musician in New York.”⁵⁵¹

With all the gravitas of a Berlin-trained pianist, music theorist, composer, and folk music scholar, Schindler’s assessment of Burleigh set him above many of his musical peers in New York, both White and Black. Schindler worked closely with Burleigh. He conducted him in the choir each week, once he became music director at Temple Emanu-El after Max Spicker died in 1912. He was also an editor at G. Schirmer and part of the city’s musical establishment.⁵⁵²

Schindler’s interest in folk music’s role in art music drew him to Black composers in Burleigh’s circle, like Will Marion Cook and Eubie Blake. He celebrated the use of American folk melodies in their music. Like Burleigh, Schindler believed sacred Black folksongs were a

⁵⁵⁰ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 82; Lucien White, “Bach to Burleigh,” *New York Age*, 1927.

⁵⁵¹ “Burleigh’s 39th Year,” *The Omaha Guide*, 1933; Murray, “The Story of Harry T. Burleigh,” 109; Johnson, *Along This Way*, 172–73.

⁵⁵² Israel J. Katz, *Robert Lachmann’s Letters to Henry George Farmer (from 1923 to 1938)* (Brill, 2020), 244–46; Carter, *Swing Along*, 92, 118.

precious cultural achievement of Black Americans that deserved performance on the concert stage. Spirituals, Schindler argued, were “the only legacy of slavery of which the race can be proud. Into the making of these spirituals were poured the aspirations of a race in bondage whose religion, intensely felt, was their only hope and comfort. They rank with the great folk music of the world.”⁵⁵³

Friendship led to collaboration. The choral versions of “Deep River” and “Dig My Grave” which Burleigh dedicated to Schindler and his well-regarded ensemble, Schola Cantorum, debuted at Carnegie Hall on April 1, 1914. During the second half of the concert, titled “Negro Composers and Modern Choral Ballads Based on Folk Songs,” composers Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Balfour Gardner, and Percy Grainger were featured with Burleigh, but none of their compositions used spirituals as source material. Burleigh’s premiere was a historic moment. For the first time, the White art music establishment heard spirituals arranged and notated by a Black composer.⁵⁵⁴

Burleigh’s output from 1913 occurred only after ASCAP was incorporated on 14 February 1913. As music editor at G. Schirmer, Schindler was also the first to publish Burleigh’s “Two Negro Spirituals,” copyrighted in December 1913. With spirituals written for the concert stage, Burleigh demonstrated the essential relationship between Black folk music and the unique sound of American art music. Dvořák’s proposal about “negro melodies” as the basis of American music remained controversial. But he had the support of Schindler, and fellow choir member at Temple Emanu-El, contralto Mary Jordan, who performed in the program that evening. She was an “ardent champion of American musical independence,” to whom Burleigh later dedicated his first art song spiritual, “Deep River,” in 1917.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ Katz, “Robert Lachmann’s Letters,” 346–47.

⁵⁵⁴ “Schola Cantorum of New York” (April 1, 1914), Carnegie Hall Rose Archives, Programs Collection.

⁵⁵⁵ Library of Congress Copyright Office, *Catalog of Copyright Entries: Musical Compositions, July–December 1913*, New Series, Vol. 8, Part 2 (Government Printing Office, 1914), entry 1575; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 306.

In 1913, the usage of “negro” to describe spirituals was an underused signifier. “Two Negro Spirituals” was the first such descriptor in twentieth-century art music publication. In 1867, Thomas Higginson wrote in *Atlantic Magazine* about his collection, *Slave Songs of the United States*, referring to these songs as “negro spirituals.” Other collections did not use that phrase. Early anthologists Allen, Ware, and Garrison gathered all types of Black folk music under one title, *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867). The Fisk Singers published their *a capella* choral spirituals as *Jubilee Songs* (1872); Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folks* used the phrase “sorrow songs” (1903), and the Work brothers at Fisk published them as “Folk Songs of the American Negro” (1907); Krehbiel’s critical essay considered them “Afro-American Folk-songs” (1914).⁵⁵⁶

The term “negro” passed through fiery debate amongst the African American community; but from the 1890s it emerged as the term of preference amongst Black intellectuals. In 1897, a group of academics and clerics led by Rev. Alexander Crummell organized the “American Negro Academy” in Washington, and Du Bois used it in the titles for his 1898 *Study of the Negro Problem* and 1899 *Philadelphia Negro*. “Negro” became a term of respect, signified in part by its capitalization. Marcus Garvey’s organization, “Universal Negro Improvement Association,” chose the same signifier in 1914, followed in 1918 by his newspaper *Negro World*. G. Carter Woodson’s novel, *Negro*, came out in 1915. And then there was the “New Negro Movement” of the 1920s.

The other signifier, “spirituals,” held meaning for Burleigh. It carved out their unique religious meaning from other types of Black folk music, especially work songs and shout songs. “Spirituals are spiritual,” as Alain Locke wrote in 1925. They embodied sacred beliefs and hopes for Christian believers. By designating them as “negro spirituals,” Burleigh

⁵⁵⁶ Higginson, “Negro Spirituals,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 1867.

distinguished them from the amorphous “folk music” usually associated with European peasantry.⁵⁵⁷

Both signifiers bracketed Burleigh’s innovations in art music as wholly distinct from preceding expressive iterations. Citations of the term “negro spiritual” according to NGram (Figure 10.1) rose sharply in 1913 and were sustained for the breadth of his career. After “Two Negro Spirituals” were published in 1913, the term “negro spirituals” became ubiquitous in America, as evidenced by its use in published literature.⁵⁵⁸

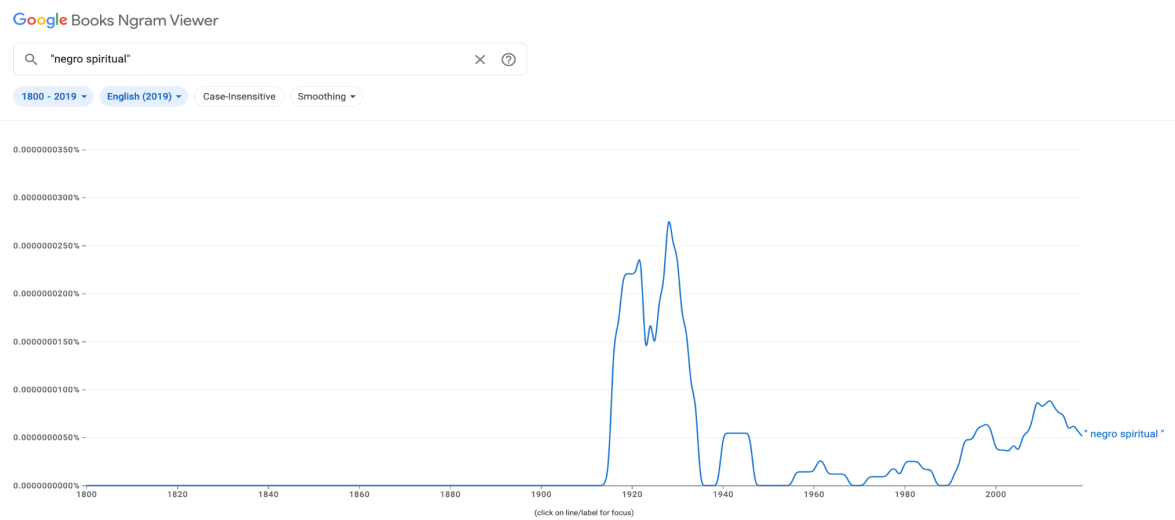
Burleigh’s choice of text for these first two compositions also deserves examination. While his musical mentors Dvořák and MacDowell encouraged “Go Down, Moses” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” as sources, Harry chose the more soulful “Deep River” and the lonely, melancholy “Dig My Grave” for his first choral arrangements of the spirituals. As a songwriter, he said texts must have more than “sentimental reference” but “call out musical thought of real fiber.” Through these rich texts, Burleigh’s spirituals invoked the complex longing and hope that held divergent meanings to Black and White American Christian adherents.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁷ Alain Locke, “Negro Spirituals,” in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (Albert and Charles Boni, 1925).

⁵⁵⁸ Google’s NGram data analysis comes from scanning all the literature that Google Books has digitized, currently numbering some 25 million titles. It is not entirely inclusive. As with archives, there is human decision, preference, and prejudice involved when deeming what constitutes important literature to digitize. Assuming, then, that Black literature, magazines, journals, etc. are underrepresented, this may be an underestimate of the usage of “negro spirituals” in English language publishing to date.

⁵⁵⁹ Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*.

Figure 10.1 NGram graphic showing number of citations of “Negro spiritual”



The lyrics of “Deep River” include the line “I want to cross over into camp-ground,” which refers to the interracial campground meetings of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century. “White and black Christian believers camped side-by-side, worshipped together, and cared about each another’s wellbeing.” Campground therefore denoted a sanctified place made holy through shared Christian identity. Black musical aesthetics came to dominate Christian revival culture because “the loudest and most fervent camp-meeting singers amongst the Whites are constrained to surrender to the darkeys.” One ex-slave recalled, “Our White folks, when they have camp meetings, would have all the colored come up and sing...you know they still say that colored can beat the White folks singing.” Historian Lawrence Levine said, “Song easily breached the bounds of racial barriers and became the chief means of communication.”⁵⁶⁰

Burleigh also hoped to breach those barriers with the lyrics of “Deep River.” The song painfully evoked the seemingly unbreachable divide between where one is and where one desires to be. As with all great art, the emotion of exclusion taps into an existential sense of longing. “Dig My Grave” touches the similarly shared chord of human fear as death approaches.

⁵⁶⁰ Foote, “Deep River,” 2017.

Though spirituals were known to White audiences, given their use in popular “Uncle Tom” shows, Burleigh’s art music arrangements inscribed them as “highbrow” culture, especially after their performance at Carnegie Hall. While the premiere of two choral arrangements of spirituals by a White chorus caused no great stir in the art music world, they were a harbinger of the whirlwind of Burleigh’s spiritual arrangements in the next two decades.

On March 14, 1914, James Reese Europe, Burleigh’s protégé, performed the two spirituals debuted by Schindler in April. Europe’s new ensemble, the Negro Symphony Orchestra, performed at Carnegie Hall to benefit the Music Settlement School for Colored People. Burleigh, a founding board member of the school, conducted a chorus of one hundred and fifty students.⁵⁶¹

The previous month, W. E. B. Du Bois and Burleigh – both founding members of the Music Settlement School for Colored People – spoke at the Ethical Culture meeting house on the topic of “American Negro folk songs.” Burleigh was Du Bois’ favourite singer, so they likely enjoyed animated conversation while preparing for this lecture. As dedicated Wagnerians, any discussion of Burleigh’s “Two Spirituals” surely involved Wagner’s ideas about music as a creative force for identity. Neither of them saw a necessary dichotomy between elite and folk culture. Instead, they believed that high culture and folk music created synergistic expressiveness. With this framework, they perhaps debated the musical possibilities of spirituals to vivify race pride and coalesce their community through a sense of Black nationalism.⁵⁶²

Anthologizing: Afro-American Folksongs

⁵⁶¹ *Concert of Negro Music*, Carnegie Hall, New York, March 11, 1914, presented for the benefit of the Music School Settlement for Colored People. Program, Carnegie Hall Rose Archives.

⁵⁶² Conversation with Du Bois biographer, David Levering Lewis, March 12, 2019; Berman, “Du Bois and Wagner,” 128–332; Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1993), 465.

“Two Spirituals” was not Burleigh’s only project in 1913. He was involved in assembling another anthology, this time with the longtime *New York Tribune* music critic and musicologist Henry E. Krehbiel. A more salubrious collaborator than W. J. Henderson, Burleigh arranged fifteen folksongs for *Afro-American Folksongs*, published by G. Schirmer (1914). This collection offered a polemical response to Henderson’s anthology of White minstrelsy, *Negro Minstrel Melodies*.

Burleigh’s arrangements, mediated by Krehbiel’s introduction, modelled an aesthetic validation of Black music, and by extension Black Americans, in art music. Unlike Henderson’s anthology, which erased Black agency, Krehbiel argued that African Americans were the creators of Black folk music. His essays reaffirmed Dvořák’s advocacy for Black music as creative material for American art music. He excoriated the composer’s 1893 critics and argued that Dvořák’s “scientific observation” about Black folksongs demonstrated their worth. With thoughtful detail, Krehbiel argued on behalf of Black folk music by reiterating European composers who mined their own folk traditions for composition. Krehbiel’s book opened the cultural space for Burleigh’s spirituals, “Two Spirituals,” for Schola Cantorum.⁵⁶³

Krehbiel and Burleigh engaged in the popular, late-nineteenth-century project of preserving cultural objects through anthologizing. During this period, collecting demonstrated the worth of endangered objects’ cultural value through preserving them. Collectors also sought to catalogue objects to retrieve them from their previously hidden state. The anthology *Afro-American Folksongs* utilized both tactics to ensure preservation and express the value of Black folk music.⁵⁶⁴

Krehbiel argued that people should not conflate White-composed minstrel songs, such as Henderson’s *Negro Minstrel Melodies*, with the music originating from Black folksong. These folksongs – overlooked and undervalued by the art music academy – were

⁵⁶³ Henry Edward. Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs; A Study in Racial and National Music* (G. Schirmer, 1914), v–viii.

⁵⁶⁴ Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 2–5.

aesthetically authoritative. However, America's institutions failed to embrace the originality of Black music's creators because of "their ungenerous and illiberal attitude toward a body of American citizens to whom at the least must be credited the creation of a species of song." Leaning into European aesthetic authority, he reminded readers that Dvořák "recognized artistic potentialities" in these tunes. Krehbiel articulated possibilities that Burleigh later voiced about negro spirituals:

For their intrinsic beauty and artistic worth, for the remarkable story they tell of the triumphant progress of a gifted race through an estate of bondage and servitude to a place on the heights of creative art, they stand today as permanent evidence of the race's spiritual ascendancy over oppression and humiliation.

Notably, Burleigh did not validate spirituals through the lens of Dvořák or any European music standards. Instead, he argued their beauty arises from the physical and spiritual liberatory work of Black people under the horrific conditions of enslavement.⁵⁶⁵

Afro-American Folksongs built on the intellectual and musical labour of people in Burleigh's network. John W. Work II and his younger brother, Frederick J. Work, published *Folk Songs of the American Negro*, Volume 1 in 1907 and the Volume 2 in 1910. They used them as the basis for a folksong cantata, *Out of the Depths*, in 1907. John Work argued that their two anthologies "show the possibilities in the folk song for development" and "should be hailed as a new development in musical art." The Work brothers took the battle to their home front: Fisk University's music department, which strictly required the study and performance of Western music.⁵⁶⁶

The Work brothers were not alone in advocating the value of Black folk music to African Americans. Like Fisk, whose administration resisted the inclusion of spirituals, in 1909 students at Howard University protested but for different reasons. They "went on

⁵⁶⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 321.

⁵⁶⁶ Lynn Abbott, *To Do This, You Must Know How: Music Pedagogy in the Black Gospel Quartet Tradition*, American Made Music Series (Jackson, 2013), 47.

strike” when they found that the White faculty restricted them to spirituals. The following year, responding at least in part to this strike, music teacher Emma Azalia Hackley asserted the value of Black folksongs as a communal cultural treasure. Hackley believed in the artistic worth of spirituals “for the remarkable story they tell of the triumphant progress of a gifted race through an estate of bondage and servitude to a place on the heights of creative art; they stand today as permanent evidence of the race’s spiritual ascendancy over oppression and humiliation.” By arranging spirituals as art songs, Burleigh worked in parallel with the Work brothers and Hackley.⁵⁶⁷

The *Folksongs* collection demonstrated Burleigh’s commitment to preserving Black folk music, particularly sacred music. He pursued this project for the next thirty years. Krehbiel’s introduction touched on one motivation. This folk music acted, he argued, as a cultural “conservator.” Since their history was being forcefully erased, Krehbiel noted that this music offered “the most efficient of memory helps” to preserve a Black inheritance that otherwise would have slipped away. While Krehbiel looked backward at the value of Black folk, Burleigh looked forward in the upcoming decade to new compositional horizons based on these musical traditions. His two major patrons, J. P. Morgan and Booker T. Washington, had just died, so his powerful patrons’ deaths may have given Burleigh compositional freedom.⁵⁶⁸

Art song masterworks

Burleigh entered a serious study of art song while waiting to publish his work. His new compositions no longer included ballad-like accompaniments with vocal and piano lines closely aligned. Music critic A. Walter Kramer said Burleigh was committed “to making art-song composition his primary goal.” He observed Burleigh’s embrace of a “Wagnerian loosening of the dominance of a tonic key” in his harmonics. Noting this modernist turn, the

⁵⁶⁷ Cuney-Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 240; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 231.

⁵⁶⁸ Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs*, 4–7; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 123.

redoubtable W. J. Henderson wrote of Burleigh, “Anyone can drag in a few bits of ‘whole-tonism’ and affect a modernist style, but only when a composer actually feels the music in this way can he put it down on paper so that it will convince the examiner of his score.” His biographer observed that his music began to “feature a thicker, orchestral-like accompaniment.” During the publishing lacuna he must have worked to craft increasingly complex music, laying the groundwork for his later orchestration of art songs.⁵⁶⁹

After Burleigh’s scarcity of published music, a flood of compositions appeared from the forty-eight-year-old composer. From 1914 through 1916, Burleigh published thirty-two art songs. In these two years, he released three song cycles and an additional fifteen arrangements for Krehbiel’s *Folksongs*. Composed over several years, these flowed out after the establishment of ASCAP. Reflecting on this period, Kramer noted a shift in Burleigh’s compositions, saying though his previous work had “splendid quality,” 1914 evidenced a “new epoch in his work.”⁵⁷⁰

When the song cycle *Saracen Songs* appeared in 1914, Burleigh drew on the dramatic intensity of Puccini, Wagner, and Verdi operas, which he loved and attended regularly. Henderson’s review for *Musical America* wrote of the “haunting rhythms and luscious harmonies” and noted “Burleigh’s poetic conceptions are paired with his masterly musicianship.” Yet he also made his compositions eminently approachable for amateur singers. While Burleigh was capable of great virtuosity, he chose to compose for the broadest group possible by emphasizing emotional complexity without relying on overly florid vocals. The accessibility of his art songs to amateurs did not prevent these pieces from moving directly to the concert stage. White soloists increasingly chose Burleigh’s art songs for their

⁵⁶⁹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 136; *ibid.*, 271.

⁵⁷⁰ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 136.

concert repertoire, which secured his artistic *bona fides* and popular success. He proved that Black-composed art music could cross the color line.⁵⁷¹

Burleigh and Poetry of James Weldon Johnson

In his early career, Burleigh chose the work of various Black vernacular poets for his songs. During this compositional phase, he turned to his friend and Marshall Circle colleague James Weldon Johnson for non-vernacular poetry as a compositional source. He published a four-song cycle based on Johnson's poems, *Passionale*, in 1915. Having his poetry featured in G. Ricordi scores and on the concert, stage was artistically and monetarily important for Johnson.

After resigning from his position as U.S. Consul to Nicaragua in 1913, Johnson began work as an editor at *The New York Age*. The pay was insufficient for his growing family and his wife's wealthy New York social circle. He wrote some popular music, at one point working with Jerome Kern. But he failed to make his desired "comeback on Broadway," which led to "some extremely blue days." Johnson tried his hand at art songs. Being published by Ricordi gave him new artistic and economic stability.⁵⁷²

Without Burleigh's trusted position at G. Ricordi, racial impediments would have stymied Johnson's art music career. This positive reception of Burleigh's arrangement of his poems encouraged a productive outpouring. Johnson published his first poetry collection in 1917. Mirroring Burleigh's commitment to including African Americans in art music, Johnson's 1922 anthology, *Book of Negro Poetry*, argued that African American poetry belonged in the American literary canon. Ricordi opened another avenue for Johnson as well.

⁵⁷¹ Floyd Jr., "The Invisibility and Fame of Harry T. Burleigh," 189; Burleigh, "Negro Minstrel Melodies, Preface."

⁵⁷² Johnson, *Along This Way*, 303.

Learning of Johnson's fluency in Spanish, Ricordi commissioned him to translate the Spanish opera *Goyescas* into English for the company's performance.⁵⁷³

Songs in wartime

Johnson's most remarkable success with Ricordi came as Burleigh engaged musically with war erupting in Europe. "Young Warrior," based on Johnson's lyrics, proved his greatest hit. The song did not specify any one country in the conflict; however, its popularity in Italy, home of grand opera, raised Burleigh's cultural status. For as one critic noted, "What Italy stamps as poetry and music the world usually accepts."⁵⁷⁴

In August 1914, the outbreak of war in Europe absorbed everyone. By this time, Burleigh had a collegial relationship with people in the Milan office of G. Ricordi who were navigating a complex position in the war. Italy was part of the Triple Alliance with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire; however, they decided to remain neutral as the Austro-Hungarians were Italy's historical enemies. Their desire to reunite with Italian-speaking borderlands from the Empire moved Italy closer to an alliance with France and Great Britain. In the spring of 1915, when Italy negotiated the secret Pact of London, it resigned from the Triple Alliance and entered the war.

In November that year, Burleigh copyrighted his song, "The Young Warrior," based on the poem by James Weldon Johnson. Translated into Italian by Eduardo Petri, "Il Giovane Guerriero" became an Italian war anthem. The lyrics involve a young soldier leaving for war who tells his mother not to pray for his safety but rather that "I would keep through all my days, my heart and purpose strong, my sword unsullied always."⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ Foote, "Deep River," 18–24; Eugene Levy, *James Weldon Johnson: Black Leader, Black Voice* (Chicago University Press, 1976), 160.

⁵⁷⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 283.

⁵⁷⁵ Harry T. Burleigh, *The Young Warrior*, words by James Weldon Johnson, music by H.T. Burleigh (G. Ricordi, 1915).

In February 1915, the Metropolitan Opera star, Pasquale Amato, sang “Young Warrior” at the Biltmore Hotel in New York at an allied benefit sponsored by the Italian ambassador and the patronage of the Queen of Italy. The *New York Tribune* called it “the sensation of the evening.” The Italian opera composer and conductor, Riccardo Zandonai, performed an orchestrated version in December 1916 at the Metropolitan Opera with Amato reprising his performance. It “swept Italy like a flash” as Italian soldiers sang it on the battlefield and Italian people sang it at home.⁵⁷⁶

That same month, Burleigh and James Reese Europe’s Clef Club Orchestra performed “Young Warrior” for an entirely different sort of audience. They took the ferry across New York harbour to Ellis Island to perform a concert for the immigrants seeking refuge from the European conflict. Along with the Wanamaker’s Colored Jubilee Club, Burleigh sang his wartime song to the audience.⁵⁷⁷

Allied countries, such as New Zealand, noted the song’s impact Italy, saying it was being sung “lustily from Milan to Naples, from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic.” Interestingly, the popularity of this martial song, rather than his many successful art songs, brought Burleigh to worldwide attention. Newspapers from America, Europe, and parts of the broader British Empire published articles about the extraordinary song by a “negro composer” more musically sophisticated than “Tipperary,” which one paper opined was “of pretty cheap order.” “What a triumph,” wrote *Musical America*, “for an American Negro musician to write the marching song of the most musical nation in this war!”⁵⁷⁸

Burleigh’s three other war songs did not similarly catch fire. “One Year 1914-1915,” published March 1916, based on Margaret M. Harlan’s poem, graphically pictured an

⁵⁷⁶ “Negro’s Music.” *Chattanooga Daily Times*. 1916; Snyder, Harry T. Burleigh, 283, *Chattanooga Daily Times*, August 6, 1916.

⁵⁷⁷ Will Kaufman, “We are Many,” in Kaufman, *American Song and Struggle from Columbus to World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 242.

⁵⁷⁸ “Musical Notes,” *Daily Telegraph*, 1917; “A Negro Composer,” *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 1917; Snyder, Harry T. Burleigh, 283.

individual soldier experiencing the “Battle birds in the sky; Shriek of gun as they die; Crash—and roar bloody drench; Black death in the trench.” Likewise, Burleigh’s setting of Rudyard Kipling’s “Soldier,” which arrived in the summer of 1916, painfully depicted a soldier anticipating that death will transfigure him into the “pulse of the eternal mind” and his spirit will return “in peace, under an English heaven.” Rich in nostalgia for England, it did not resonate with American listeners. Finally, his 1918 “Under a Blazing Star” described explosive “star shells” under which a young soldier slept, and which illuminated the night-time battlefield, a disquieting image for those on the home front. Unlike the martial, upbeat “Young Warrior,” war’s reality in Burleigh’s other songs did not entice sheet music buyers.⁵⁷⁹

“The Grey Wolf” and “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors”

In 1915 and 1916, the wave of Burleigh’s complex and critically well-received art songs continued. His increasing musical sophistication and artistic rendering of a wide variety of texts hint at how the period of seeming inactivity between 1909 and 1913 gave him space for musical growth. Two especially deserve close reading.

The text of “The Grey Wolf” (1915) came from one of the poets whom Burleigh often called upon for lyrics, Arthur Symons. The narrator speaks of being haunted by a violent creature. Despite giving this wolf her meagre store of food to keep him at bay, the animal returns “with old hunger and old thirst of blood.” With nothing to protect her, she cries, “O grey wolf, grey wolf, will you not depart, this time, unless I feed you with my heart?” When sung by an African American, “Grey Wolf” carries a valence of racial violence, a ceaseless economic, physical, and emotional assault that never relents in wanting more from its victim.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁹ Harry T. Burleigh, *One Year, 1914–1915*, words by Margaret M. Harlan (New York: G. Ricordi, 1916); *The Soldier*, words by Rupert Brooke (New York: G. Ricordi, 1916); *Under a Blazing Star*, words by Mildred Seitz (G. Ricordi, 1918).

⁵⁸⁰ Harry T. Burleigh, *The Grey Wolf*, words by Arthur Symons (G. Ricordi, ca. 1919).

Burleigh's song based on Walt Whitman's "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" (1915) contains painful American history. One speaker, a tired young soldier, is marching with Sherman's army. The other is an elderly enslaved woman, proudly bearing the colours of her native Ethiopia, standing roadside saluting American troops supposedly bringing emancipation. The soldier's racialized perception of a "dusky woman, so ancient hardly human," is at odds with her dignified stance. When he enquires about the meaning of her salute, she replies, "As a little child, they caught me as the savage beast is caught. Then hither me across the sea the cruel slaver brought." So, she honoured those fighting to return her freedom.⁵⁸¹

The ambivalent legacy of Sherman's army is unspoken by the poet but known by Burleigh and other members of the Black community. During Sherman's five-week march to the sea, liberated enslaved people followed the troops, trusting their safety to the Union army. The army scavenged its supplies as it destroyed everything in its path. Not wanting to share their sparse provisions with Black Americans, on December 9, with Confederates chasing close behind, Union soldiers erected pontoon bridges across a creek. They instructed the nearly five thousand African Americans in their company to cross over behind all the troops and wagons. In an atrocious act, the soldiers pulled away the bridges, leading to the bloody massacres of those who followed their emancipators. The song's brief ten pages holds weighty complexities in America's racial history.⁵⁸²

Arranging this Whitman piece demonstrated Burleigh's agility when handling challenging poetics. Unlike many of his works, which eschewed what Whitman considered old-world poetic form and rhyming structures, "Ethiopia" does have some approximate rhyming. Still, the lines are so irregular as to skewer elegant prosody. Burleigh leaned into

⁵⁸¹ Harry T. Burleigh, *Ethiopia Saluting the Colors*, words by Walt Whitman (G. Ricordi, 1915).

⁵⁸² Anne Sarah Rubin, "Sherman's March in American History and Cultural Memory," Oxford University Press online, 2017.

these disjunctures, using operatic forms of recitative and aria which move between militaristic music and the touching tune “Marching to Georgia.” Slightly dissonant and repetitive chords signal dialogue shifts from one speaker to another. The music critic at the *New York Age* considered the song “symphonically developed,” particularly the “big recitative and final *Moderato sentito*.”⁵⁸³

Burleigh’s use of all sorts of poetry influenced the following generation of Black composers. When his friend, Abbie Mitchell, introduced a young Margaret Bonds to Burleigh’s “Ethiopia,” it had a transformative effect. She recalled, “I myself had never suffered under any feelings of inferiority because I am a Negro, and I had always felt a strong identification with an identification Africa, but now here was a poem which said so many different things I had known and was not able to verbally express.” As a young composer, she looked up to Burleigh. “In my teens and highly impressionable, I began unconsciously to copy Harry T. Burleigh.” At a time when Black composers were still expected to write music with “racial characteristics,” Burleigh’s work opened new poetic possibilities for Bond’s compositions. Eventually, Bonds enjoyed a long and productive collaboration with the poet Langston Hughes.⁵⁸⁴

Song Cycle, “Five Songs of Laurence Hope”

The outpouring of work copyrighted in 1915 included a song cycle based on five poems by the British poet Adela Florence Nicholson (1865–1904), published under the pen name “Laurence Hope.” Nicholson led a somewhat operatic life. Born in England but relocated as a teen to Lahore, India because of her father’s army appointment, she then married happily an army colonel who was posted throughout the country. Despondent when her husband

⁵⁸³ Burleigh, “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors”; Lucien White, “Race Musician,” *New York Age*, 1916.

⁵⁸⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 181.

died unexpectedly in 1904, she committed suicide at the age of thirty-nine. Her poetry expresses a lover's loss.⁵⁸⁵

Nicholson's passionate sensibility appealed to Burleigh. Hardy's assessment of Laurence Hope's work as "full of impassioned effusions" could easily describe Burleigh's love affair and subsequent marriage break-up. "Passion" was commonly used by reviewers of Burleigh's art songs, many of which painted the wide range of his emotions toward Louise, including intense attraction, disappointment with love, desperate supplication, and fervent longing for love lost.⁵⁸⁶

Engaging in the "orientalism" associated with India, or any place non-European, was very popular at the time. Edward Said famously argued that the West's "othering" of non-Western culture was meant to differentiate them as superior to their fellow humans. Like many others, Burleigh was enthralled by the exoticism of places outside the "Occident." Perhaps Burleigh felt commonality with these hallowed "others" when surrounded by White people on a New York street or tuxedoed as he stepped on a White recital stage. However, he was capable of "othering," even though his culture made him sensitive to exclusionary practices.

Reviews of *Five Songs* were effusive and manifested a new quality to Burleigh's compositions – the "modern." The score's prefatory note by Henry E. Krehbiel maintained these were "far removed...from the affected harmonic phrase which has taken possession of the German *Lied* and the French *Mélodie*." The music sprang naturally in beautiful language with its instrumental accompaniment and had a development separate from the vocal line that "carries along the emotional passion like a flood."⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ Gregory Zavracky, "Beyond the Spirituals: Harry T. Burleigh's Five Songs of Laurence Hope," *Journal of Singing* 78, no. 5 (June 2022): 560.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Harry T. Burleigh, *Five Songs of Laurence Hope*, words by Laurence Hope (Adela Florence Nicolson) (G. Ricordi, 1915).

Horatio T. Parker, who taught at the Conservatory the year Burleigh arrived, reviewed *Five Songs* for *Musical Courier* magazine as “individual, fragrant and without a hint of the commonness and triteness that beset most songs from American pens. He uses no cheap or hackneyed device...” and “has sensibility, humor and even imagination; and he shuns our molasses-like sentimentality as though it were the plague upon our songs as it really is.”⁵⁸⁸

Interestingly, many sheet music customers were unaware that Burleigh was African American. Krehbiel described his compositions as “music with his own national voice.” Burleigh had not published art song spirituals in 1915, so Krehbiel was not implying that his “national voice” reflected “racial character.” It was a point of pride for Burleigh to be considered an American composer versus a “negro” composer.⁵⁸⁹

Ascension of Burleigh's art songs in popular culture

By the 1915/16 season, Burleigh's art songs made the *Musical America* list of most popular for top operatic recitalists. As a professional, he knew how to write for singers and wrote specific voicings for specific vocalists. In turn, his repertoire became a staple of a “Who's Who” in art music singing at the time: Mary Jordan, Alma Gluck, Frances Alda, Sophis Braslau, Christine Miller, Lillian Evanti, Paulina Donalda, Oscar Seagle, Pasquale Amato, Paul Althouse, Evan Williams, George Hamlin, Lawrence Tibbet, Roland Hayes, and John McCormack. Burleigh said this “created a certain vogue” for the songs he was writing. Two forwarded his career and sealed belief in his consummate artistry.⁵⁹⁰

Burleigh's work had advanced since his early compositional days. In the first decade, the popularity of ballads shaped his output in the White art music world. With the musical outpouring of 1914 onwards, the texture of his worked shifted to such a degree that *Musical America* described his songs as “modern in spirit, in fact, they are far more modern than

⁵⁸⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 280.

⁵⁸⁹ Burleigh, “Five Songs.”

⁵⁹⁰ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 280; A. Walter Kramer, “New—and Instrumental.” *Musical America*. 1916.

anything else Mr. Burleigh has given us...There is nothing of the ballad in his settings; he has written art songs.”⁵⁹¹

Lucien White, music critic for the *New York Age*, concurred. He said Burleigh had entered upon a study of the art song genre and made its creation “a task of love.” The increased level of complexity required a new level of commitment from singers. Unlike songs easily sung “without acquaintance,” White admonished singers that Burleigh’s art songs “must be studied” to express all the harmonic and melodic complexity of his latest works. Several singers took up that challenge.⁵⁹²

The celebrated Irish operatic tenor, John McCormack, often premiered Burleigh’s newest art songs. McCormack’s talent and charisma made him a star, and so his performances elevated Burleigh’s work even higher in the public consciousness. Many composers sent their songs to the tenor hoping he would include them in his repertoire. He needed a massive set of songs for his many appearances. Only about seventy became his repertoire from the more than six hundred he received. From that number McCormack chose several of Burleigh’s art songs and cycles for his 1916–17 season, a testament to his appreciation of his friend’s artistic sensibility and compositional acumen.⁵⁹³

From 1914 to 1916, McCormack featured seventeen of Burleigh’s art songs in his recitals and the two song cycles, *Passionale* and *Five Songs of Laurence Hope*. The distinguished tenor was often compared to Enrico Caruso, with whom he shared a warm friendship.⁵⁹⁴

Soprano Mary Jordan featured many of Burleigh’s art songs alongside European composers in her programs. Born in Cardiff, Wales, when she moved to America, Jordan undertook music training in Scranton, Pennsylvania. After her celebrated 1911 debut with the Boston Opera Company, she accepted an offer to join Milton Aborn’s new English

⁵⁹¹ A. Walter Kramer, “New Music—Vocal and Instrumental,” *Musical America*, March 13, 1915.

⁵⁹² White, “Race Musician.”

⁵⁹³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 269.

⁵⁹⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 269.

Grand Opera in New York. Aborn aspired to the same quixotic goal as Jeanette Thurber: he hoped to make opera accessible to new audiences in America by translating them into English.⁵⁹⁵

Upon moving to New York, Jordan joined the progressive social gospel church, LaFayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, in Brooklyn. Formed as a “temple of abolition” before the Civil War, it hosted the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1871 and allowed women abolitionist and temperance preachers. At the time of her attendance, Burleigh’s close friend and frequent accompanist, Melville Charlton, was a regular guest organist. In 1970, Burleigh’s protégée, Marian Anderson, sang at the church to celebrate Charlton’s achievement as the first African American member of the American Guild of Organists.⁵⁹⁶

Alongside Jordan’s contract with the opera company, she moved to New York with a second offer to hand. Max Spicker hired her to join the choir at Temple Emanu-El in 1912, his last year as musical director. Jordan and Burleigh formed a bond of mutual respect and admiration. She recognized Burleigh’s artistic sensibilities, extraordinary musicianship, and the worth of his song repertoire. She brought Burleigh’s songs with her when she rose to music royalty, singing for Frank Damrosch’s Oratorio Society and People Music League, Kurt Schindler’s MacDowell Chorus and Schola Cantorum. As with McCormack, her prestige helped popularize Burleigh’s song catalogue.

Despite his demonstrable artistry and vocal capability, Burleigh was never invited to perform on the same stages as Jordan and McCormack or to sing with an opera company. When he did sing at Carnegie, it was part of a Black ensemble like the Clef Club Orchestra. His concertizing was limited to private homes, church jobs, and the abundance of offers from Black institutions.

⁵⁹⁵ “Jordan Sings,” *New York Times*, 1917; “Famous Soloist to Sing at Festival,” *Elyria Evening Telegram*, 1909; “Jordan Wins Fame,” *Scranton Times*, 1911.

⁵⁹⁶ “Our History,” *Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church*, accessed February 16, 2024.

Conclusion

Burleigh's compositional craft blossomed between 1898 and 1915 because of the relationships he cultivated with publishers and the protection afforded by ASCAP. These opportunities arose directly out of the networks he carefully maintained within the art music industry. His success was due in equal measure to his command of compositional forms and the variety of literary texts he chose from White men and women, Black vernacular poets, and Black folk music. Along with James Weldon Johnson, Burleigh influenced the next generation of composers, poets, and authors to look to their own literary and musical predecessors to create and innovate as Burleigh did in art music.

As illustrated by the published orchestrations of "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors," "Five Songs of Laurence Hope," and "Young Warrior," these masterwork art songs and song cycles exhibited orchestral complexity and beauty. Burleigh established an international reputation and gained the respect of leading critics in the White music industry, giving him stability in an often-capricious marketplace. With positive reception of his choral "Two Negro Spirituals" performed by Schola Cantorum, he had confidence – artistically and economically – to publish his first arrangements of art song spirituals from 1916.

Had his career stopped at this point, his accomplishments would have been laudable. After his civil rights action in 1895 was critiqued from both sides of the color line, Burleigh chose not to engage in direct political action. Instead, he used his talent for cultural production to open doors for colleagues in his generation and the next. His well-earned reputation as a "race musician" led to an unusual opportunity.⁵⁹⁷

When D. W. Griffiths' film *Birth of a Nation* premiered in February 1915, Black communities organized boycotts and protests, unsuccessfully challenging the film's

⁵⁹⁷ White, "Race Musician.," *New York Age*, 1916.

screening.⁵⁹⁸ As it played across the country, *Birth* showered audiences with racist messages of Black inferiority, violence, and hyper-sexuality, reinvigorating the Klan. Knowing the pernicious effect of this dangerous cultural artifact, Burleigh joined an effort to present a positive counter-narrative to Dixon's White supremacy.

In 1915, Black intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and activists scrambled to produce the response film, *The Birth of a Race*, to demonstrate the astounding progress of Black Americans just fifty years post-Civil War. NAACP and Tuskegee organized the enterprise and announced that music would be provided "by Harry T. Burleigh, the eminent composer, who has made a special study of the Negro folk songs." A combination of lack of funding and knowledge about the film industry ultimately derailed the project. Though this path was never taken, Burleigh's participation solidified his standing as a musician representing the promise and possibility of African Americans' contribution to America's cultural arts.⁵⁹⁹

As high-flying as Burleigh's career was at this moment, the subsequent decade eclipsed the record of his first twenty years in music. His trajectory went stratospheric as he brought spirituals into the quintessentially German *Lieder* genre. The industry and listening public were about to experience the potent emotional energy of negro art song spirituals.

⁵⁹⁸ Josh Glick, "Mixed Messages: D.W. Griffith and the Black Press, 1916—1931," *Film History* 23, no. 2 (2011): 183–84.

⁵⁹⁹ "Just You," *Broad Ax*, 1916; Birth of a Race Photoplay Corporation, *The Birth of a Race*, produced in collaboration with Selig Polyscope Co., 1918. See "Birth of a Race Photoplay," *Motography* 17 (March 1917): 6.

Chapter 11

Composition Career 1916-1936

Introduction

Established first as a singer, then as a highly regarded composer in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Burleigh achieved even greater renown when some of the era's most talented concert singers performed his art songs. His art song spirituals modelled in American music literature what the literati of the Harlem Renaissance pursued a decade later – the representation of voices, stories, and African Americans of all classes in American literature. His proven marketability justified his creative leap in the spring of 1916 to publish his first art song spiritual, “Deep River.”

In some measure, economics drove this leap. Burleigh wrote to a friend about the reduced demand for his compositions because of the limited number of recitalists willing to perform his art songs. Despite both Dvořák and MacDowell admonishing him to make spirituals accessible to a wider audience, something held him back until 1916. As discussed, the death of his two powerful patrons – Morgan and Washington – also likely played a role in his pursuit of a broader artistic path.⁶⁰⁰

Burleigh's choral arrangements of “Deep River” and “Dig My Grave” for the Schola Cantorum and Clef Club Orchestra in 1914 hinted at his new direction. Some hesitancy likely came from the public's familiarity with spirituals through Uncle Tom shows like New York's *Black America* in 1894. So, it was revolutionary for Negro spirituals to be translated into art song, and 1916 was a propitious year to do so because of two developments in American culture.⁶⁰¹

⁶⁰⁰ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 294.

⁶⁰¹ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 273–74.

The previous year, D. W Griffith's racist film, *Birth of a Nation* premiered in New York in March of 1915. The intertitle read "The bringing of the African to America planted the first seed of disunion." It purported that White unification came from fighting their common enemies – African Americans. The film's popularity demonstrated that White Americans not only saw their fellow citizens as "other," but as non-Americans deserving of violence and subjugation. In contradistinction, Burleigh's Negro spirituals posited their African American creators as folk artists whose music was needed in this moment to revitalize Black history in the face of rising White supremacy. His music confronted this movement to White-wash American history and exclude Black voices of the American past.⁶⁰²

The time was right – professionally, culturally, and politically – to follow Dvořák's admonition to "give these melodies to the world," which were "as great as a Beethoven theme" to the Czech composer. American composer Edward MacDowell, who likewise saw the spirituals' beauty while listening to Burleigh sing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," encouraged him to "give that melody a setting that will make it available to all musicians and music lovers – to the Caucasian interpreter as to the Negro creator."⁶⁰³

The war raging in Europe factored into the timing of Burleigh's release of art song spirituals. A vacuum opened in art song repertoire because *Lieder*, German art songs, were unpatriotic. Burleigh's first art song spiritual, "Deep River," was published on June 3, 1916, just as singers' repertoire was politically curtailed. This initiated a vogue for White concert singers to include spirituals in their recitals and made Burleigh a household name. From that point forward, though he continued to release some successful art songs, his spiritual compositions established him in the popular cultural imagination. Soon he travelled widely to

⁶⁰² Klára Mócz, "The Birth of a Nation and the Limits of the Human Universal in Ernest Bloch's America," *American Music* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 182–83.

⁶⁰³ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 83, 302; Murray, "The Story of Harry T. Burleigh," 104, fn19.

perform and lecture about their significance to American music. Featured regularly on radio, by the 1920s Harry T. Burleigh had achieved *bona fide* celebrity.⁶⁰⁴

Choosing the German *Lied* tradition as a framework for African American folk music, Burleigh embodied the development of Black art. Reacting to critics who viewed Burleigh's move as a corruption of folk tradition, W. E. B. Du Bois vociferously defended this development:

“Listen to the Lambs” by Dett, or “Deep River,” as translated by Burleigh, or any attempts to sing Italian music of German, in some inexplicable manner leads them off their preserves and is not “natural.” To which the answer is, Art is not natural and is not supposed to be natural. And just because it is not natural, it may be Great art.⁶⁰⁵

Reckoning with the American past and present through spirituals

In his new iteration of spirituals, Burleigh created an intellectual framework to overcome the pernicious, historical connection between spirituals and minstrelsy. Robert Moton, president of Tuskegee, described hearing “Wear dem Golden Slippers,” sung at a circus by White minstrels in blackface, as “These white men were making fun, not only of our color and of our songs, but also of our religion.” Moton took years to recover from the violence done to this music before he trusted White audiences with Black music.⁶⁰⁶

Even Burleigh was unsure about performing them earlier in his career. On annual fundraising trips with Booker T. Washington, some Black audiences severely criticized him for singing spirituals to White audiences, because minstrelsy treated them as primitive and comical. Yet, he contended, his new arrangements retained recognizable melodies and rhythmic structure but differed entirely from “coon songs.” Burleigh argued that spirituals expressed the lived experience of those “who were in America when Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean,” and “if the Negro is not American, I do not know who is.” Black Americans

⁶⁰⁴ “Radio Today,” *Daily News*, 1924; “Radio Prepares Special Tributes to Honor Memorial Day Heroes,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 1926.

⁶⁰⁵ Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory*, 14.

⁶⁰⁶ Graham, *Spirituals and Birth of Black Entertainment*, 67.

were constitutive to any concept of the nation, and their music, therefore, was integral to the sound of America writ large.⁶⁰⁷

Two compatible cultural and religious concepts motivated his work. Philosophically, his *Bildung* commitments meant he hoped to touch something deep in human experience. Burleigh believed his art song spirituals could evoke a listener's sense of connectedness to the universal human condition and challenge the racial partitioning which divided people.

Bildung was compatible with by Judeo-Christian traditions and Burleigh's understanding of a fundamental unity amongst humans. The concept of *imago dei* posits a universal relationship between all people, because each carries the divine image of their creator and so shares some aspects of that divinity. This belief shaped his broadly ecumenical and interfaith approach. Rather than cloister within either the White or Black church or one Christian denomination, Burleigh engaged in a wide variety of sacred institutions during his life.

Bildung also comported with Burleigh's spiritual convictions regarding the Christian gospel's concept of the "parable of the talents," in which Jesus admonished his disciples to be faithful to their unique gifts and callings. In response, Burleigh dedicated himself to art musicianship, which made the most of his vocal gifts and compositional talents. He pursued all the *Bildung* elements to becoming a great artist – a rigorous work ethic and the development artistic sensibilities through reading, listening, and reflecting on musical, poetic and literary texts, immersing himself in what he considered "high art," and surrounding himself with like-minded peers. Through this development of his "talents," Burleigh aspired to create music which could mitigate racial, political, and cultural differences that kept people from seeing each other's shared humanity

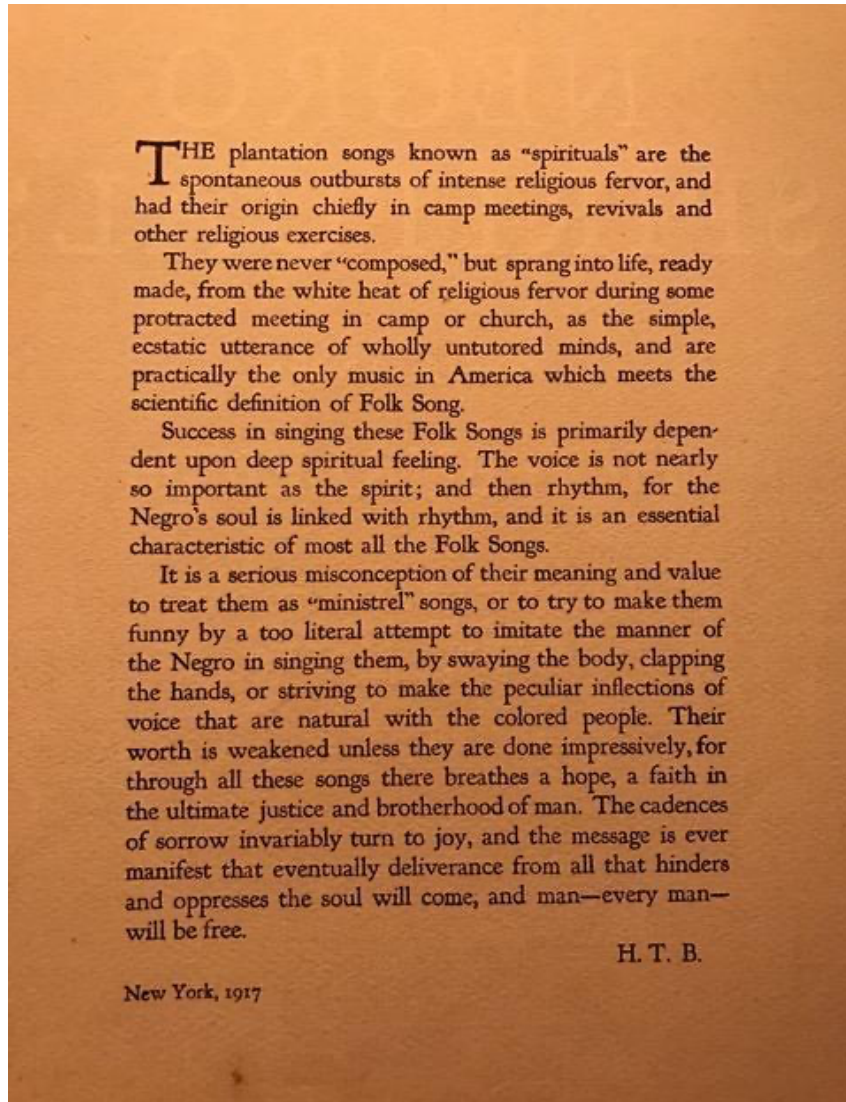
⁶⁰⁷ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 316.

In America, this concept of shared humanity was besieged specifically in 1916 through *Birth of a Nation* and the Klan's reinvigoration. Both his faith and these divisive ideologies informed Burleigh's manifesto. A statement printed on the back of all his collected G. Ricordi art song spirituals placed this music as pre-eminently American, by arguing it met "the scientific definition of Folk Song." Furthermore, he situated spirituals as the American *Volksgeist*, a German concept in which the "spirit of the nation" defines its character. Enslavement, which had birthed the spirituals, was inextricably American.

The spirituals' narratives of survival under enslavement set up a discomfiting dialectic with the perception of America's core values and institutions as inherently democratic. The voices that rang out in spirituals evidenced America's founding on inequity and the legal violence that allowed trafficked Black bodies. However, healing are also intrinsic because the spiritual "breathes a hope, a faith in the ultimate brotherhood of man." This music, he insisted, pointed toward a truer framing of American democracy. His *Bildung* aspiration was that the spiritual would enable connection between people in a national community where unity overcame differences.

In the final line of his manifesto, Burleigh declared, "The cadences of sorrow inevitably turn to joy, and the message is ever manifest, that eventually deliverance from all that hinders and oppresses the soul will come, and man – every man – will be free." This unfreedom applied to White Americans enslaved to White dominance. For Black Americans, connecting with the music of their ancestors might bring healing through the faith and hope their music expressed.

Figure 11.1 Burleigh's manifesto about the origin of spirituals⁶⁰⁸



The Negro spiritual

Before examining Burleigh's particular expression of the Negro spiritual, it is necessary to historicize it as a musical expression to contextualize his sonic contribution to art music.

Though it shares a legibility with the poetically infused *Lieder* tradition, its texts are radically different. With Burleigh's professional arrangement of spirituals into art songs, a new sound carried old voices to desegregate the German genre.

⁶⁰⁸ Burleigh, "Deep River."

Frederick Douglass, one of the most celebrated Black voices, wrote about the emotional resonance of the “sorrow songs.” As a boy enslaved on a Maryland farm in the 1820s, the young Douglass found it cathartic to hear free emotional expression in these tunes. To survive the brutal conditions, Black people often sublimated their emotions, but he experienced “sorrow songs” as a chink letting in light amidst the darkness of a subjugated existence.⁶⁰⁹

Douglass did not initially comprehend what he heard. At first it seemed “meaningless jargon,” but he soon felt they were “the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest of anguish.” As a child knowing no other existence, for the first time he comprehended the “dehumanizing character of slavery.” This music destabilized the absolute power of enslavement by allowing people to imagine freedom. As a freed person, spirituals continued to inspire him. “Those songs still follow me,” he reflected, because they “deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds.” Burleigh hoped his art song spirituals might engender this sense of *simpativo* between the races.⁶¹⁰

Douglass carefully did not to reiterate the racist concept that enslaved people sang because they were happy. Yet he asserted the songs reflected more than sorrow; they also expressed hope and joy hidden in sometimes contrary sounds. He observed that “the most pathetic sentiment” was often wrapped in “the most rapturous tones.” He believed that “the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.” Many years later, Burleigh likewise hoped spirituals might confront the violence of White supremacy in Jim Crow America.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 25–7.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

These sonic vessels enabled Black Americans to manifest a full range of their sorrow and suffering, as well as Christian faith, hope, and joy. After his adult conversion to Christianity, Douglass called out the pharisaical nature of the “religion of the south” as “mere covering for the worst horrid crimes.” Songs, like “Go Down, Moses” carried the implicit warning that God’s judgement was not reserved for the eternal realm but could come in the present.⁶¹²

Spirituals addressed three audiences: the Black community of creators and singers, White listeners, and the Christian god to whom singers directed their entreaties. And they correlated at least three purposes: personal and communal cathartic expressions, calls for judgement on their oppressors, and coded messages used to communicate spiritual liberation, despite the confines of enslavement.⁶¹³

As a result of the incessant surveillance in the slave economy, Black people sometimes encoded messages to elude White perception. By hiding communication within biblical language, their music communicated agency, escape, and subversion. In the words of early Black blues musician, Perry Bradford, these songs were the “secret weapon” of the oppressed. Keeping in mind these multifaceted aspects of the spiritual, Burleigh not only desegregated art song, but art song spirituals became his “secret weapon” to bring the history, stories, voices, and faith of Black Americans into White churches, salons, and concert halls.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² Ibid., 82.

⁶¹³ Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music*, 112.

⁶¹⁴ Robert Darden, *Nothing But Love in God’s Water*, 2 vols. (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 23.

Burleigh's art song spirituals

By calling them “Negro spirituals” rather than “sorrow songs,” Burleigh conveyed three things. First, this name broadened the emotional range spirituals expressed – not only sorrow but joy, critique, warning, and faith. Second, “spiritual” signified them as sacred music of Black people versus other musical iterations such as field hollers, work songs, non-sacred folk songs, or the blues. Finally, “Negro,” as discussed earlier, was a self-determined address of respect in this period.

Burleigh might not have overtly positioned spirituals as a political statement, but these new art songs functioned as barely veiled protest music. With a successful catalogue of increasingly complex art music behind him, Burleigh had the opportunity to integrate art song with the voices and vicissitudes of many individual lives over the previous three hundred years. The Negro spiritual collapsed time. Reaching back, it echoed the celebration and consolation of trafficked humans. Reaching forward, it voiced a future where hope and justice existed for the “meek of the earth.” Embodied in the present, Burleigh produced the music that reverberated in the bodies of his audiences. He carried a host of ancestors as he sang their realities in new spaces. It was inherently transgressive to bring these narratives of oppression and freedom into art music performance. Their transgressive nature, however, was lost on many White listeners and some Black, including James Weldon Johnson to whom they were merely “a vogue.” But they impacted White American aesthetic sensibilities in three aspects of difference: in terms of listening, as transliteration, and as language.

The critic, John Berger, noted that “songs connect, collect and bring together... [providing] a shelter from the flow of linear time: a shelter in which future, present and past can console, provide, ironize, and inspire one another.” This complexity creates musical connection depending upon the listener. The *New York Times* music critic, Olin Downes, wrote that Roland Hayes performed Burleigh’s “Go Down, Moses” in “the tone and manner

of one who prophesies.” In art song spirituals, Black listeners heard prophetic judgement on historic injustices of unfreedom, a sermon likely lost on many White listeners.⁶¹⁵

At the same time, however, during this 1923 concert the White reviewer also experienced Hayes’ performance as unifying its concertgoers: “I saw a miracle at Town Hall,” he reported, as the integrated audience “shared together the close silence. One emotion wrapped them. And at the end it was a single sob.” Negro spirituals profoundly affected White audiences, but what they heard diverged emotionally from the experiences of the Black audience.⁶¹⁶

Musicologist Jon Cruz coined the term “ethnosympathy” to explain spirituals filtered through White listening practices. When Negro spirituals referred to injustice and oppression, Cruz argued, they were more aesthetically acceptable to White listeners than the literary and political efforts of Black Americans. While audiences connected with Black subjectivity in the spirituals, it was less an intellectual encounter with the history of enslavement and more an emotional connection with the lived experience of Black suffering and hope. Cruz observed this “peculiar kind of culturalism [which] triumphed through the eclipse of politics.”⁶¹⁷

To that observation I add the concept of “spiritual transliteration,” a further layer cushioning White listeners from the sharp edges of spirituals’ liberatory cries. White Christians emotionally identified with the outsider status that African Americans expressed in spirituals, but their interpretation was about their hope for future spiritual consummation. They saw their mortal journey within Christian theology’s hope for a bright, heavenly eternal home in return for earthly suffering for following Jesus. Spiritually transliterated into their own longings, “Deep River,” for example, stirred a desire to “cross over” to heaven “where

⁶¹⁵ John Berger, “Some Notes on Song,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 2015; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 325.

⁶¹⁶ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 325.

⁶¹⁷ Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 5–6.

all is peace.” Music always involved individual interpretation and emotional resonance, but by transliterating the historic suffering of enslaved Black people onto their own spiritual journeys, they created a cognitive distance between themselves, and the history of White prosperity built on the oppression of African Americans.

The spirituals expressed deeply cherished Christian beliefs, so it is little wonder that when Burleigh sang “Deep River,” his most famous art song spiritual, at a St. George’s service, “more than one handkerchief mopped wet eyes.” Christianity teaches “all are one in Christ,” and music carries multiple meanings to listeners. White spiritual transliteration obscured the suffering and hope which the originators of spirituals manifested in song.⁶¹⁸

Eric Sunquist wrote that the militant phrase “to wake the nations underground,” in the spiritual “My Lord, What a Mo[u]rning,” is an exhortation to White audiences to acknowledge the multi-century histories of untold enslaved Black Americans. Yet spiritual transliteration enabled White Christians to focus on their own spiritual suffering and longing to cross over to their heavenly home. This disabled any grief over literal water crossings – the Middle Passage, Maroons hiding from enslavers in swamps, or people trafficked down the Mississippi.

Spiritual transliteration also pacified consciences of White Christians over the everyday experiences of Black folks under Jim Crow. White listeners could enjoy the cathartic emotional synergy between this music, the performer, fellow audience members, and their own Christian desires. The transgressive nature of spirituals lost some its potency to effect change on individuals, and by extension, the political and social fabric of society. This effect contradicted Burleigh’s *Bildung* idealism which envisioned music’s power to unify people through recognition of their mutual humanity.

⁶¹⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 232.

Perhaps the most corrosive effect of spiritual transliteration was that it inhibited “bearing witness” to the histories, emotional lives, and lived experience of Black people. Burleigh conjured the exigencies of Jim Crow but also summoned many pasts to the present. Spiritual transliteration disabled White ability to connect to the historical realities behind the Negro spiritual.

“Deep River”

Burleigh’s 1916 arrangement of “Deep River” marked the first time that a composer presented the sacred liberation music of Black Americans as art song. Sung by a formally attired vocalist on the concert stage, Burleigh’s “Deep River” brought professionally arranged Negro spirituals to American art music. They took the world by storm.⁶¹⁹

“Deep River” was not a ubiquitous spiritual. When Du Bois wrote *Souls of Black Folk*, he did not include it amongst others he quoted as chapter epigraphs, nor did James Weldon Johnson mention it in his poem “O Black and Unknown Bards.” Perhaps Burleigh chose “Deep River” in homage to his friend Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who died tragically three years prior and whose piano arrangement was the first art music iteration of the spiritual.⁶²⁰

In June and September 1916, G. Ricordi filed a flurry of copyrights issued for Burleigh’s songs. By year end, based on the popularity of “Deep River,” Ricordi issued an entire *Album of Negro Spirituals* containing twelve spirituals for \$2.50. This collection remains one of the most ubiquitous of Burleigh’s available sheet music. Anthologizing conferred cultural value on objects which in turn influenced their reception.⁶²¹

The authority of G. Ricordi, an arbiter of European music excellence, along with Burleigh’s previous compositional success, immediately made these art songs widely sought after by professional singers and home musicians. The more ubiquitous an item, the greater

⁶¹⁹ Johnson, *Negro Spirituals*, 48.

⁶²⁰ Shirley, “The Coming of ‘Deep River,’” 497–98.

⁶²¹ Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, 2012, 5.

possibility it gained purchase in both the marketplace and cultural imagination, so Burleigh's position at Ricordi combined with George Maxwell's support proved priceless.

White performance

White recitalists were the first to include Burleigh's art song spirituals in recital. Already accustomed to Burleigh's sonically sophisticated art songs, they found his spiritual arrangements musically accomplished and a joy to sing. The American baritone Oscar Seagle stirred up enthusiasm in 1917 when he performed an entire group in a Brooklyn concert. Burleigh sat in the audience that evening and approved of Seagle's renditions as the spirituals crossed the color line.⁶²²

A reviewer of the new musical expression considered Burleigh's arrangement as having the "child [*sic*] simplicity of negro melody." Given Burleigh's harmonically and rhythmically complex art songs that preceded this, Burleigh's simpler treatment of his source material was unrelated to the supposed "simplicity" of Black music, but rather a conscious effort to preserve and honour the oral form practices by the original creators. The signification of Black music as "child" negated the complexity of this music's creation and expression, and by extension treated Black sacred music as simplistic. However, recitalists found these arrangements like the presentation of nineteenth-century European composers' use of their own folk music, such as Brahms' *Deutsche Volkslieder*.⁶²³

Seagle was the first to record "Deep River" in 1916. Both he and world-famous Nellie Melba were the first to encore their recitals with Burleigh's art song spirituals. As they gained popularity, both singers programmed entire sets of his spirituals through the 1916–18 concert season. The performance by White recitalists drove interest in Burleigh's spirituals as

⁶²² Janifer, "H. T. Burleigh Ten Years Later," 24; "Utilizing the 'Negro Spirituals' for the Concert Stage," *Musical America*, 1917.

⁶²³ Floyd Jr., "The Invisibility and Fame of Harry T. Burleigh," 190; Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 480.

recital music. As with Burleigh's earlier art songs, G. Ricordi advertised the prominent White recitalists performing his Negro spirituals.

Figure 11.2 Ricordi's advertisement for Burleigh's "Deep River"

DEEP RIVER
NEGRO FOLK SONG

Harmonized and arranged by

H. T. BURLEIGH
"The American Coleridge-Taylor."

The masterly arrangement by Mr. H. T. Burleigh in retaining the true folksong atmosphere of this old negro Spiritual Melody, has commended it to the most eminent artists of the day, through whose efforts this folksong has been brought into wide popularity this season.

The following are a few of the celebrated artists who are singing

H. T. BURLEIGH'S SETTING of DEEP RIVER

Madame Frances Alda	Miss Christine Miller
Madame Pauline Donalda	Miss Emma Roberts
Madame Charlotte Lund	Mr. John McCormack
Madame Anita Rio	Mr. Percy Hemus
Madame Sembrich	Mr. Arthur Herschmann
Madame Louise Homer	Mr. Francis Rogers
Miss Mary Jordan	Mr. Edgar Schofield

What the critic of the NEW YORK TRIBUNE November 24, 1916, says:

"Harry Burleigh's arrangement of 'Deep River' was also present. It is a significant tribute to this song that it has been on a majority of the programs of song recitalists during the last three weeks."

G. RICORDI & CO., Inc. 14 East 43rd Street NEW YORK

Initially White audiences found themselves emotionally gripped by archetypal characters experiencing human troubles. As Burleigh published more spirituals, White recitalists moved on as art song spirituals became familiar and no longer "the vogue." Beginning with the premiere of "Deep River" in 1916 through 1921, a survey reveals that White recitalists largely abandoned his spiritual arrangements. Ricordi's advertisements reflected this shift.

Black performance

Burleigh's art song spirituals quickly became segregated under the effects of Jim Crow. Burleigh maintained his private concertizing career until 1927, when he was fifty-nine years old. Alongside pieces by European composers like Beethoven, Schubert, and Elgar, his recitals always ended with a set of spirituals, or he performed them as an encore. Although White singers abandoned programming his art song spirituals, Black singers created a new and different vogue for his arrangements.⁶²⁴

⁶²⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 160, 325; "Burleigh," *The New Yorker*, 1937, 18–9.

Starting in 1918, the tenor Roland Hayes was the earliest Black concert singer to follow Burleigh in including a group of spirituals at the end of his concerts. Within a few concert seasons, White audiences began to expect art song spirituals as a “natural” part of recital repertoire by a Black concert singers and choral groups. Burleigh’s finely crafted art song spirituals enabled Black concert soloists to express their history and the emotion behind their everyday experiences, as well as the long history of Black American music.⁶²⁵

Initially though, Black singers did not integrate art song spirituals into their repertoire. Not only was their history misapprehended in the White community, Black singers resisted them as well: both because they might associate the singer with past enslavement, but also because they were fighting for inclusion on the concert stage by demonstrating their training and mastery of European music, to be taken seriously as singers worthy of the concert stage. Roland Hayes, for example, recalled being ashamed of not including a spiritual in his 1916 debut concert at Boston’s Jordan Hall. “I suppose I was unconsciously putting myself in competition with white singers, whose spotlight I wanted to share...I had still to learn that I must approach art personally...had first to measure my racial inheritance and then put it to use.” Burleigh’s “Deep River” was the only art song spiritual available at that time.⁶²⁶

Once Black singers performed Burleigh’s art song spirituals, it opened doors for them and trapped them in a White-anticipated Black performance modality. Black singers refuted White expectations shaped by minstrelsy through art song’s performance practice. Long gowns, tuxedos, artistic virtuosity, and poised and still bodies countered racist

⁶²⁵ Christopher A. Brooks and Robert Sims, *Roland Hayes: The Legacy of an American Tenor* (Indiana University Press, 2014), 41–2.

⁶²⁶ Jennifer Hildebrand, “Two Souls, Two Thoughts, Two Unreconciled Strivings”: The Sound of Double Consciousness in Roland Hayes’s Early Career,” *Black Music Research Journal* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 283.

expectations. Scholar Kira Thurman points out that only by singing “differently than they look” could they blur the sonic color line.⁶²⁷

The combination of racialized curiosity about Black concert singers and Burleigh’s growing catalogue of art song spirituals opened doors for Hayes, Marian Anderson, and Paul Robeson in Europe. For audiences to take them seriously, however, Black vocal artists only performed spirituals after demonstrating their proficiency with the German-language *Lieder*. Once European critics affirmed their merit, they could then hope to build a successful career in America. Du Bois noted, “America with all its imitative snobbery woke up” to their artistic worth.⁶²⁸

In the 1925 preface of *The Book of Negro Spirituals*, James Weldon Johnson said that Burleigh’s pioneering arrangements of art song spirituals “widened the appeal and extended their use to singers and the general public.” He noted the initial revolt by emancipated African Americans “against everything connected with slavery,” including their survival music. Into that musical vacuum, White hymn book sellers profited by bringing their music into Southern churches. But, according to Johnson, the vogue for spirituals “reawakened” Black Americans “to the value and beauty” of their music. Burleigh’s music, he argued, began “an entirely new phase of race consciousness” by turning the community’s “gaze inward toward [their] own cultural resources.”⁶²⁹ Johnson acknowledged here that Burleigh’s arrangements directly affected the literary turn of the Harlem Renaissance, as Black writers unabashedly rooted work in their Black experience and challenged White perspectives of Black life.

⁶²⁷ Kira Thurman, “Performing Lieder, Hearing Race, Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3, (2019): 827.

⁶²⁸ Laura Tunbridge, *Singing in the Age of Anxiety: Lieder Performances in New York and London between the World Wars* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 35; W.E.B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art,” *The Crisis* 32, no. 6 (October 1926): 295–97.

⁶²⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *Book of American Negro Spirituals* (Peter Harrington, 1925), 48–49.

Burleigh's mission to propagate, resituate, educate, and defend spirituals

In 1917, in acknowledgment of his “excellence in the field of creative music,” Burleigh received the third Spingarn Medal awarded, still the highest honor given by the NAACP today. However, because he put his political effort into his music, historians, musicologists, and others have perceived him as apolitical, or worse, accommodationist. Historians tend to overlook his work because Burleigh generally did not speak overtly about his politics. Indeed, he avoided the press for much of his career. Yet W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the great champions of Burleigh’s work, believed in a *Bildung* approach to art as effective political expression.⁶³⁰

In his Essay “The Criteria of Negro Art,” Du Bois argued that art was the “one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest.” Black artists, he contended, must use the tools of truth and beauty as the one “great vehicle of universal understanding.” For Du Bois, cultural production was inherently political. He famously proclaimed, “thus all art is propaganda and ever must be.” Furthermore, it was the duty of the Black artist to be “the apostle of truth,” and employ their gifts to “gain sympathy and human interest” across the color line.

Du Bois’ assertion that art had the power to foster human connection harmonized with Burleigh’s belief in his Ricordi manifesto that what “hinders and oppresses the soul” was racial othering that engendered hate, violence, and rupture of their sense of shared humanity. When market taste and demand shifted at the outset of the war, Burleigh created a new iteration of art song with political, cultural, and spiritual aspirations. Like Du Bois, as a Black artist reaching across the color line, he believed the creators of Black sacred music had gifts to give White America, which contained “a hope, a faith in the ultimate justice and brotherhood of man.”⁶³¹

⁶³⁰ “Burleigh Wins Springarn,” *New York Age*, 1917.

⁶³¹ David Levering Lewis, *Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader* (Turtleback Books, 1995), 102–3.

To do so, Burleigh addressed the musical limitations of the spirituals' oral tradition, which in some measure siloed them in Black culture. Since the oral tradition had no accompaniment, Burleigh recognized "there was nothing in the tune to guide the singers. No one else could understand them. They were really hidden from the world." By propagating them in the soil of notated art music, he made them available for wider performance, and not only as art songs. The same year that "Deep River" debuted as an art song, Burleigh quietly began arranging spirituals for in quartets and choirs to make them available as church music.⁶³²

Burleigh resituated spirituals as American music for all its citizens to enjoy, perform, and appreciate as their heritage. Accustomed to putting his politics into his art, Burleigh increasingly made public statements about spirituals in the late 1910s and early 1920s. In a speech to the 1922 NAACP convention, he quoted from his collaborative project with Henry Krehbiel, *Afro-American Songs*, to remind the audience that spirituals were "the only songs in America that conform to the scientific definition of art songs." This framing linked spirituals with the concept that German *Volksmusik* contained essential truths of national identity.⁶³³

Accordingly, he thought singers ought to perform them in "musicianly manner" appropriate to their distinctive national characteristics and not conflated with less meaningful modern music. Burleigh intended musicians to follow the nineteenth-century European pattern of composing art music based on folk melodies to express their discrete cultural and historical past. Creating "high art" from spirituals placed Black Americans and their history at the center of national identity, which affirmed their rights of full citizenship. The narrative of spirituals and the voices of their creators revealed that the country's wealth was built on

⁶³² "NY Church Pays Tribute." *Musical America*. 1924; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 312.

⁶³³ Burleigh, "Eminent Negro Musician," NAACP. ; Applegate and Potter, *Music and German National Identity*, 132–39; "Folk Songs Originated by Negroes," 1–2. *New York Amsterdam News*. 1923; Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 219.

Black labour, even before it was constituted a nation, thus making them, as literary scholar Eric J. Sundquist described, “the preeminent American art.”⁶³⁴

To make this case, Burleigh went on the road to educate both Black and White audiences about spirituals as nationalist art. During the last twenty years of his career he travelled widely, performing lecture—recitals about spirituals to both sets of constituents. Music critic Lucien H. White described these Burleigh performances: “After his brief exposition, Dr. Burleigh turned to the piano and sang, playing his own accompaniments, making running comments as to his effort to so correlate his harmonic arrangements with the spirit of the original melodies as to accentuate the marvellous imagery and descriptive beauty of the race conception.”

Burleigh wove music theory with performance to demonstrate how this oral, communally created art could extend to new contexts, including concert stages and church sanctuaries. To White audiences, his argument concerned racial inclusion broadly, not only based on the argument about nationalist music. As Burleigh expressed in his Ricordi statement, spirituals enabled empathetic listening to the stories and humanity of Black Americans. Empathy could heal White Americans from the poison of racist hatred arising from not recognizing Black Americans as fellow, equal creations. Only then could there be hope for freedom from hate and misrecognition.

Amongst his own community there was different resistance, because many African Americans associated spirituals with enslavement and the degrading imagery and narratives in minstrelsy which bastardized spirituals. Burleigh educated Black audiences about the pride they could have in spirituals. A 1922 letter directed to the NAACP made the case that spirituals were artifacts of great worth:

⁶³⁴“Folk Songs Originated by Negroes,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 1923; Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 319.

These melodies are our prized possession. They were created for a definite purpose and are designed to demonstrate and perpetuate the deepest aesthetic endowment of the race. They are the only legacy of slavery days that we can be proud of; - our one priceless contribution to the vast musical product of the United States. They rank with the great folk-music of the world and are among the loveliest of chanted prayers. Now, since this body of folk-song expresses the soul of a race, it is a holy thing.⁶³⁵

Unsurprisingly, Burleigh soon had to defend his position on spirituals from White critics who appeared out of the woodwork with hackneyed arguments. As Burleigh's spirituals crossed the color line, they reignited claims that African Americans did not originate this music but adopted them from White people, something Burleigh and Krehbiel's 1914 *Afro-American Folksongs* had aimed to refute. Burleigh responded authoritatively to these claims in the press, which he believed were ignorant disinformation about spirituals; he actively fought back through his lecture—recitals and public addresses.

Citing his work with Krehbiel, Burleigh averred that “Nowhere save on the plantations of the South could the emotional life essential to the birth of true folksongs be developed: nowhere else was there the necessary meeting of the spiritual cause and the simple agent and vehicle.” Then he swiped at White hubris, stating “The white inhabitants of the continent have never been in the state of cultural ingeniousness which prompts spontaneous emotional utterance in music.” In the face of White erasure and the use of spirituals for popular music, Burleigh argued, spirituals ought to remain as source material for art music. This position reflected his personal preference and his belief in a broader project of promoting spirituals as authoritative sources for nationalist music and identity.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁵ Burleigh, “Eminent Negro Musician.”

⁶³⁶ Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs*.

Community backlash, again

Unlike in 1895, when the older Black bourgeoisie criticized Burleigh and his friends' civil rights action, in the 1920s the high-profile Burleigh drew fire from a younger generation. Not everyone appreciated Burleigh's aspiration to arrange Black folk music with the tools of Western art music. Black artists in the 1920s embraced new ways to approach their secular and sacred folk songs.

Marshall Circle friends, James Weldon and Rosamond Johnson, capitalized on the popularity achieved by Burleigh's arrangements by publishing their own arrangements in their 1925 *Book of Negro Spirituals*. Invested in broadening the range of Black expressive arts, James's introduction discussed other Black musical expressions such as the "wild, monotonous chant" of the "frenzied" ring shouts. He celebrated the "swaying bodies," clapping and "swinging of heads" of Black church congregants with "shrill, plaintive voices" as more indicative of the true folk expression of Black sacred music.

The Johnsons had different cultural goals from Burleigh and Du Bois. They promoted the development of Black literature: the poetry of spirituals and their popularity might nurture Black literary growth. The Johnsons' collection intended to capitalize on the popularity of jazz to invest spirituals with "swing" for eager White consumers in the 1920s, unlike Burleigh's more sophisticated arrangement for churches and concert halls.⁶³⁷

Burleigh honed his musical sensibilities through years immersed in the ethos of European art music, so found the Johnsons' musical approach disconcerting. Eslanda Robeson wrote to Carl Van Vechten, the White cultural gatekeeper of the Harlem Renaissance, about Burleigh being "in a frightful stew" about the *Book of Negro Spirituals*. Meeting the Johnsons on the street, he reportedly "abused them roundly, saying neither of them knew anything about Spirituals or even music itself." Pulling musical rank, he

⁶³⁷ Johnson, *Negro Spirituals*, 47-50.

reportedly told them, “if you knew anything about Brahms or Debussy your harmonizations would be far different.” That the title of the Johnsons’ collection sounded like the definitive study of the spiritual, *The Book of Negro Spirituals*, likely also bruised Burleigh’s ego, denying his status as the authoritative voice on spirituals. Burleigh may also have felt the perceived insult to his aesthetic principles deeply because of his increasing obscurity as the Harlem Renaissance gained cultural currency.⁶³⁸

Burleigh’s spirituals brought Black lived experience into American music literature before the literary turn of the Harlem Renaissance. James Weldon Johnson acknowledged his friend’s central role in inaugurating “a vogue” for spirituals which contributed to the defiant ground note of the New Negro movement’s challenge of White culture. Artists advanced similarly divergent stories to challenge White conceptions of race, sexuality, gender, and class. Burleigh had acted as the thin end of the cultural wedge with his musical literature carrying African American narratives across the color line, enunciating freedom within the constraints of European art song. In the next generation, the poetry of Langston Hughes and Jessie Fauset, the essays of Alain Locke and Gwendolyn B. Bennett, the novels of Dorothy West and Zora Neale Hurston, all celebrated the soundtrack of the jazz revolution with new literary rhythms and bodily expressions of freedom.⁶³⁹

“Curiously obscured”

After Burleigh had occupied such a large cultural domain, a younger generation pushed back to create space for themselves. Zora Neale Hurston was one of Burleigh’s most vociferous critics. In the 1920s, she criticized “Harry T. Burleigh [and] Roland Hayes” for “talking some rot” about the cultural foundations of Black folk music. Hurston equally criticized Du Bois’ work on sorrow songs in *The Souls of Black Folk*, claiming his characterizations were a “school

⁶³⁸ Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson: A Biography* (The New Press, 1995), 347, fn 34.

⁶³⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, 48; Ronald M. Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 230–32.

of sobbing Negrohood.” She may have felt it necessary to critique her elders’ work to make space for her modernist approach.⁶⁴⁰

Besides the modernist sensibilities that sidelined his music from the 1920s, Burleigh had the good and bad fortune to outlive many younger contemporaries. One by one they died. Many died prematurely of illness or poverty during a time when no social safety nets existed and Black artists were paid a pittance compared to their White counterparts: Paul Laurence Dunbar (d. 1906), Ernest Hogan (d. 1909), George W. Walker (d. 1911), Bob Cole (d. 1911), Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (d. 1913), Aida Overton Walker (d. 1914), Scott Joplin (d. 1917), James Reese Europe (d. 1919), Bert Williams (d. 1922), Sidney Woodward (d. 1914), Daisy Tapley (d. 1925), Florence Mills (d. 1927), Alex C. Rogers (1930), Walter F. Craig (d. 1933), and James Weldon Johnson (d. 1938). Burleigh suffered the unromantic fate of slowly disappearing with age, rather than poignantly having his life and career cut short.

Musicologist Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. argues compellingly that the work of Burleigh and other culture-makers in the period 1895–1920 began a “new attitude of the Negro himself toward his own art material... and his own cultural resources.” He attributed the oversight by twentieth-century academics to jazz, to which I would add that historians are often drawn to cultural figures who have explicit political agendas. Black figures who worked successfully in predominantly White spaces are frequently overlooked. Despite their neglect, Floyd asserted that the musical period 1895–1920 contained more Black musical riches than the Renaissance period. He claimed that the older generation “gave birth to the Harlem Renaissance, and died in the delivery... Through it all, there was Harry T. Burleigh, whose hands metaphorically touched it all.”⁶⁴¹

As early as 1926, the *New Yorker* noted Burleigh’s eclipse by the press’s fetishization of singers like Hayes, Robeson, Bledsoe. “Curiously enough the most skilled worked in the

⁶⁴⁰ Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory*, 199.

⁶⁴¹ Floyd Jr., “The Invisibility and Fame,” 191.

field of negro music has been partly obscured by this new talent. We refer of course to Harry T. Burleigh, whose arrangements of spirituals and other negro songs have not been surpassed and are not likely to be.” Noting that Burleigh was a “singularly modest musician” likely added to the press’s interest in the younger, dynamic, and talented singers who succeeded him. But there were additional reasons for distance between generations of Black artists in New York.⁶⁴²

Burleigh was fifty-four years old when G. Ricordi released “Deep River” in 1916. By then, his gentlemanly demeanor, comfortable lifestyle, and secure income made him an easy target for the younger generation. Zora Neal Hurston interpreted his couture as a cool aloofness that meant Burleigh “had less sympathy for the Negro than anyone [I can] imagine,” a statement repudiating the success and strategies of prior generations and signaling her own ambition and modernist sensibilities. Burleigh found his freedom differently from the next generations’ cultivated interiority.⁶⁴³

The writer Kevin Quashie proposes that resistance alone serves as a limited lens for Black subjectivity: concepts like double consciousness and masking, which position interiority as facing outward “toward a political discourse of oppression and never toward its own human vagary.” Quashie further argues for the importance of quietness, which avoids public drama but rather embraces the beauty and intimacy of what he calls the “expressive quiet...of the interior.” With Burleigh’s *Bildung* ethic, his interior life was animated by contemplative rumination on literature, the study of music, and spending his days reading, analysing, and creating his own compositions and editing those of others.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴² R.A.S., “Music,” 21, *The New Yorker*, 1926.

⁶⁴³ Brian Moon, “Harry Burleigh as Ethnomusicologist? Transcription, Arranging, and ‘The Old Songs Hymnal,’” *American Music* 22, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 287.

⁶⁴⁴ Kevin Everod Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2012), 17–22.

While his regimented routine no doubt acted as a response to racial oppression, he also found joy in ways that did not comport with the expressive freedoms of 1920s Harlem. Burleigh's love of poetry, European travel, custom suits, Arthur Conan Doyle books, horror films, and of course opera and German culture express more complexity than the rubric of oppression and resistance. Without imbibing the German *Bildung* ethos, young cultural doyens above 110th Street perhaps dismissed it as Burleigh's affectation.⁶⁴⁵

Burleigh aligned with Du Bois and *Bildung* sensibilities, believing one ought to “husband and use his best powers and his latent genius” and achieve a “better, truer self.” Only then could the “black artisan” escape the dehumanization of “white contempt.” And if their work benefited the Black community, then they had rightly utilized their power and genius.

All of Burleigh's work, including the spirituals, embodied Du Bois' ideal that true art reflects “that Negro blood has a message for the world.” He desired people to see African Americans as able – intellectually, educationally, and professionally – to participate at every level of the country's democratic institutions and contribute to its cultural wealth. Burleigh and Du Bois both trusted, perhaps idealistically, that American culture would come to appreciate the beauty of the Black art they produced. Artistically committed people were, Burleigh believed, “the most potent weapons to secure those equal rights...our greatest desire,” and “men and women who give themselves to artistic endeavor are the true stars of any race.” Burleigh did not waver from this belief that art could change individuals, communities, and the larger world.

⁶⁴⁵ Simpson, *Hard Trials*: His commitment to German culture and Wagner operas was such that on his eleventh birthday, the son of Burleigh's housekeeper, James C. Hall, was sent by Burleigh to the Metropolitan Opera for Wagner's “Ring Cycle.” Hall said that Burleigh considered this part of his “cultural indoctrination.” Hall grew up around Burleigh, so his extended interview, documented in Anne Key Simpson's *Hard Trials*, pp. 182–204, is the only first-hand account of Burleigh's apartment, routine, manners, and daily activities in the 1930s and 1940s.

Black artists, Burleigh asserted, were “laden with gifts...we need to cultivate and nurture,” because “they are the true physicians who heal with melody the ills of mankind...They are trailblazers. They find new worlds.” So thoroughly was *Bildung* inculcated in Burleigh that he believed that artists’ high calling combined healing and hope thorough education, a relentless work ethic, meticulous artistry, and a continued cultivation in high culture.⁶⁴⁶

Roland Hayes, Alain Locke, Paul Robeson, Florence Price, and Langston Hughes, Margaret Bonds and white critic Carl Van Vechten all weighed in on the significance of spirituals. Generally, their concerns around “authenticity” versus “utility” seemed to form the dividing line. Burleigh’s work concertizing spirituals was so successful that everyone wanted to agree their value as Black cultural products. Their significance also opened territory for many composers to begin working on their own versions of the concert spiritual or push back against it and create other iterations of music grounded in the spirituals’ musical language.

End of an era at G. Ricordi, New York

In 1927 a dispute arose between the London G. Ricordi office and George Maxwell, the head of Ricordi’s New York office, ASCAP president, and Burleigh’s indefatigable friend for over twenty years. Only the outgoing side of the correspondence survives in Milan at the Archivio Storico Ricordi, so the conflict’s full parameters remain uncertain. However, George Maxwell was fighting for Burleigh’s financial rights and those of the New York office against G. Ricordi London.⁶⁴⁷

Maxwell advanced G. Ricordi New York’s proprietary rights over the two popular collections of Burleigh’s music published as *Album of Negro Spirituals*, Volumes 1 and 2.

⁶⁴⁶ Harry T. Burleigh, “The Negro in Music: Address of Mr. Harry T. Burleigh,” *The Crisis* 22, no. 2 (June 1921): 84–6.

⁶⁴⁷ G. Ricordi & Co., *Ricordi Correspondence, 1927–28*, vol. 7 (Milan: Archivio Storico Ricordi), 328, 454–56.

According to the Ricordi correspondence, Maxwell thought their sister office was not marketing Burleigh's collected spirituals aggressively enough. He turned to another London publisher, Ascherberg, Hopwood & Crew Ltd., to publish the collections in Britain, an extraordinarily aggressive move on Burleigh's behalf.⁶⁴⁸

G. Ricordi Milan, who in correspondence called themselves "the Mother house," contended that Maxwell wrongly blamed London for "indifference or aversion to your editions." They claimed that London "spent a lot of money" advertising Burleigh's spirituals. Mother Ricordi asserted that even if London was not committed to Burleigh, Maxwell could not publish his music elsewhere. They proposed closing the incident by New York sharing 50 percent of the profit from Ascherberg's sales.

Maxwell fought vociferously for Burleigh's publication rights. No doubt the profits that accrued to New York through the side deal with Ascherberg helped, but the sense that London did not support Burleigh sufficiently prompted Maxwell to transgress Milan's policy about publishing within the "family" of G. Ricordi offices. Maxwell, a Scot, may have felt less inclined to cooperate with a recalcitrant London office. He may also have believed that the prejudices of the English publishers limited their promotion of a Black composer. Whatever his reasons, Maxwell bypassed Ricordi London and took another route that benefited both Burleigh and New York.

The sixty-one-year-old Maxwell died suddenly in Paris in August 1931. London continued publishing editions of Burleigh's collected spirituals until 1977. It is unclear who oversaw the New York office after Maxwell's death. The deepening Depression and the onset of the war brought paper shortages, and whoever was in charge did not support Black

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 454–56.

art musicians. At the end of his thirty-five-year editorship, Burleigh's power was limited and his ability to publish for the next generation severely curtailed.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁹ Franco Columbo began work as an editor at G. Ricordi New York in 1937, and became managing editor for G. Ricordi New York in 1949, the year Burleigh died.

Conclusion

The advent of Burleigh's 1916 art song spirituals, when he was forty years old, presaged a significant change in Burleigh's composition career. He had been notating spirituals since his days singing for Dvořák and traveling with Booker T. Washington. With the deepening of his craft, Burleigh saw his opportunity to market the spirituals at a time when there was pressure to prohibit German-language *Lieder* during the war.

Burleigh's spirituals immediately became a sensation with White recitalists. In the year 1916–17, one study documented thirty-four nationally and internationally known singers performing them in recital, which inaugurated a plethora of recordings for Columbia, beginning in 1916. However, Burleigh's spirituals never became a permanent part of their repertoire, and after five years were largely abandoned altogether. Art song spirituals became perceived as the purview of Black recitalists. Though racialized as the only ones qualified to sing these art songs, Burleigh's arrangements had a powerful impact on the performance and recording careers of many Black singers, especially the most well-known – Roland Hayes, Marian Anderson, and Paul Robeson – all of whom benefited from Burleigh's mentoring them in both the vocal and business side of music.⁶⁵⁰

Though their recordings spread Burleigh's art song spirituals worldwide, he sang for recording only once in his career, when George W. Broome opened Broome Special Phonograph Records in 1919. Burleigh was dissatisfied with the quality of the technology and felt it did not do justice to his voice. His grandson attested to the fact that *no* recording ever did justice to Burleigh's voice. Though he sang and spoke frequently on live radio, the only other known recording of his voice occurred on April 2, 1944. The following Sunday was to be Burleigh's fiftieth consecutive year of singing Jean-Baptiste Faure's song, "The Palms." Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia brought Burleigh to sing on his weekly program *Talk to*

⁶⁵⁰ Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 479–81.

the People, on station WNYC. Though Burleigh's voice at eighty years old was well past its prime, he accompanied himself on the piano as he sang into the microphone. Burleigh later recalled his delight at riding in a police car to City Hall.⁶⁵¹

To preserve what he called "our beautiful melodic inheritance," Burleigh made spirituals accessible to all singers in a "musicianly manner," as the *Volksmusik* of America, and by extension argued for African Americans as pre-eminently American people. Burleigh expressed the desire to "preserve them in harmonies that belong to modern methods of tonal progression without robbing the melodies" of their creators. G. Ricordi supported his preservation effort by publishing over three hundred of his arrangements. As paper culture, they continue to circulate around the world to the present day.

Though African American composers had arranged spirituals in a variety of formats before, they leveraged the popularity of Burleigh's art song spirituals to publish their own. Carl Diton, Melville Charlton, Lawrence Brown, J. Rosamond Johnson and many others contributed to the proliferation of spiritual arrangements. The next generation of William Dawson, Florence Price, William Grant Still, and Margaret Bonds felt empowered to bring spirituals into their instrumental and orchestral work. This spread exemplifies Sam Floyd's statement about Burleigh touching it all.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 481.

Chapter 12

Burleigh's Codas

Introduction

Burleigh's position in the White art music industry was unprecedented, and from there he acted both as turnkey and inspiration to a younger generation of Black art musicians. At the same time, he paid a heavy price. Implicit and ubiquitous racial bias situated him in those spaces as a novelty and exception by White patrons, institutions, and colleagues.

To achieve his goals required an ability to tolerate daily White interactions which incessantly diminished him as exceptional for his race. Burleigh desired a career singing, and he got it by maintaining his place within White institutions and social circles. He wanted to provide for his young family, which required a steady income that precluded other opportunities in Black musical theatre or concertizing abroad. Financial provision had to come from other income streams, so he developed his composition career and worked in White publishing. He wanted to enable the next generations to have more choices, so he persevered, finding ways to armour himself and mentor those who followed. Like other leaders and "firsts," he endured discomfort to gain a measure of freedom for those aspiring to similar career paths. But his interaction with White folks, even sympathetic ones, carved a deep groove in his psyche.

This coda in musical literature concludes one section and elaborates on a previous theme while offering a different musical direction. This chapter will examine how Burleigh navigated the heights of his earlier career and found new directions in its final years. His family life was shattered. From his perspective, Louise "deserted and abandoned me without cause," and his parental life was equally empty. After years of believing, as his Ricordi statement phrased it, in "ultimate faith and hope in the brotherhood of man," his experience of the White church was ultimately disillusioning. Furthermore, it elucidates how the death

of his *Bildung* idealism occurred when Burleigh finally travelled to Bayreuth, Germany, the shrine to Wagner where “holy German art” met the realities of Nazism. Cumulatively, Burleigh’s long and storied life and career end on sorrowful notes.⁶⁵²

Fastidious in movement and personal presentation

James C. Hall, Burleigh’s housekeeper, saw him daily during the last two decades of his career. His observations highlight the toll of his career shaped by these forces. Hall recollected Burleigh’s need for control in order survive a career that transgressed the color line. First, he controlled his movements by using the same Jewish taxi driver who for years took him where he needed to go. When at the midtown G. Ricordi, Burleigh avoided the street by traveling around by the well-lit subterranean passage connecting many office buildings, shaking hands with the Black Red Caps of Grand Central and acknowledging the Black maintenance and security workers down there who would “tip their hats to him as if he were royalty.” Hall said years later that Burleigh stayed within “that protected area as a defence and security to avoid unfamiliar people addressing him as a peer.” Hall understood Burleigh’s fragility, because “his confidence may not have handled the situation,” implying that racialized, derogatory language made Burleigh feel exposed and fragile.⁶⁵³

Unable to control such daily White interactions, Hall noted, Burleigh was so regimented in his routine, keeping to the same timing and routes, that he “was a creature of habit, like a bear, following the same paths over and again,” always at the same place and time day after day. That measure of predictability allowed him a degree of control over the people he regularly encountered. These routines were not changed.⁶⁵⁴

Burleigh attempted to mitigate quotidian racism by what Hall referred to as the “protective coat” of personal appearance. Given the circles in which he worked, professional

⁶⁵² Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 345.

⁶⁵³ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 199; “Burleigh,” *The New Yorker*, 1937, 18–9.

⁶⁵⁴ Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 199.

presentation was normal, whether white tie and tails for recitals, or business suits for his office and church positions. Burleigh clearly also had a love of beautiful clothes. His apartment in the Bronx, Hall recalled, was relatively spartan, but his fashion sense was decidedly elegant. When Hall accompanied him shopping, Burleigh was well-known and had “service beyond belief” at Best, a high-end men’s clothier across from St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Fifth Avenue.”⁶⁵⁵

Always “extremely tidy and neat,” Burleigh still wore stiff collars with brass collar buttons, even when out of vogue. Yet Hall felt Burleigh had a timelessness which enabled him to “carry it off.” Though dated, his charm and distinguished poise made him attractive to women. With a flower always in his lapel and his homburg at a jaunty angle, Hall saw him as a Black David Niven who had “presence” as he walked down the street. His entire New York career influence this style, but he may have intended to adopt an air of unapproachability to circumvent racist interactions in public. Unfortunately, it had an attendant isolating effect.⁶⁵⁶

Family coda

The coda to Burleigh’s family history was particularly sad. When he was nearly sixty years old, he attempted to reconnect with his son. The last significant trip father and son shared was when he and Louise dropped him at an English boarding school in 1909, as their marriage was fracturing, and they pursued separate careers. In June 1925, Burleigh and the twenty-five-year-old Alston took a trip Europe, Burleigh’s third.

In celebratory fashion, Burleigh travelled First Class for the first time, something he emphasized in his diary with a bold box drawn around the fare class. Considering all the American and European aristocrats and royalty he had sung for, it likely fulfilled a long-held dream to travel among them. Anticipating francophone immersion, he peppered his diary

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 200–01.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 199.

entries with French in which he was fluent, using it in correspondence with other G. Ricordi offices. Sailing First Class to Paris was a world away from when he had cleaned classrooms with his mother in Erie's public schools and when he had needed to count every penny to survive in his early New York days.⁶⁵⁷

Steamers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries carried music as well as passengers back and forth over the Atlantic waters. Scholar Laura Tunbridge describes ocean liners as Foucauldian "heterotopic spaces." These "floating pieces of space" were "places without a place," which meant that America's particular iteration of racism was blunted by the presence of people from various societies onboard. In upper class every luxury was available, including a lively exchange of music. Burleigh's compositions were performed on at least one such voyage in 1903, when tenor Evan Williams sang Burleigh's art song "Jean" onboard the steamship *Minnehaha*. The song reportedly "took like fire."⁶⁵⁸

Since it was common for the ship's entertainment to give passengers a sample of their destination's culture, when the ship headed toward America, other singers may have performed Burleigh's compositions. International celebrity singers like Ernestine Schumann-Heink, John McCormack, Roland Hayes, and Marian Anderson may have serenaded passengers with his songs. When his art song spirituals, such as "Deep River," were in vogue during World War I from 1916 onwards, they may well have replaced *Lieder* for onboard performances. Burleigh may or may not have participated in onboard concerts on his various treks to Europe from 1908 to 1937.⁶⁵⁹

On this trip in 1925, Burleigh met Rubin Goldmark onboard, his longtime friend and harmony teacher from the Conservatory. Goldmark had been in Dvořák's composition class

⁶⁵⁷ Burleigh, "My Trips Abroad 1908–1937."

⁶⁵⁸ Tunbridge, *Singing in the Age of Anxiety*, 15; "Maxwell Songs." *Music Trade Review*. 1903.

⁶⁵⁹ Tunbridge, *Singing in the Age of Anxiety*, 15; G. Ricordi, & Co., "Boston Evening Transcript Eulogizes America's Great Composer of Song," December 10, 1917, Burleigh Clippings file MCD (uncat.), Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

and like Burleigh earned a teaching post. He had joined the recently opened Julliard School as its inaugural head of composition in 1924. His *Negro Rhapsody* premiered in 1928, built on the Negro spirituals for which Burleigh was renowned. The two composers probably enjoyed playing together on the ocean crossing. Their conversations about music, education, and composition likely ranged widely, as they sat together over meals or enjoyed a coffee in the smoking room.⁶⁶⁰

As for Alston, he was adrift after his graduation in 1922 with a music degree from Howard University. There he performed his mother's Princess Red Feather's verses and sang with the Howard Glee Club. Burleigh's connections may have led to Alston's studying with Nadia Boulanger, the pianist and renowned pedagogue, for a month that summer of 1925, before father and son set off for Germany and Switzerland. Sadly, this effort at repairing their relationship failed.⁶⁶¹

Alston inherited from both parents his vocal ability and love of the stage. Unfortunately, working in the same fields as his celebrity father and vaudevillian mother did not benefit Alston. Though he had a somewhat successful career as a singer and actor, it did not compare to his illustrious father. Alston taught in the music department at the historically Black college, Virginia State, from 1930 to 1933. After that he had a role in a Broadway play by well-known spirituals arranger Hall Johnson, *Run Little Chillun*.⁶⁶² Burleigh took pride in Alston's World War II service as Major of a Black troop; but his paternal connection remained attenuated.⁶⁶³

Ultimately Alston's alcoholism and their estrangement left Harry disappointed in his only child, while the lack of fatherly engagement made Alston bitter. Of their relationship,

⁶⁶⁰ Burleigh, "My Trips Abroad 1908–1937."

⁶⁶¹ "Howard Glee Club Pleases at Million Dollar Pier," *Press of Atlantic City*, 1924; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 213.

⁶⁶² White Studio, *Fredi Washington and Alston Burleigh in "Run, Little Chillun,"* Photograph. Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections, 1933.

⁶⁶³ HBCU Library Alliance, "Alston Burleigh Portrait," 1930; "White Studio, *Fredi Washington and Alston Burleigh*," Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 287.

Burleigh's grandson, Harry T. Burleigh II, said, "My grandfather gave him money, but he didn't give him himself." Alston took vengeance on his ever-private father when he publicly contested Burleigh's will and dragged the messiness of Burleigh's family life into the press. After a hung jury, the lawyers settled the suit by splitting his estate – valued variously at around \$400,000 but with additional income from royalties of \$10,000 to \$15,000 per year.⁶⁶⁴

Musical coda

Burleigh's arrangement of Langston Hughes' poem "Lovely Dark and Lonely One" turned into a coda to Burleigh's art song career. Though he did not retire for another ten years, this song shifted the direction of his most overtly political art songs. Burleigh's music was, of course, inherently political, because he occupied a racial and cultural space not intended for him. His persistent presence for forty years in the White art music industry made him a transgressive outlier. Burleigh spoke to his realities through his music.

"Lovely Dark and Lonely One" merits a critical reading as the coda to Burleigh's compositional career. As with his art song compositions, it was not verbatim from texts but altered according to his artistic sensibilities and rhetorical goals. Comparing the Hughes text with Burleigh's helps highlight his perspective of the joy and struggle of working across the color line:

⁶⁶⁴ "Contested Will," *The New York Times*, 1950; "H. T. Burleigh's Fight Dropped After 8 Hours," *New York Amsterdam News*, 1950.

Hughes

Lovely, dark, and lonely one,
Bare your bosom to the sun.
Do not be afraid of light,
You who are a child of night.

Open wide your arms to life,
Whirl in the wind of pain and strife,
Face the wall with the dark closed gate,
Beat with bare, brown fists—
And wait.

*Lovely dark and lonely one,
bear your bosom to the sun.*

Burleigh

Lovely, dark and lonely one,
Bare your bosom to the *golden* sun.
Do not be afraid of light,
You who are a child of *right*.

Open wide your arms to life,
Whirl in the wind of pain and strife.
Face the wall with the dark closed gate
Beat with *tireless hands* and wait,
Wait, wait.

The first two lines marked *pianissimo* begin gently and melodically to emphasize “one,” as if to symbolize their solitary nature. Burleigh expands Hughes’ “sun” to the “golden sun” for a better rhythmic flow for vocalists. But the “gold” in “golden” also ascends to an E note, as if to highlight the warmth and power of illumination on the subject. Yet the second syllable of golden is lowered, seeming to complicate the sun by portending diminishment.

Burleigh marks “Do not be afraid of light” *mezzo forte*, for a moderately loud and insistent admonition. But visibility in a racial caste system is dangerous and emotionally fraught. So, he offers gentle encouragement through *pianissimo* in the next phrase, “You who are a child of right.” Whereas Hughes wrote “you are a child of *night*,” Burleigh’s rewording is clearly communicating national and spiritual citizenship instead.

The music gently encourages the “child of right” to “open wide your arms to life,” to take up space, because only fearlessness in life offers the richest returns. But open arms also signify vulnerability, so one ought to pause and count the cost, which he signifies by notating a brief *rest* immediately after “life.” This *rest* entails a pause, a breath, before the difficulty ahead.

The courageous subject's path suggests a "whirl with the wind of pain and strife." While this phrase begins softly, marked *piano*, it rises suddenly to *forte* when the word "strife" hits an F note, the highest note thus far. Burleigh implies here the inevitability of strife for those who live as an enlightened "child of right."

The significant musical rest following "strife" denotes even greater challenges ahead that require resolve. In the final section, choosing illumination and spiritual belonging amidst pain and strife culminates in further impediment, to "face the wall with the dark closed gate." The *mezzo forte* demands a confrontation with the seemingly impregnable "dark closed gate." Sung *declamando*, Burleigh encourages resistance through a powerful *crescendo*.

Burleigh charges the Lonely One to "beat" at this "closed gate" "with *tireless hands, and wait*" as against Hughes' wording of "beat with *bare, brown fists*." This shift may indicate Burleigh's response to the younger generation of Harlem Renaissance artists who criticized the previous generation's racial strategies. However, these young artists built their increased expressive freedom, supportive institutions, and living spaces – coalesced in Harlem – on the painstaking labour of previous generations. What the younger generation experienced was less a renaissance and more a flowering in the fertile ground their elders had prepared. In this interpretation, Burleigh reminds listeners that his "tireless beating" enabled him to make his living as an artist for over four decades. And yet...

The highest pitch at F, and loudest dynamic *fortissimo*, occur on the next word, "wait," which Burleigh further emphasized by elongating it over a full measure. When a "dark closed gate" does not yield to the tireless hammering, "wait" is all an outsider can do. Although Burleigh enjoyed a measure of success few of his generation achieved, he imagines in this song all that could be, if that gate of White supremacy finally yields and Black people gain economic and legal citizenship.

Assailing the gate requires patience. Unlike Hughes' poem, Burleigh adds two more echoes of "wait" to his song. He notates these to let the singer and accompanist decide how

long and how dynamically they perform each “wait.” In most recordings, performers choose to linger over the word with decreasing dynamics. Thus, the singer seems tired yet persistent before the “black gate.” From the loudest to the softest moments in the song, Burleigh poignantly expresses an inner choice to “wait.” This emphasis preserves agency in the face of exclusion.

Unlike Hughes’ poem, Burleigh’s final line returns to the opening: “Lovely dark and lonely one, bare your bosom to the sun.” It progresses softly, ending in the quietest *pianissimo* on “to the sun.” Despite unsuccessfully assailing the “dark gate,” Burleigh adds a defiant insistence to “bare your bosom to the sun.” Resolving with a C Major chord, Burleigh signals the Lonely One to maintain their hope by connecting to the metaphysical warmth of the sun’s illumination.

Interestingly, Hughes named his poem “Song,” as if he intended it as an art song. Burleigh took up that challenge, but renamed the poem to emphasize its subject, the “lovely dark and lonely one,” as if to signify the beauty and peril of their battle.

Although Burleigh continued to compose for another nine years, this did not include another art song. He dabbled with choral arrangements of previously published spirituals and wrote a few pieces for St. George’s. But apparently, when Burleigh laid his pen down after “Lovely Dark and Lonely One,” he felt he had nothing left to express in art song. At least one reason for this silence lies in his trip to Nazi German in 1936.

Coda to Bildung ideals

Burleigh made six trips to Europe between 1908 and 1937. His 1936 trip fulfilled a lifelong dream of going to Bayreuth, Germany to hear the operas of Wagner, his musical hero. When he first arrived at the National Conservatory, Anton Seidl, a student of Richard Wagner, was maestro at Metropolitan Opera and opera instructor at the National Conservatory. Burleigh grew enamoured of the composer’s work during Wagner mania, spurred by Seidl’s direction of Wagner’s operas in the early 1890s.

Conversation in White café culture with Seidl and fellow Wagnerians, Dvořák and Victor Herbert, included music's relationship with *Bildung* philosophy to nurture both individual and national aesthetic sensibilities through the pursuit of artistic achievement. During Burleigh's second year at the Conservatory, Seidl articulated this connection to the *New York Tribune* in 1893: "Wagner says, 'Honor your German masters and you will conjure up beneficent spirits.' I understand honor here to mean love and study." Burleigh took this admonition to heart and devoted his musical prowess to manifesting the power of those ineffable spirits through his art, a path which aligned with Black ideals of uplifting the reputation of race by demonstrating exceptional achievement.⁶⁶⁵

Burleigh boarded the steamer *Rex* in New York harbour on July 18, 1936, and in his travel diary recorded receiving a "beautiful floral basket from Marian Anderson's family in Philadelphia" in his cabin. Burleigh had mentored their daughter throughout her early career, particularly around the financial sides of contract negotiations. Anderson performed many of his art song spirituals on tour and recorded many others. Most recently she had asked for help to navigate the public controversy about a White accompanist for her 1935–36 American tour. Anderson wrote Burleigh a pained letter saying that critics believed a biracial performance prejudiced her reception with White audiences. Anderson also feared that some in the Black community thought she was too proud and "grown too big" for her current pianist, Billy King. She appealed to Burleigh, saying there was "no-one whose opinion I value as yours."⁶⁶⁶

Burleigh responded as one professional artist to another, deeming the proposed Finnish pianist, Kosti Vehanen, had "poetry, imagination, and technique" to complement her own. Reassured, she also asked if he had any new art songs for her. He replied, "Have a

⁶⁶⁵ "Musical Matters," *New York Tribune*, September 17, 1893.

⁶⁶⁶ Burleigh, "My Trips Abroad 1908–1937"; Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 170–71; Keiler, Allan. *Marian Anderson, A Singer's Journey* (University Illinois Press, 2002), 79–81, 146; Alvin E. White, "Writer Feels Burleigh's Voice Will Be Heard Thru the Ages," *The Voice*, September 24, 1949.

dandy new song for you too. Langston Hughes' words. 'Lovely dark and lonely one.' Thought of you and your voice when I wrote it." The flowers for Burleigh's journey showed how much Anderson and her family valued him.⁶⁶⁷

Unlike previous European trips, Burleigh's 1936 trip was unique for three reasons: he travelled alone, he was secretive about his plans, and Europe was politically fraught. Burleigh clearly loved going to Europe when his commitments allowed. Josephine Harreld Love, a pianist with whom Burleigh was close in his later years, reported that he sang extensively on these trips, though no documentation currently exists of his engagements.⁶⁶⁸

Burleigh felt some concern before he left on his 1936 trip, as evidenced by his evasiveness with the Black press. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia the previous year had incensed African Americans. Burleigh was mindful that his well-known association with an Italian publishing firm could be problematic; or perhaps he felt this excursion was particularly personal and wanted privacy. *New Amsterdam News* said that any enquiries about Burleigh's trip proved "fruitless, as [he] refused to receive a reporter or throw any light on the purpose of his visit." When journalists contacted the Ricordi office, they responded only that the trip was "for historical purposes." One other detail did, however, become public: Burleigh planned to attend Bayreuth, one of German high culture's holy sites.⁶⁶⁹

Burleigh embarked on July 18, 1936. He made his usual meticulous observations of the weather and calculated the ship's latitudinal and longitudinal progress as they steamed eastward across the Atlantic. No documentation survives on how and where he spent his time on land until he boarded another Italian steamship for his return on September 3, 1936. During the six weeks, he must have travelled by rail to and from Germany, then returned to

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 114; Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 44; "St. George's Baritone," 58–9. *Southwestern Christian Advocate*. 1917; "Long Ago, When Musical Lunches Were Leisurely," *The New York Times*, 1982.

⁶⁶⁹ "H. T. Burleigh, Singer, in Italy: Also, to Visit German Music Festival," *The New York Amsterdam News*, August 1, 1936.

sail out of the same Italian port. This vacuum is notable as he usually noted every detail of his itinerary, as seen in the pages reproduced from his trip to Italy the year before. That trip was replete with detail; but Burleigh had little to say after visiting Bayreuth, which is unimaginable given the Wagnerian he was.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁷⁰ Burleigh, "My Trips Abroad 1908–1937," 56–7; "NY Passenger Arrival List."

Figure 12.1 Burleigh's travel diary for 5th trip, July 1936

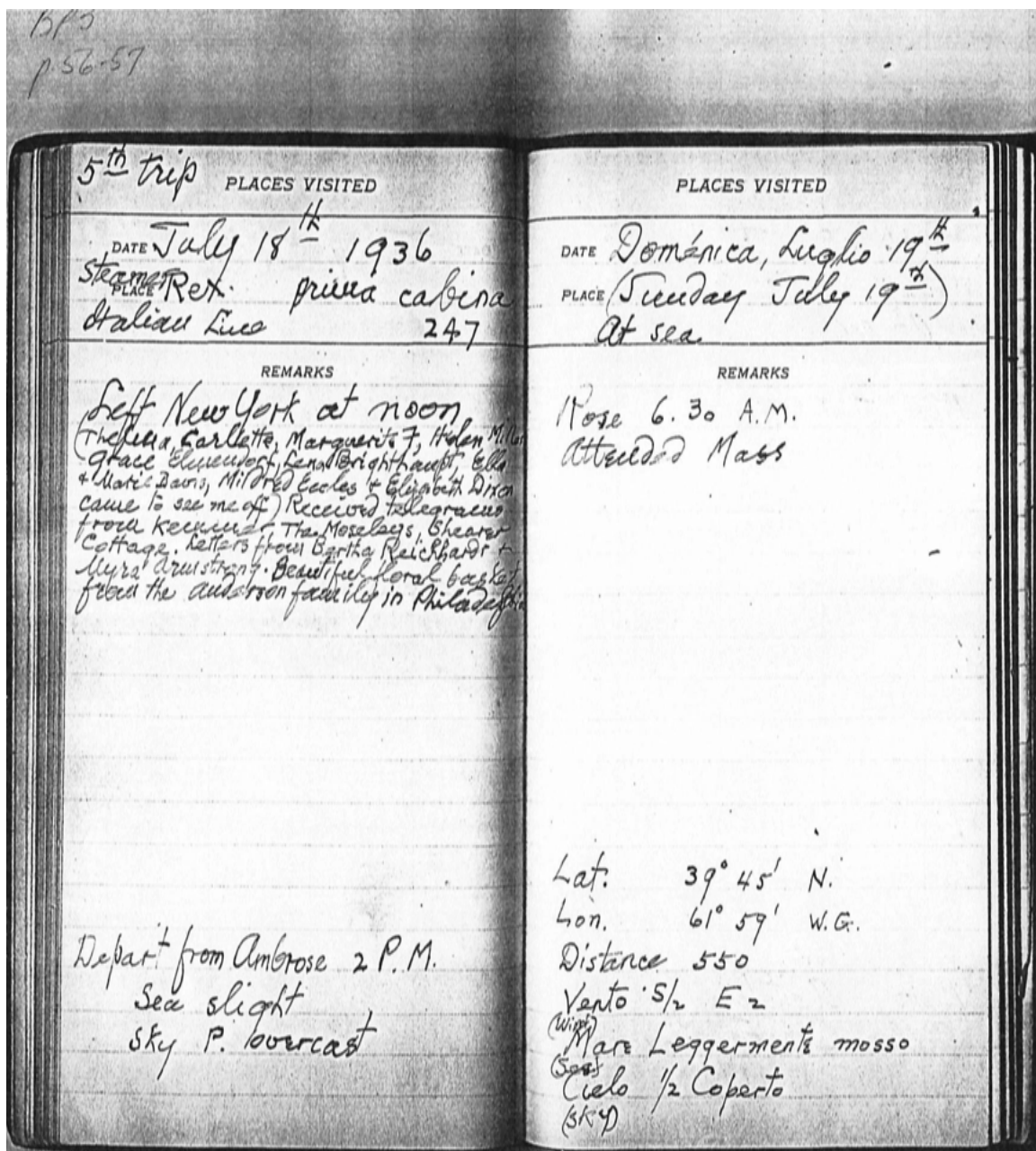


Figure 12.2 New York Immigration Passenger List - Harry T. Burleigh

LIST OF UNITED STATES CITIZENS
(FOR THE IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES)

S.S. *NY* "SATURNIA" sailing from TRIESTE, August 20th, 1936, Arriving at Port of NEW YORK Sept. 3rd, 1936

No. of List	NAME IN FULL		AGE	SEX	STATUS	IF NATIVE OF UNITED STATES, GIVE DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH (CITY OR TOWN AND STATE)	IF NATURALIZED, GIVE NAME AND LOCATION OF COURT WHICH ISSUED NATURALIZATION PAPERS, AND DATE OF PAPERS	ADDRESS IN UNITED STATES
	FAMILY NAME	GIVEN NAME						
1	Williams	Mary H.	26	F	S	New York 7.10.1910	.	New York 130 East 67 Str.
2	Williams	Grace	58	F	M	Brooklyn 2.1.1878	.	New York 130 East 67 Str.
3	Dinon	Angelo	45	M	M	.	District Court Pa. 5.5.1916	440 Fairfax Rd. Drival Hill, Pa.
4	Peron	Florence C.	46	F	M	New York 20.7.1890	.	N.Y. Brooklyn 51 Bainbridge St.
5	Cohen	Ray	50	F	S	New York 29.9.1885	.	N.Y. Brooklyn 81 Bainbridge St.
6	Brumwell	Gerald A.	54	M	M	New York 3.9.1880	.	New York 25 Shilton Place
7	Brumwell	Eileen	46	F	S	Chicago 25.11.1897	.	New York 25 Shilton Place
8	Brumwell	Elizabeth	20	F	S	Marcella Mass. 24.6.1916	.	New York 25 Shilton Place
9	Ruth	David S.	26	M	S	New York 14.4.1910	.	New York N.Y. 525 West End Ave.
10	Soresi	Carlo	19	M	S	New York 5.12.1916	.	New York 14 East 90 Str.
11	Morgenthau	Hita W.	55	F	M	New York 3.4.1881	.	New York 70 East 77 Str.
12	Burleigh	Harry T.	69	M	M	Erie Pa. 12.2.1865	.	New York 823 East 166 Str.
13	Cahn Rosenberger	Alise	35	F	M	New York 8.11.1901	.	New York 315 W. 102 Str.
14	Grieh	Alelaide	58	F	M	New York 9.9.1878	.	New York 36 E. 27 Str.
15	Cahill	Marion	35	F	S	New York 8.4.1901	.	New York 448 Riverside Drive
16	Morey	Sylvester H.	40	M	M	Greenwich N.Y. 22.4.1896	.	New York 71 Washington Sq.
17	Morey	Wilhelmina El. known as Hilda M.	35	F	M	New York 11.2.1901	.	New York 71 Washington Sq.
18	Morey	Clayton F.	8	M	S	New York 14.2.1928	.	New York 71 Washington Sq.
19	Connell	Elisabeth A.	28	F	S	Boston Mass. 10.9.1907	.	Boston Mass. 41 Str. Andrew Road
20	Gluek	Charles F.	60	M	S	Pila Pa. 8.11.1876	.	Fewton Mass. 29 Vermont Str.
21	Sposito	Ellen R.	38	F	M	New York 26.3.1898	.	New York 177 Macdonough Str.
22	Morgenthau	Jean W.	19	F	S	New York 18.8.1917	.	New York 70 East 77 Str.
23	Goldberger	Morris H.	69	M	M	.	Am. Passp. 99748 Wash. 14th 1936	New York Hotel "aft
24	Balbani	Mary A.	30	F	S	Bridgewater Mass. 4.10.1906	.	Bridgewater Mass. 58 Spring Str.
25	Balbani	Marion R.	25	F	S	Bridgewater Mass. 1.31.1911	.	Bridgewater Mass. 58 Spring Str.
26	Odell	Hankin F.J.	56	M	S	Chicago Ill. 1.5.1880	.	Chicago 111.20 Cedar Str.
27	Eisig	Olga T.	51	F	M	New York 13.5.1885	.	New York 22.4th Ave
28	Eisig	Arthur W.	61	M	M	New York 21.1.1875	.	New York 22 4th Ave
29	Luca	Maxi	25	F	S	S. Francisco Cal. 28.11.1911	.	Toronto Ont. 190 Courtyr Boul.
30	Reich	Arthur M.	50	M	S	New York 22.5.1886	.	New York 141 W. 77 Str.

Alena
1132 TH

3/6 Brumwell Gerald A. 3/7 Brumwell Eileen at full, 3/8 Brumwell Eileen sea Man. 11/25, 11/26, 11/27
The Chief Purser: *Brumwell*

IMPORTANT NOTICE. - 1. Great care should be taken not to place on this list the name of any passenger who was not born in the United States or who has not taken out final naturalization papers.
2. Where one or more members of a family are aliens, the names of all such members should be recorded upon the alien manifest. Suitable notation may be made upon such manifest opposite the names of those members who claim citizenship.
3. Failure to observe the terms of this notice may result in delay to passengers at the port of arrival.

Burleigh's fellow adherent to the *Bildung* ethos, W. E. Du Bois, also attended the Wagner festival in Bayreuth that summer of 1936. In columns for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Du Bois made the connection between German high art and *Bildung*. Wagner's operas, he

opined, were about “learning Truth,” an encounter less about facts than the “dreams and ideals” that give birth to “real education.”⁶⁷¹

By 1933, the persecution of Jewish musicians like Bruno Walter and Otto Klemperer had marred the reputation of the festival. Arturo Toscanini resigned his conducting position in 1933 because of these “sorrowful events.” His boycott had little effect. By 1936, the festival had practically turned into rally for the Nazis with *Mein Kampf* in bookshop windows and shops filled with Hitler memorabilia. Writing about his experience of antisemitism that summer, Du Bois reported “no tragedy in modern times [is] equal in its awful effects to the fight on the New in Germany.” He compared the Third Reich to the “horrors of the Spanish Inquisition and the African slave trade.”⁶⁷²

During Hitler’s rise, American and British tourists noted in their letters and diaries an “extraordinary profusion of signs proclaiming *Juden sind nicht erwünscht*” (Jews not wanted here). In preparation for the summer Olympics of 1936, Germans cleaned up the most visible excesses to welcome international visitors. They also removed such signs before the winter games in Garmisch. They also briefly halted the assaults – especially on foreigners – for failure to “*Heil Hitler*.” Despite ubiquitous German nationalist demonstrations, Burleigh and Du Bois experienced a visually attenuated version of Nazi policies that summer.⁶⁷³

No evidence survives about whether the two Wagnerians met during their trip, but given their shared relational networks and love of German culture, they likely did. The paucity of Burleigh’s archives makes it impossible to fix when he attended the festival, which entailed consuming five Wagner operas in five days. However, Du Bois, in Germany on a six-month research trip, saved his programs, tickets, and seat map at the *Bühnenfestspielhaus* as

⁶⁷¹ Herdt, “Ethical Formation,” 112–14; Du Bois, “Opera and the Negro Problem,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1936.

⁶⁷² Tunbridge, *Singing in the Age of Anxiety*, 124; Julia Boyd, *Travelers in the Third Reich* (Pegasus Books, Ltd., 2018), 150; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Race Prejudice in Germany,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 19, 1936, sec. Forum of Fact & Opinion, 1936.

⁶⁷³ Boyd, *Travelers in the Third Reich*, 150.

souvenirs. These artifacts show that their time in Bayreuth overlapped. Du Bois attended from 19 to 23 August, and Burleigh booked his return passage from Italy for September 3.⁶⁷⁴

Influenced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German philosophy and Goethe, Schiller, Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Wagner, both men believed that culture could redeem the world through the universality of art. For them, *Bildung* was about more than German exceptionalism. Du Bois saw German philosophy and culture as a route for the “rise of the Negro people.” Burleigh’s “high art” education at the National Conservatory and within New York’s German café society taught him that *Bildung* acted as a force for good in democratic society. Like Du Bois, Burleigh extrapolated this belief to Black cultural identity.⁶⁷⁵

Melding the concept of *Bildung* with racial uplift, Du Bois, Burleigh, and other intellectual elites of their generation envisioned this aesthetic self-cultivation as heuristic for Black advancement. Du Bois’s “talented tenth” fit comfortably within this older striving for education and cultural influence. Yet German influence on the ideology of racial uplift grew more fraught as the twentieth century progressed. As historian Jeremy Eichler argued, “reverence for *Bildung*...blinded so many to the threat Hitler actually posed,” although Du Bois and Burleigh probably felt much warier. As early as 1933, Du Bois noted the antisemitic rising in Nazi Germany. He equated Nazism’s agenda to all-too-familiar racial prejudice that “feeds on envy and hate.” He could list a hundred Jewish names, he opined, “like Mendelssohn, Heine, and Einstein” who’d built German civilization.⁶⁷⁶

Du Bois and Burleigh both had a relationship with eminent Jewish leader Joel Springarn, the NAACP co-founder and creator of the Springarn Medal, awarded to the year’s

⁶⁷⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Lohengrin* ticket and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* program, August 1933, souvenirs from the Bayreuth Festival; W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

⁶⁷⁵ Berman, “Du Bois and Wagner,” 124–25.

⁶⁷⁶ Harold Brackman, “‘A Calamity Almost Beyond Comprehension’: Nazi Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the Thought of W. E. B. Du Bois,” *American Jewish History* 88, no. 1 (2000): 59.

most important contributor to Black achievement. Burleigh was the third recipient of this high honor in 1917 for “Excellence in the field of music”; Du Bois was sixth recipient in 1920 for his work organizing the 1919 Pan African Conference in France. They both knew Louis Marshall, NAACP board member and founder of the American Jewish committee, who as president of Temple Emanu-El was an ardent Burleigh supporter. These Jewish leaders knew of artists fleeing the “re-education camps” in Germany, which some Americans and Europeans visited as tourist attractions in 1935-36.⁶⁷⁷

Even a cursory view of Jewish newspapers in late 1935 and early 1936, before Du Bois and Burleigh sojourned to Europe, told of the loss of German-Jewish civil rights, massacres in concentration camps, imprisonment without trial, justified by strikingly parallel White American rhetoric about African Americans. Nazi propaganda portrayed Jews as “ravishing your wife and sisters” as they sought to “infect your race.” One Jewish American journalist described it as “a relentless vendetta against all [Germany’s] Jewish citizens.” This included the erasure of Jewish titans of German music from the concert repertoire and culminated with the middle-of-the-night destruction of Felix Mendelssohn’s statue, even though his work had helped drive the mid-nineteenth-century creation of German national identity. This desecration would have profoundly affected lovers of German musical history like Burleigh and Du Bois.⁶⁷⁸

Without Burleigh’s own account, we cannot know how he experienced his long-awaited pilgrimage to Bayreuth; however, his aesthetic sensibilities resembled Du Bois’. Du Bois thoroughly enjoyed the festival: his *Courier* column calling Bayreuth a “shrine.” People need shrines, he suggested, as “places where [one] can renew their strength: where [one] can

⁶⁷⁷ “Music: Temple Emanu-El Lauds Burleigh,” May 13, 1925, *New York Amsterdam News*, 1925; Boyd, *Travelers in the Third Reich*, 154–56.

⁶⁷⁸ Pierre Van Paassen, “Jewish Danger in Nazi Hysteria,” *Jewish Press*, July 12, 1935; “What the Nazis Have Done to Human Lives,” *Buffalo Jewish Review*, April 3, 1936; Van Paassen, “Germany Jewry Under Europe War Clouds,” *Jewish Press*, March 20, 1936; Eichler, *Time’s Echo*, 75, 33–37.

catch again faith in themselves and in their fellow man.” For Burleigh, Bayreuth perhaps felt like “coming home,” because his passion for Wagner was not solely artistic appreciation. Something in these operas made him feel seen. He attended *Tristan and Isolde* sixty-six times in his life, and in 1922 he quoted *Tristan* in his art song “Exile.” According to musicologist Joe Horowitz, he also quoted the opera’s prelude in his last art song, “Lovely Dark and Lonely One,” in 1935.⁶⁷⁹

In Du Bois’ columns for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, he contended that Wagner’s work had “vital connection with our pressing social problems.” Because Wagner struggled to get an education and make a living, was nearly always in debt, and was not fully appreciated until after his death, Du Bois saw parallels with Black artists. After standing at this tomb of “genius,” Du Bois’ somewhat star-struck conclusion was, “to know life is to know how Wagner lived it – indefatigable in this calling and artistry despite all that was arrayed against him.” Du Bois believed that Wagner’s “musical dramas” showed how to overcome adversity.⁶⁸⁰

The Wagner scholar, Alex Ross, believes that part of the draw for Black Americans like Du Bois was Wagner’s use of myth. Because of the cultural disjuncture caused by many different people groups making the Middle Passage, Ross suggests that Wagner’s creation mythologies pointed the way for people like Du Bois, who sought to coalesce a unifying Black national identity. Stories with powerful, archetypal characters and elaborate mythical backstories could become the legends to anchor a durable past. These new legends might help mitigate the double-consciousness Du Bois saw debilitating and dividing African Americans.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁹ Joseph Horowitz, “Harry Burleigh’s Eloquent Song of Freedom,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2023, sec. Arts; Per email with Dr. Jean E. Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, February 13, 2023.

⁶⁸⁰ Du Bois, “Opera and the Negro Problem, 1936.

⁶⁸¹ Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 13–4, 21, 271–74.

Du Bois and Burleigh undoubtedly witnessed how National Socialism's education policy benefited the party rather than *Bildung* ideals. This corruption of German culture repudiated the music ideals of Wilhem von Humboldt, the eighteenth-century philosopher of German high culture, who believed that through music "all members of a nation can unite purely as human beings and without the accidental distinctions of society." In the end, the ideals of German high culture did not save, elevate, or create a better society. Instead, the National Socialists used these principles to valorise the murderous aims of the state.⁶⁸²

It appears that this degradation of German high culture affected Burleigh deeply. He never again composed another art song, due to loss of faith in the *Bildung* ideals. For instead of healing and unifying, Nazi Germany's cultural purges exemplified the all too familiar White supremacy. After this, he abandoned his effort to uplift Black Americans through art song. He may have felt the futility of continuing after witnessing the ease with which a corrupt political system destroyed a society's democratic and artistic ideals.

White church coda

Though Burleigh's tenure at St. George's church lasted until his retirement in 1944, his hymns appear to show his loss of faith in racial solidarity and reconciliation within the White church. Communicating, as always, through his music, he set a poem from John Oxenham's 1913 bestselling volume, *Bees in Amber*. Burleigh had held onto this poem for nearly thirty years before adapting it. The poem derives from a verse from the Christian text of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, written during the first century A.D.: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁶⁸³

Burleigh emphasized his unfulfilled desire for unity and mutual recognition by setting it in unison. This implicitly criticized the White Christian church's lack of equality; if Jesus

⁶⁸² Herdt, "Ethical Formation," 113–14.

⁶⁸³ *Galatians* 3:28.

died for all, this made everyone equal in the sight of God. Though Burleigh was beloved in many ways at St. George's, he remained set apart. His very descriptors – of Negro singer and Negro composer – differentiated him by racial adjective. His exceptionalism reinforced the underlying White supremacist assumptions that only an extraordinary Black American could be so able, gifted, and professional.

The work of Burleigh's first biographer, Anne Key Simpson, benefited from proximity to contemporaries at St. George's, one of whom was Reverend Edward O. Miller, who worked at St. George's. He commented on the irony that "the parish worshipped him" even as he "remained aloof." He noted that Morgan invited Burleigh to his home, "but always as a performer," and his choice never to step inside the parish house during his fifty-two years despite the longstanding and "most cordial invitation to come inside." White supremacy's ideology shaped perception by parishioners and therefore Burleigh's distancing from degrading or insensitive interactions.⁶⁸⁴

For his part, though, Burleigh's ecumenicalism and inter-faith practices confirmed his commitment to the concept that all are "one in Christ." While segregation was not an explicit policy at St. George's, Sunday services remained so, as Martin Luther King, Jr. later observed. "11 o'clock is the most segregated hour, if not the most segregated hours in Christian America." He argued further, "any church that stands against integration and that has a segregated body is standing against the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ." These political and spiritual realities Burleigh addressed, as he always did, through his music.

In 1936, when he was seventy years old, Burleigh stopped composing art songs. Active at G. Ricordi for another eight years, he reworked his art song spirituals for various choral ensembles, but in 1939 he wrote a final hymn for his church, "In Christ There Is No East Nor West" (1940), which expressed disillusionment and stated a challenge. This final

⁶⁸⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 237.

hymn served as a rhetorical salvo about the failure of the White church in general, and St. George's specifically, to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Most congregants probably remained oblivious to Burleigh's intent. As with spiritual transliteration, they no doubt felt that Burleigh's presence in the congregation affirmed St. George's as paragons of Christian unity. White supremacy, however, trumped Burleigh's aspiration; for the hymn's lyrics of the "golden chord close binding all mankind" remained as elusive as ever.⁶⁸⁵

Figure 12.4 Score of "In Christ There Is No East Or West"⁶⁸⁶

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MAY 10 1940

In Christ There Is No East Or West
C. M. Old Negro Melody
Adapted by Harry T. Burleigh, 1939

Mc Kee

1. In — Christ there is no — East or West, In
2. In — Him shall true hearts ev - 'ry - where Their
3. Join — hands then, broth - ers — of the faith, What -
4. In — Christ now meet both — East and West, In

Him no South or North; — But one great fel - low -
high com - mun - ion find; — His ser - vice is the
e'er your race may be. — Who serves my Fa - ther
Him meet South and North; — All Christ - ly souls are

ship of love Through - out the whole wide earth.
gold - en chord Close - bind - ing all man - kind.
as a son Is — sure - ly kin to me.
one in Him Through - out the whole wide earth. A - men.

Words from "Bees in Amber" John Oxenham 1908
Used by permission of the American Tract Society, holders of the copyright
Copyright 1940 by H. T. Burleigh

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⁶⁸⁵ There is no explanation at this point why this hymn was not published by G. Ricordi, but by the American Tract Society instead. Though Maxwell died nine year earlier, Burleigh remained employed there until his retirement in 1944.

⁶⁸⁶ Burleigh, "In Christ There Is No East Nor West."

In memoriam

Following Burleigh's death on September 12, 1949, Black contemporaries honoured his contribution to American music, Black culture, and Black achievement, education, artistry, and his legacy for aspiring up-and-coming Black musicians. In 1956, Margaret Bonds produced the Harry T. Burleigh Memorial Concert, held fittingly at Carnegie Hall where Burleigh performed his breakthrough concert with Sissieretta Jones in the first few months of arriving at the Conservatory.⁶⁸⁷

The sponsoring committee was a "who's who" of Black achievement. Notable supporters were Black singers Abbie Mitchell, Roland Hayes, Carol Brice, and Charlotte Wallace Murray, all of whom were closely mentored by Burleigh. Black music journalists Lester A. Walton and Nora Holt participated, as did rising opera singers William Warfield and Leontyne Price. Burleigh's longtime friends and collaborators Clarence Cameron White, Carl Diton, and W. C. Handy were sponsors, as well as Bonds' close collaborator Langston Hughes. Notably the concert debuted the first string quartet of Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, then only twenty-four years old, named after Burleigh's friend Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. This concert demonstrated both Burleigh's role as a turnkey in the White art music industry as well as the foothold some Black composers began to gain with their orchestrated works.⁶⁸⁸

An unsuccessful effort to memorialize Burleigh's cultural impact was attempted in 1948 by Neil Scott, who was married to Carol Brice, a contralto and close friend of Burleigh's and the second African American singer hired by St. George's. Scott, who owned the Harlem-based public relations firm, Neil Scott and Associates, aspired to put on a "Harry T. Burleigh Music Festival" on August 11, 1948, to be held at Lewisohn Stadium, the summer home of the New York Philharmonic.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁷ See Appendix D for concert documents

⁶⁸⁸ Margaret Bonds, "Harry T. Burleigh Memorial Concert, Margaret Bonds Chamber Music Society," November 3, 1956. Property of the author.

⁶⁸⁹ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 216.

Correspondence between Scott and Bruno Zirato, Managing Director of the Philharmonic, and its Chairman of the Board, Charles Triller, thanked them for becoming sponsors and asked for permission to use the name of the Philharmonic in their promotions, noting the engagement of “ninety members of the orchestra to play at the festival.” Scott reported that the engaged soloists were Carol Brice, Camilla Williams – the first Black opera singer contracted to a major opera company, New York City Opera, in 1946 – Roland Hayes, and the White opera singers Helen Traubal and Robert Merrill. Hungarian conductor of opera and orchestra, Fritz Reiner, was slated to lead the concert.⁶⁹⁰

The correspondence is marked “approved” in the Philharmonic archives, but for unknown reasons the music festival honouring Burleigh did not come off. However, Scott wrote a letter summing up his reasons for attempting the concert: “We think that Mr. Burleigh deserves the greatest honors that the city of New York and the music lovers of the world can bestow on one of its most beloved citizens. Unquestionably, he has labored hard, and his labor has brought forth good fruit for which all mankind has benefited, and which a race of people has been uplifted and dignified.” Zirato’s letter in response concurs: “We wish you all possible success at this concert as the late Burleigh deserves recognition in the musical world.”

Neil Scott’s list of sponsors was less New York-centric than Margaret Bonds’ concert and demonstrates how people and institutions were mindful of Burleigh’s contribution and legacy for American music. Represented are many Black educational institutions, European and American composers, accompanists, and vocal coaches, elected officials, Jewish organizations, opera and concert singers, symphony conductors, Black newspapers and periodicals, the chief music librarian of the New York Public Library, the music faculties of Yale, Princeton, Columbia, music publishers, broadcast organizations, and notable

⁶⁹⁰ See Appendix E for correspondence

individuals like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr., Marian Anderson, and Mary McLeod Bethune. The list shows the breadth of Burleigh's reach in education, mentoring, composing, publishing, as well as music and news media. Had the concert been successful, it might have accomplished much to secure Burleigh's contribution to American music, given the prestige of associating with both Lewisohn Stadium and the New York Philharmonic. But White supremacy's reach was broader and more able to erase Burleigh in American musical history, just as many accomplished and successful Black musicians of this period failed to resonate in the American cultural and historical imagination.

Chapter 13

Burleigh's orchestration work

Introduction

In April 1924, Burleigh gave a rare extended interview to *Musical America* on the 30th anniversary of his career at St. George's. Asked about his legacy, Burleigh ardently stated, as he often did to the press, that preservation of the spirituals was uppermost in his mind.

Then, however, he introduced what has been little remembered about his long career:

I started a string quartet...I would like to do work in different fields but...You see I have a mission. I must make my music known, and songs are the only things it pays publishers to issue. A chamber music piece may be played once and forgotten. You can't get it published. You get a little discouraged and you go back to writing songs.⁶⁹¹

The whereabouts of the chamber music pieces he discussed are currently unknown, but new research shows that he continued his efforts. It is striking that these orchestrations of Burleigh's songs are hiding in plain sight. The performance record shows that his works were played by at least four major orchestras: the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Philharmonic, Philadelphia Philharmonic, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. There are also orchestrations for which no scores are currently known to exist: Carnegie Hall concerts featuring James Reese Europe's Clef Club Orchestra in 1912 and 1913, and then his Negro Symphony Orchestra in 1914. Scholars assumed that these publicly performed pieces must have been orchestrated by someone other than Burleigh. Additionally, discography of Burleigh's music names him as an arranger on multiple orchestrated recordings of his songs.

Nine orchestral arrangements of Burleigh's spirituals and one of his art songs are currently available in rental music libraries, and one is digitized on the New York Philharmonic website. There are over two dozen orchestration scores marked as Burleigh's

⁶⁹¹ "New York Church Pays Tribute to Burleigh," *Musical America*, April 12, 1924.

in the CBS Radio Music collection at the New York Performing Arts Library. Though some are clearly in his hand, others are not. So, musicologists must study these to verify how they reflect Burleigh's particular musical language, craftsmanship, and sensibilities. The effort of this brief chapter is to frame the cultural, historical, personal, and professional aspects that make these orchestrations logical, and perhaps even inevitable, outcomes of Burleigh's life and work.⁶⁹²

Economic forces that Burleigh references particularly limited the opportunities of Black American musicians, entertainers, and artists under the reign of Jim Crow – even for a celebrity such as Burleigh. It was not until the next decade that symphonies by Black art musicians were programmed by major orchestras, and even then, their representation in the concert hall was short-lived. As a music editor at G. Ricordi & Co., New York, Burleigh knew the music market. There was limited tolerance of publishers for these unproven and “negro” composers without a ready audience, as he enjoyed, particularly if their music did not fall under the rubric “popular music.” Perhaps once securely in his job as music editor at Ricordi, he tried his hand with the string quartet and chamber pieces he referenced. According to the interview, he quickly realized these would not be his bread and butter. But it now also appears he did not abandon orchestral efforts altogether. Indeed, his fame brought him more opportunities and freedom to compose orchestrated versions of his songs.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹² Orchestrations currently available “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors,” “Behold That Star,” “Go Down, Moses,” “I Stood On The River of Jordan,” “Nobody Knows The Trouble I’ve Seen,” “Oh, Didn’t It Rain,” “I Want to Be Ready.”

⁶⁹³ Still’s *Afro-American Symphony* (1931); Florence B. Price, *Symphony No. 1 in E Minor*, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Frederick Stock, premiered June 15, 1933, Auditorium Theatre, Century of Progress International Exposition, Chicago; William L. Dawson, *Negro Folk Symphony*, Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Leopold Stokowski, Premiered November 14–17, 1934, Philadelphia; performed November 20, 1934, Carnegie Hall, New York: Not until the following decade did Black composers of larger works enjoy premieres by major orchestras: William Grant Still’s *Afro-American Symphony* (1931) by Rochester Philharmonic; Florence B. Price’s *Symphony in E-Minor* in (1933); William L. Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony* (1934) by Philadelphia Orchestra.

This brief chapter explores how Burleigh's education, musicianship, relationships, publishing, and tenacious work ethic all positioned him to orchestrate some of his most popular spirituals and art songs. His orchestration output prompts reconsidering his influence on the next generation who were able, with significant limitations, to compose and perform their instrumental and orchestral work. Their attempt to create art that assailed racial barriers in the White art music industry had limited success and only in the last five years have some of these composers been performed by major American orchestras, primarily due to pressure on the industry from the Black Lives Matter movement.

Learning orchestration

Burleigh's music knowledge, language skills, relationships, and meticulous penmanship led to his job as the Conservatory orchestra's music librarian. This position is held by one who has a broad musical knowledge and the ability to speak German and at least one other romance language. The breadth of his musical and linguistic knowledge came, in part, from singing for three different congregations in Erie, including the Jewish temple. Additionally, he had previous training from serving as both vocalist and music librarian for Erie's most prestigious choir, the Orpheus Society.

These engagements gave him frequent opportunities to read and sing in German, French, Italian, Latin, and Hebrew. German was the *lingua franca* of the music industry in the late nineteenth century, so its instruction was ubiquitous in public school education and considered essential to a "finished education" in the United States from the 1860s onwards. Furthermore, as a young scholarship student, Burleigh worked in a store frequented by German and Italian immigrants. As a result, *Werner's Voice Magazine* wrote, "he perfected himself in German and Italian."⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹⁴ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 61; Edwin H. Zeydel, "The Teaching of German in the United States from Colonial Times to the Present," *German Quarterly* 37 (1964): 315–92; "Expressive Power of the Colored Race," 470, *Werner's Voice Magazine*, 1901.

The ability to speak the language of the music elite certainly assisted in working closely with them and learning from them. When Dvořák needed copyists for the premiere of his *Symphony No. 9*, Burleigh was one of four people he trusted to create a manuscript version for its premiere. “I copied many of the orchestral parts for the *New World Symphony* from his original *partitur*,” Burleigh told music critic Walter Kramer in 1916. Along with his singing experience and thorough musical education, this task would have served as a master class in orchestration with one of the most beloved symphonic composers of the late nineteenth century. One can imagine the questions, clarifications, and exchanges with Dvořák the task would have entailed, and the extensive and detailed musical and creative choices Burleigh would have gleaned from the process. All these factors gave him more than training to orchestrate.⁶⁹⁵

And the publishing industry understood his capabilities. In a 1917 gathering of art music publishers concerning the future of American music, Burleigh was placed amongst an elite list of American composers challenging the European hegemony in repertoire: “Nevertheless, Cadman, Manney, Chadwick, Crist, Gilbert, Carpenter, Bond, Burleigh, MacDowell and other Americans have forced their way into recital and concert programs by sheer merit.” As the only Black composer listed, it is uncommon and laudable, and unusual, that there was no descriptive of his race.

The high level of Burleigh’s musicianship was demonstrated by his hiring as G. Ricordi music editor where, according a 1916 profile, “No piece of music is submitted to them that does not pass through his hands, and its fate rests on his judgment.” Furthermore, George Maxwell noted his orchestral ability and gestured toward the racial dynamics that engendered Burleigh’s compositional limitations:

[Burleigh] has done remarkable things...things which would have been remarkable in a man who began with everything in his favor and had no such

⁶⁹⁵ Snyder, *Harry T. Burleigh*, 106; Kramer, “H. T. Burleigh: Composer by Divine Right,” 25, *Musical America*, 1916: With thanks to Dr. Ann Sears for this insight.

fight to mark as Burleigh had. But he has so much more in him. If only someone had had the vision, in Burleigh's youth, to set him free from that long struggle for mere existence and make it possible for him to spend his strength in the work he was made for, he would rank with McDowell himself. One must have time for symphonies – months and years; and they bring in no ready money. America, and the whole world of art is poorer because Burleigh had to fight for his daily bread so long.⁶⁹⁶

Burleigh, characteristically, demurred about being a composer rather than a singer, saying of his compositional output, “Oh, no, just a few songs, and practically no orchestration,” although by 1927 he had published over three hundred compositions. Responding to Maxwell's statement about foreclosed opportunities, Burleigh replied, “I had my living to make. I am like other people; I must do the best I can with what I have and not cry for what I cannot get.” Though he modestly resisted the rank of composer, he clearly did some orchestrating work in or before 1927 even if it did not pay.⁶⁹⁷

One unlikely source comprehended Burleigh's orchestral ability. In 1919, James Huneker, formerly of the NCMA faculty and well-regarded music critic, recalled sitting with Burleigh at an opera the previous year. Describing him as “baritone and composer, and all-round good fellow” whose “modesty was his chief virtue.” According to Huneker, the mediocrity of the music “pricked [Burleigh's] conscience” and prompted his companion to say “Pon my word...I believe I could do as well myself!” to which Huneker replied, “Why don't you compose an opera?” Burleigh replied, “But the libretto?”

Huneker went on to propose the theme of miscegenation, because “Harry Burleigh might find ready at hand a libretto based on this race question.” Huneker clearly imagined a Black composer could only use race as the subject for opera. After all, he went on, “Our parents fought and died to free the negro, and then we built about them walls of brass,” apparently not self-aware enough to see the irony of the wall he drew around Burleigh's imaginative and creative powers. Nonetheless, it is notable that this music critic understood

⁶⁹⁶ Kramer, “H. T. Burleigh: Composer by Divine Right.”

⁶⁹⁷ Bullock, *In Spite of Handicaps*, 40–2.

in 1919 that Burleigh was fully capable of the elaborate orchestration needed for composing an opera.⁶⁹⁸

Chicago 1933

At the time of this writing, only one performance of Burleigh's orchestrations can be substantiated by public records. On June 15, 1933, Burleigh's "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as part of Chicago's Century of Progress exhibition.⁶⁹⁹ Though the press covered the event, no description of the orchestration's performance was forthcoming. It undoubtedly pleased Burleigh, however, that Florence Price's *Symphony No. 1 in E minor* premiered on the same program. No review of the concert is currently available.⁷⁰⁰

Two months later, after being banned from showcasing the contribution of Black Americans at the Century of Progress, as they had been from the Chicago's Columbian World's Fair in 1893, the community presented their own pageant titled "O, Sing a New Song." The audition committee comprised Burleigh, Clarence Cameron White, Nathaniel Dett, Rosamond and James Weldon Johnson, Will Marion Cook, H. Lawrence Freeman, blues composer W. C. Handy, William Grant Still, Eubie Black, Luckey Roberts represented a variety of composers, from art music to stride piano. They descended on Chicago just days before Burleigh's orchestrated "Swing Low," perhaps considering Price's symphony premiere and the orchestrated spirituals by Burleigh and Hayes on June 15. The veracity of Burleigh's authorship of the rental library score is confirmed, because it is in his hand and signed by him.⁷⁰¹

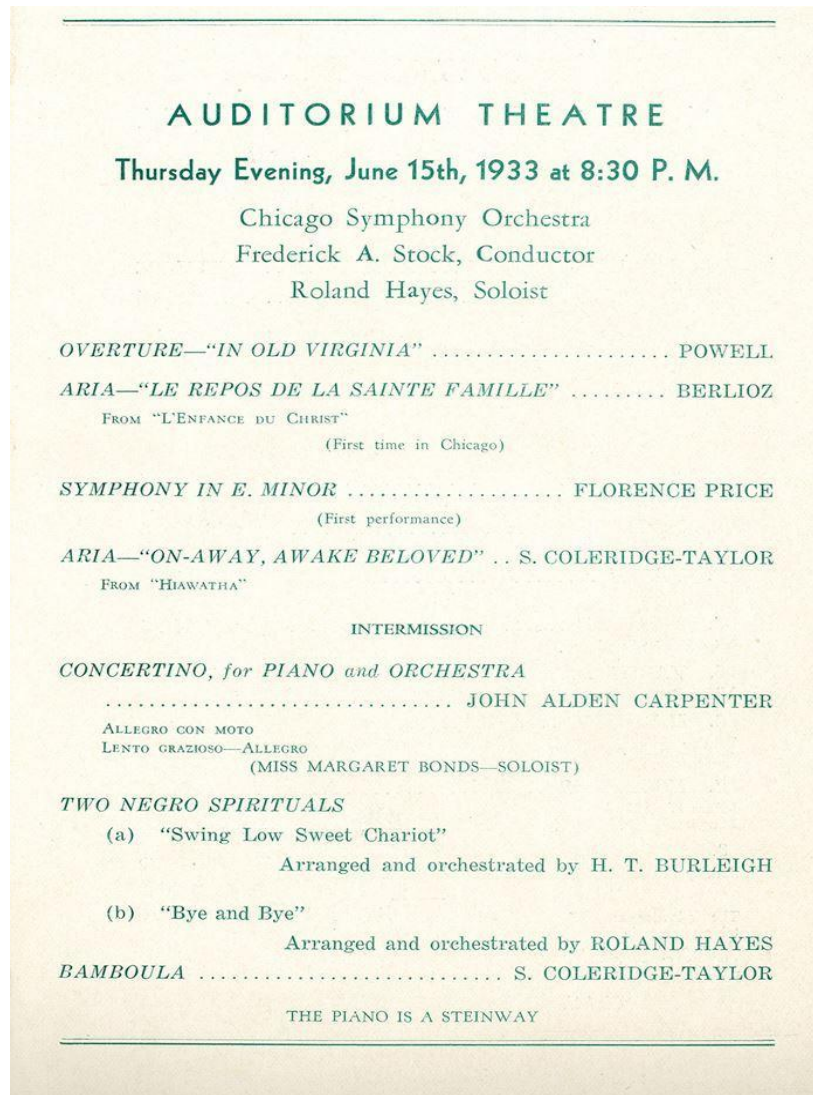
⁶⁹⁸ James Huneker, "The New York Voice," *New York Times*, 1919.

⁶⁹⁹ Frank Villella, "125 Moments: 072 Price's Symphony in E Minor, Chicago Symphony Orchestra Auditorium Theatre, June 15, 1933.

⁷⁰⁰ Edward. Moore, "Negro in Music Given Place in Concert Century of Progress Series," *Chicago Tribune*, June 16, 1933.

⁷⁰¹ "Music Leaders to Converge on Chicago for Auditions" *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, 1934.

Figure 13.1 Chicago Symphony Orchestra program, 1933



Another orchestration of Burleigh's was presented as part of the August pageant. According to Rae Linda Brown, Price's biographer, the program recorded it as "Ode to Ethiopia." However, she wrote, "almost assuredly the composers 'Ethiopia Saluting the Colors,' originally an art song...and later orchestrated." The art song version published by Ricordi in 1916 notes "An orchestral accompaniment can be had on hire from publishers." Both pieces of evidence, along with the rental library score attributed to Burleigh, lead to the conclusion that Burleigh was the composer.

Conclusion

It is striking that these orchestrations of Burleigh's songs are hiding in plain sight, because there are clues in the performance record of four major orchestras which programmed his works: the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Boston Pops Orchestra. However, scholars have consistently believed that Burleigh never orchestrated, leaving us wondering why these nine orchestrations have not been previously discussed; why they were composed; and where they have been performed. Let us hope that musicologists well-versed in Burleigh's other compositions will undertake to study and decide the authenticity of these orchestrations. If scholars conclude these are Burleigh's compositions, it invites a re-examination of his influence on the next generation of Black composers working in instrumental and orchestral work, many of whom he mentored.⁷⁰²

⁷⁰² "New York Philharmonic Program: Young People's Concert, A Thanksgiving Celebration!" New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives, November 13, 2004; Stevenson, Joseph. "Deep River, For Orchestra." Blog. All Music, n.d.; "Programme for Third and Fourth Concerts," *Syracuse Herald*, 1916; "Concert Programs, Season 38"; Stevenson, "Deep River, For Orchestra."

Conclusion

My Master's dissertation in 2017, "Deep River: The Negro Spiritual and Black Intellectual Thought, 1900-1930," put Burleigh in conversation with W. E. B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson. Each variably positioned the spirituals as part of a Black cultural intervention in American music, history, and literature. The research for this thesis made evident to me that of the three, Burleigh's argument that the Negro spiritual was foundational to the country's art music was either the least persuasive or retained the least purchase in American cultural imagination.

While pondering why this might be, I recently encountered the television series, "Gospel," hosted by Henry Louis Gates, which made the argument that part of gospel music's staying power related to the Black-owned and run institutions that grew up around the new genre. As it slowly overcame objections its bluesy and jazzy articulations were inappropriate for the church, gospel proliferated especially amongst the Southern migrants fleeing racial terror and settling in Northern cities like Chicago. But it was the "conscious institution building by Black musicians and entrepreneurs" that enabled gospel's cultural staying power. The evangelizing work Black song pluggers, singers, and music directors for gospel led to Black-owned music publishing, music stores, large religious conventions and famous choirs that reshaped Black religious music practices.

Though Burleigh advocated for the Negro spiritual as American music, its Eurocentric style compositions were less suited to these changing religious practices. Burleigh's art song spirituals and choral arrangements relied almost entirely on White publishing and promotion and therefore enjoyed nothing akin to the Black infrastructure of the new gospel music industry of the 1920s and 1930s. So though Burleigh remained a figure of Black uplift

and musical accomplishment in this period, his compositions were less ubiquitous across a wide variety of Black churches.

Burleigh's *Bildung* ideals that high art could connect people through universals in the human experience ended up trapping his music within art music. When the head of G. Ricordi New York, George Maxwell, died in 1931, it became apparent how fragile was Burleigh's reliance on the White publishing industry. Even with a strong publishing advocate like Maxwell with the protection of ASCAP, Burleigh's compositions never were as tied to Black religious expression and practices as gospel. In a sense then, Burleigh's reliance on the White art music industry tended over time to relegate his music to smaller niche of Black music. The rise in the 1920s and 1930s of Hayes, Anderson, and Robeson as international figures singing art song spirituals reified Burleigh music as belonging to the concert hall more than the Black church.

Since the latter part of Burleigh career was focused on arrangements of spirituals for trained choirs and concert singers, his influence waned as a cultural force within the Black church. And since White singers and choirs were no longer performing spirituals regularly, this led to further shrinking of a wider cultural impact for Burleigh. Adding to that diminishment was the irony that the Harlem Renaissance's literary focus on Black voices and storytelling relied in some measure on the work of Burleigh and his generation. Their music, plays, and comedy called on the history and narratives of Black Americans, freed from minstrelsy, to create emotionally raw and confident expressiveness about the realities of White supremacy on Black folks.

Because this era is too often remembered as "the nadir," this generation of culture-makers remain less studied and understood than artists of more famous Harlem Renaissance. But it was their vibrant intellectual and innovative creativity during the era of lynching, disenfranchisement, and economic inequity that open pathways and showed the way to present the history and realities of Black life to the White marketplace. Racial dynamics of

power and patronage continue to be a constrain on Black artists. Burleigh's career demonstrates how he meticulously built financial viability across the color line through the many income streams he cultivated and maintained over time, but it also shows the limitations and fragility of leaning so heavily on White people and institutions.

Tempo di marcia (♩ = 116)

A handwritten musical score for a conductor, featuring multiple staves for various instruments. The score is written in a 4/4 time signature with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked "Tempo di marcia" with a quarter note equal to 116 beats per minute. The instruments listed include 2 Flauti, 2 Oboi, 2 Clarinetti (Bb), 2 Bassoni, 2 Trombe (Bb), 4 Corni (in F), 2 Tromboni and Tuba, Timpani, Little drum (Tamburo), Arpa, Voce, 1st and 2nd Violini, Viole, Bells, and Bass. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *p*, and *divisi*. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols like notes, rests, and articulation marks.

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ALF0407

rall: *1. tempo* *poco ritenuto*

Piano
 Timpani
 Little Drum
 Organ
 Voice

cambia in Andante
poco ritenuto
rall.
poco ritenuto
rall.
poco ritenuto

Are he-my feet? Why rising by the road-side here, O you the col-ors

rall: *1. tempo* *poco ritenuto*

Timpani
piccolo
Harp
Voice

cambia in la, ille

rall *poco ritenuto*

Why rising by the road-side here, do you feel col-our

rall *poco ritenuto*

Piu Mosso

Handwritten musical score for strings and woodwinds. The top staff features a woodwind instrument (likely flute or clarinet) with a melodic line. Below it are two staves for strings, with various notes and rests. A large crescendo hairpin is drawn across the top of the section.

Timp.
Little
Drum

Handwritten musical score for Timpani and Little Drum. The staff shows a rhythmic pattern of notes with stems, likely representing drum hits.

Alto

Handwritten musical score for Alto. The staff contains a melodic line with notes and rests. The tempo marking *Piu Mosso* is written at the beginning of the staff.

Voice

Handwritten musical score for Voice. The staff shows a vocal line with lyrics. The tempo marking *Piu Mosso* is written at the beginning. The lyrics are: "(I) while our army lines be - no longer sound and proud they never dare show with - b - o - p - i - a to us".

Handwritten musical score for piano accompaniment. The bottom three staves show chords and accompaniment for the piano. Dynamics markings include *mf.* and *crescendo*. A large crescendo hairpin is drawn across the staves.

allargando. *a tempo*

allargando. *a tempo*

con cordina

allargando

a tempo

mf.

mf.

mf.

allargando *mf.*

do um del deeply chinghen? March toward the sea)

ALP0407

Andante languido.

pp rall. molto

con sordina

con sordina

Tempo

pp.

crescendo in 2da. T.

Little drum

Arpa

Voice

languido

Ma + master, years a hundred since from my par-ents

dim e rall.

dim e rall.

Andante languido

rit: meno mosso

rit: meno mosso

meno mosso

rit:

sun-der'd. sun-der'd. a little child they caught me as the sa-va-ge beast is caught,

ALF0407

Moderato

The musical score consists of the following parts from top to bottom:

- Five staves of woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and saxophone).
- Two staves of strings (violin and viola).
- Timpani (Timp.) and Little Drum (L. Drum).
- Acoustic guitar (Acg.).
- Voice part with lyrics: "Then hisser cried the sea monster with the cruel snake in thought".
- Two staves of piano accompaniment.

The score is written in a 4/4 time signature and includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, pp), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions.

Tempo I
ff *rall.* *colla voce.*

ff

Tempo I
ff *colla voce*

Timpani

Little Drum

Arpa *rall.* *colla voce.*

Voce
pp *il te* *un uo*
a alla child

ff *Tempo I* *p colla voce*

ff *rall.*

ff

rit. e diminuendo

rit. — pp.

Handwritten musical score for strings and woodwinds. The top system consists of five staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second staff has a bass clef. The third staff has a treble clef. The fourth and fifth staves have bass clefs. The music features various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are dynamic markings like *pp* and *rit.* throughout the section.

Timps
Little drum

rit. e diminuendo

Handwritten musical score for Timpani and Little Drum. It consists of two staves. The top staff is for Timpani and the bottom for Little Drum. The music is marked with *rit. e diminuendo* and includes various rhythmic patterns.

Arpa

Handwritten musical score for Arpa. It consists of one staff with a treble clef. The music features arpeggiated chords and is marked with *rit. e diminuendo*.

Voice

re-ovell star - in thought

rit. — pp

Handwritten musical score for Voice. It consists of one staff with a treble clef. The lyrics are *re-ovell star - in thought*. The music is marked with *rit. — pp* and includes various rhythmic patterns and rests.

Tempo I

A handwritten musical score on aged paper, featuring multiple staves for an orchestra and a voice part. The score is titled "Tempo I" in the upper left. The top section consists of five staves of orchestral music, including woodwinds and strings, with dynamic markings such as *f* and *p*. Below this is a section for percussion, with staves for "Timp." (Timpani) and "Drum", and a section for "Arpa" (Harp). The bottom section is for "Voice", with two staves of vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The vocal lines include the lyrics "No further does she" and "his". The score is filled with musical notation, including notes, rests, and various performance instructions.

ritenuto

Handwritten musical notation for strings and woodwinds. The top two staves show woodwind parts with various notes and rests. The bottom two staves show string parts with rhythmic patterns and some melodic lines.

ritenuto

Handwritten musical notation for Timpani and Arpa. The Timpani part (labeled 'Timp.') features a series of rhythmic strokes. The Arpa part (labeled 'Arpa') has a more melodic and harmonic accompaniment.

Handwritten musical notation with lyrics. The lyrics are: "sing - but sings - ing all the day over high - time - turban and one way, and". The notation includes various musical symbols like notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

ritenuto

Handwritten musical notation for the bottom section of the page, featuring a melodic line with various notes and rests.

rall ----- *a tempo* *crescendo. ritenuto. Tempo I*

in la-illi

rit: Tempo I

rall ----- *a tempo*

Voce
 Solo her dar-king eye dead countie to the roy. I wante the que - done mourning ay

rall ----- *ritenuto + f* *Tempo I*

This page of handwritten musical notation features several staves. At the top, four staves are grouped together, likely representing a string quartet. Below these are two staves for Timpani (Timp) and Drum. The Arpa (harp) part is indicated by a bracket on the left. The bottom section is labeled 'Voice' and contains five staves of vocal notation. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'pp' and 'arco'. The page is numbered '16' in the upper left corner.

The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged paper, page 19. The score is divided into two systems. The upper system includes a piano part with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat, followed by staves for Trumpet and Drum. The lower system features a vocal line with lyrics and piano accompaniment. The piano part in the upper system includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *mf*, and uses various rhythmic notations including eighth and sixteenth notes. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "strange and marvelous you see or have seen or have". The score is written in ink and shows signs of being a working draft.

a tempo *dim*

Violins I
Violins II
Violas
Cellos
Double Basses

Timp

Drum

Harp

Voice
dim?

a tempo

dim

A.B. October 1915

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

Data from table is the source of the infographics which follow and contains the greatest aggregation of Burleigh's music thus far. This data comes from archives of Dr. Jean E. Snyder, the Music Division at the Library of Congress, and the author's personal collection.

Title	Date	Publisher	Category	Genre	Collection
Absent Minded Beggar	1899	Boosey & Co.	Art Song	Art Song	
Acadian Boatman's Song	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
Achievement	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Adoration	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Ain't Goin' to Study War No Mo'	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Almona - Song of Hassan	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Saracen Songs (Cycle)
Amhed's Song of Farewell	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Saracen Songs (Cycle)
Among the Fuschias	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Five Songs of Laurence Hope (Cycle)
And as the Gulls Soar!	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Angel Gabriel	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Angel's Message, The	1932	Unknown	Choral	Sacred Music	
Angels, Meet Me at The Crossroads	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Ante-Bellum Sermon, An	1901	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Plantation Melodies Old and New
Apart	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Are You Smiling	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Balm in Gilead	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Spiritual	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Balm in Gilead	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Balm in Gilead	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Before Meeting	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Behold That Star	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	
Behold That Star	1944	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Bethlehem	1929	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Birthday Song, A	1898	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Art Song	Three Songs
Bring Her Again to Me!	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Two Poems

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

Bring Her Again, O Western Wind	1932	Galaxy Music	Choral	Choral Music	
By an' By	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
By an' By	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
By the Pool at the Third Roses	1916	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Carry Me Back to the Pine Wood	1909	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Child Jesus Comes From Heav'nly Height	1912	William Maxwell Music	Choral	Sacred Music	
Christ Be With Me	1929	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Christ Be With Me	1929	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Christmas Bells	1896	Luckhardt & Belder	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Come Unto Me	1906	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Come Unto Me	1906	William Maxwell Music	Choral	Sacred Music	
Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Come With Me	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Compensation		Unknown	Art Song	Art Song	
Corn Song, A	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Folk	
Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Dar's A Meeting Here Tonight	1926	Oliver Ditson	Art Song	Spiritual	70 Negro Spirituals
Darling Nellie Gray	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
De Blackbird an' de Crow	1901	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Plantation Melodies Old and New
De Blin' Man Stood on de Road an Cried	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
De Campdown Races	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
De Creation	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
De Gospel Train	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
De Gospel Train	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
De Ha'nt	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Folk	Negro Folk Songs

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Table of Burleigh's Compositions

Dear OP NCC	1939	North Carolina Central University	Choral	College Song	
Dearest Mae	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Deep River	1916	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Deep River	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Deep River	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Deep River	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Instrumental	Instrumental	
Deep River	1923	Unknown	Instrumental	Instrumental	
Deep River	1927	G. Schirmer	Choral	Spiritual	
Deep River	1952	G. Schirmer	Choral	Spiritual	Secular Choruses
Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel	1916	G. Schirmer	Choral	Sacred Music	Three Negro Spirituals
Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Dig My Grave	1913	G. Schirmer	Choral	Spiritual	Standard Secular Choruses
Dig My Grave	1952	G. Schirmer	Choral	Spiritual	Secular Choruses
Don't Be Weary Traveler	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Don't Be Weary Traveler	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Don't Be Weary Traveler	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Don't Yo' Dream of Turnin' Back	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Folk	Negro Folk Songs
Don't You Weep When I'm Gone	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Dove And The Lily, The	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Down By The Sea	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Dream Land - A Cradle Song	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Dream Land - A Cradle Song	1916	Etude Magazine	Art Song	Art Song	
Dream Love	1923	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Dreams Tell Me Truly	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Dry Bones	1930	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Eleven O'Clock	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	

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Eleven O'Clock	1926	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Elysium	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Ethiopia Saluting the Colors	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Ethiopia's Paean of Exultation	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
Ev'ry Time I Feel de Spirit	1925	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Ev'ry Time I Feel de Spirit	1925	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Exile	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Ezekiel Saw de Wheel	1927	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Ezekiel Saw de Wheel	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Fair Talledaga	1927	Talledaga College	Choral	College Song	
Father Abraham	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
Father Abraham (Tell It)	1916	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Spiritual	Three Negro Spirituals
Father Abraham (Tell It)	1916	G. Schirmer	Choral	Spiritual	Three Negro Spirituals
Father To Thee	1904	William Maxwell Music	Choral	Sacred Music	
Fatuous Tragedy, A	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
Felicity		Unpublished	Art Song	Art Song	
Folk Song: I Lo'e My Jean	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Fragments	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
From the Southland	1910	Thomas Presser Co.	Instrumental	Instrumental	From The Southland
Give Me Jesus	1926	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Glory of the Day was in Her Face, The	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Passionale (Cycle)
Go Down in de Lonesome Valley	1926	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Go Down, Moses (Let My People Go!)	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Go Down, Moses (Let My People Go!)	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Go Tell It On the Mountain	1927	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Go Tell It On the Mountain	1929	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"

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Greeting		Unknown	Choral	Choral Music	
Grey Wolf	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Hail to the King	1906	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Hail to the King	1906	William Maxwell Music	Choral	Sacred Music	
Hard Trials	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Hard Trials	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Have You Been to Lons	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Have You Been to Lons	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
He Met Her In the Meadow	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
He Met Her In The Meadow	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
He Met Her In the Meadow	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	“Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices”
He Sent Me You	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
He's Jus' de Same Today	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Hear de Lambs a-Cryin'	1927	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Hear de Lambs a-Cryin'	1927	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	“Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices”
Hearts	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Heav'n, Heav'n	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Heav'n, Heav'n	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Heigh-Ho!	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Her Eyes, Twin Pools	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Passionale (Cycle)
His Helmet's Blaze, Almona's Song of Yussouf to Hassan	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Saracen Songs (Cycle)
His Word Is Love	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Ho-Ro! My Nut-Brown Maid		Unpublished	Art Song	Folk	
Ho, Ro! My Nut-Brown Maiden	1930	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Folk	
Hour Glass, The	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Hush	1901	Everybody's Magazine	Art Song	Art Song	

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Table of Burleigh's Compositions

Hymn to St. Matthew	1934	Unknown	Choral	Sacred Music	
I Doan' Want fu t' Stay Hyeah No Longah	1901	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Plantation Melodies Old and New
I Don't Feel No-Ways Tired	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
I Don't Feel No-Ways Tired	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
I Got a Home in A-Dat Rock	1926	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
I Gwine to Alabamy	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
I Hear His Footsteps, Music Sweet Almona's Song of Delight	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Saracen Songs (Cycle)
I Hope My Mother Will Be There	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
I Know de Lord's Laid His Hands On Me	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
I Look O'er Yander	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
I Remember All	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
I Stood on de Ribber ob Jerdon	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
I Want To Be Ready	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
I Want to Die While You Love me	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
I Wonder	1940	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
I'll Be Dar 'To Meet Yo'	1907	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Folk	
I'll Be Dar to Meet You'	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
I'm a-Rollin'	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
I've Been in the Storm So Long	1927	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
I've Been In The Storm So Long	1944	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
If Life Be a Dream	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
If You But Knew	1898	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Art Song	Three Songs
In Christ There Is No East or West	1940	H. T. Burleigh	Choral	Sacred Music	
In Summer	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
In the Great Somewhere	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
In The Wood Of Finvara	1916	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	

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Table of Burleigh's Compositions

It Was Nothing But A Rose	1910	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Jean	1903	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Jean	1915	Etude Magazine	Art Song	Art Song	
Jesus Heal de Sick	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
Jim Along Josey	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
John's Gone Down On de Island	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Joshua Fit De Battle ob Jerico	1935	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Jubilee, A	1925	Etude Magazine	Instrumental	Instrumental	From The Southland
Jungle Flower	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Five Songs of Laurence Hope (Cycle)
Just a-Wearyin' For You	1906	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Just Because	1906	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Just Because	1915	Etude Magazine	Art Song	Art Song	
Just My Love and I (Boat Song)	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Just You	1915	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Just You	1915	William Maxwell Music	Choral	Choral Music	
Just You	1921	William Maxwell Music	Choral	Choral Music	
Kashmiri Song	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Five Songs of Laurence Hope (Cycle)
Keep A Good Grip On de Hoe	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Folk	
Keep A Good Grip On de Hoe	1907	Etude Magazine	Art Song	Folk	Two Plantation Songs
Kingdom Coming	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Last Goodbye, The	1908	William Maxwell Music	Choral	Choral Music	Octavo Choruses for Mixed Voices, Secular
Let Us Cheer The Weary Traveler	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Let Us Cheer The Weary Traveler	1926	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Let Us Cheer The Weary Traveler	1927	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Life	1898	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Art Song	Three Songs
Listen To Yo' Gyarden Angel	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Folk	

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

Little Child of Mary: De new-born baby	1932	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Little David, Play On Your Harp	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Little House of Dreams	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Little Mother Of Mine	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Little Mother Of Mine	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
Lonesome Valley	1926	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Lord's Prayer	1911	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
Lord's Prayer	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	G. Ricordi Church Music
Love Found The Way	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Love Song		Unpublished	Art Song	Art Song	
Love Watches - An Irish Fragment	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Love's Dawning	1906	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Love's Garden	1902	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Love's Likeness	1927	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Love's Pleading	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Lovely Dark and Lonely One	1935	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Ma Lawd's a-Writin' Down Time	1901	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Plantation Melodies Old and New
Malay Boat Song	1906	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Mammy's L'l Baby - Cradle Song	1901	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Folk	
Man in White, The	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Many Thousand Go	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
Many Thousands Gone	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
Massa's In De Col', Col' Ground	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Mattinata ("Tis the Day)	1932	Unknown	Choral	Choral Music	
May My Words	1935	Emanu-El Choir	Choral	Sacred Music	
Memory	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

Mister Banjo	1934	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
Mother 'O Mine	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
My Lord, What a Mornin'	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
My Lord, What a Mornin'	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
My Merlindy Brown - Negro Serenade	1901	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Plantation Melodies Old and New
My Old Kentucky Home	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
My Way's Cloudy	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Myrra (I Know Of Two Bright Eyes)	1909	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Negro Lullabye	1901	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Plantation Melodies Old and New
Negro Minstrel Melodies (complete)	1910	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Nellie Was A Lady	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Nelly Bly	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Neve' A Man Speak Like This Man	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
New Year's Greeting, A	1912	Unknown	Art Song	Art Song	
Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal	1908	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
O Brothers, Lift Your Voices	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	
O Graveyard	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
O Love Of A Day	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
O Night of Dream and Wonder, Almona's Song	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Saracen Songs (Cycle)
O Perfect Love - Wedding Song	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
O Peter Go Ring-a Dem Bells	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
O Peter Go Ring-a Dem Bells	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

O Rock Me Julie	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
O Rock Me Julie	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
O Rock's Don't Fall on Me	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
O Southland	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
O Why Art Thou Not Near Me! (Serenade)	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Oh Peter Go Ring-a Dem Bells	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Oh Peter Go Ring-a Dem Bells	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	
Oh, Didn't It Rain	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Oh, Didn't It Rain	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Oh, Inishman Isles of Aran	1916	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Oh, My Love!	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Oh, Wasn't Dat A Wide Ribber	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Oh! Dem Golden Slippers	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Oh! Rock Me Julie	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Folk	Negro Folk Songs
Oh! Susanna	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Old Black Joe	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Old Cabin Home, The	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Old Folks At Home	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Once In Royal David's City	1905	William Maxwell Music	Choral	Sacred Music	
One Day	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
One Year 1914-1915	1916	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Passing By	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Passing By	1928	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
Passionale	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Passionale (Cycle)
Perhaps	1906	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Perhaps	1919	Etude Magazine	Art Song	Art Song	

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

Pilgrim	1908	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Plantation Melodies Old and New	1901	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	
Po' Lil Lulu	1922	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Songs Of America
Po' Lil Lulu	1929	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Songs Of America
Po' Lil Lulu	1930	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Songs Of America
Pov Piti Lolotte	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
Prayer I Make For You	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Prayer, The	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Promis' Lan' (A Hallelujah Song)	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Promis' Lan' (A Hallelujah Song)	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	
Promised Land, The	1929	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Reiland Amen	1924	St. George's	Choral	Sacred Music	
Request	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Responses for Vesper Service	1928	St. George's	Choral	Sacred Music	
Ride On, King Jesus!	1929	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Ring, My Banwjer, Ring	1902	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Two Plantation Songs
Rockin' In de Win'	1906	G. Schirmer	Choral	Folk	
Run To Jesus	1926	Oliver Ditson	Art Song	Spiritual	70 Negro Spirituals
Sailor's Wife, The	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Saracen Songs	1914	G. Ricordi (Milan)	Art Song	Art Song	Saracen Songs (Cycle)
Savior Divine	1907	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Savior, Happy Would I Be	1932	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Sacred Music	
Scandalize My Name	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Folk	Negro Folk Songs
Scandalize My Name	1922	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Folk	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Shine On	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Since Molly Went Away	1907	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

Since Molly Went Away	1916	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Singing' Wid a Gun In Ma' Han'		Unpublished	Art Song	Spiritual	
Sinner, Please Doan Let Dis Harves' Pass	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Six Responses	1926	Schirmer's School Choral Series	Choral	Sacred Music	
Sleep, Li'l Chile, Go to Sleep	1902	Harry van Tilzer	Art Song	Folk	
So Sad (Three Negro Spirituals)	1916	G. Schirmer	Choral	Spiritual	Three Negro Spirituals
Soldier, The	1916	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Some Rival Has Stolen My True Love Away	1934	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Folk	
Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Somewhere	1907	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Song Of Rest, A	1919	Unknown	Art Song	Art Song	
Song Of The Watcher	1901	Everybody's Magazine	Art Song	Art Song	
Southern Lullaby	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Folk	
Southern Lullaby	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	
Spring, My Dear, Is No Longer Spring	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Two Poems
Stan' Still Jordan	1926	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Stan' Still Jordan	1939	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Steal Away	1921	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Steal Away	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Tarry With Me, O My Savior	1911	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Tell Me Once More	1920	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
This is Nirvana, Yussouf's Song to Almona	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Saracen Songs (Cycle)

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

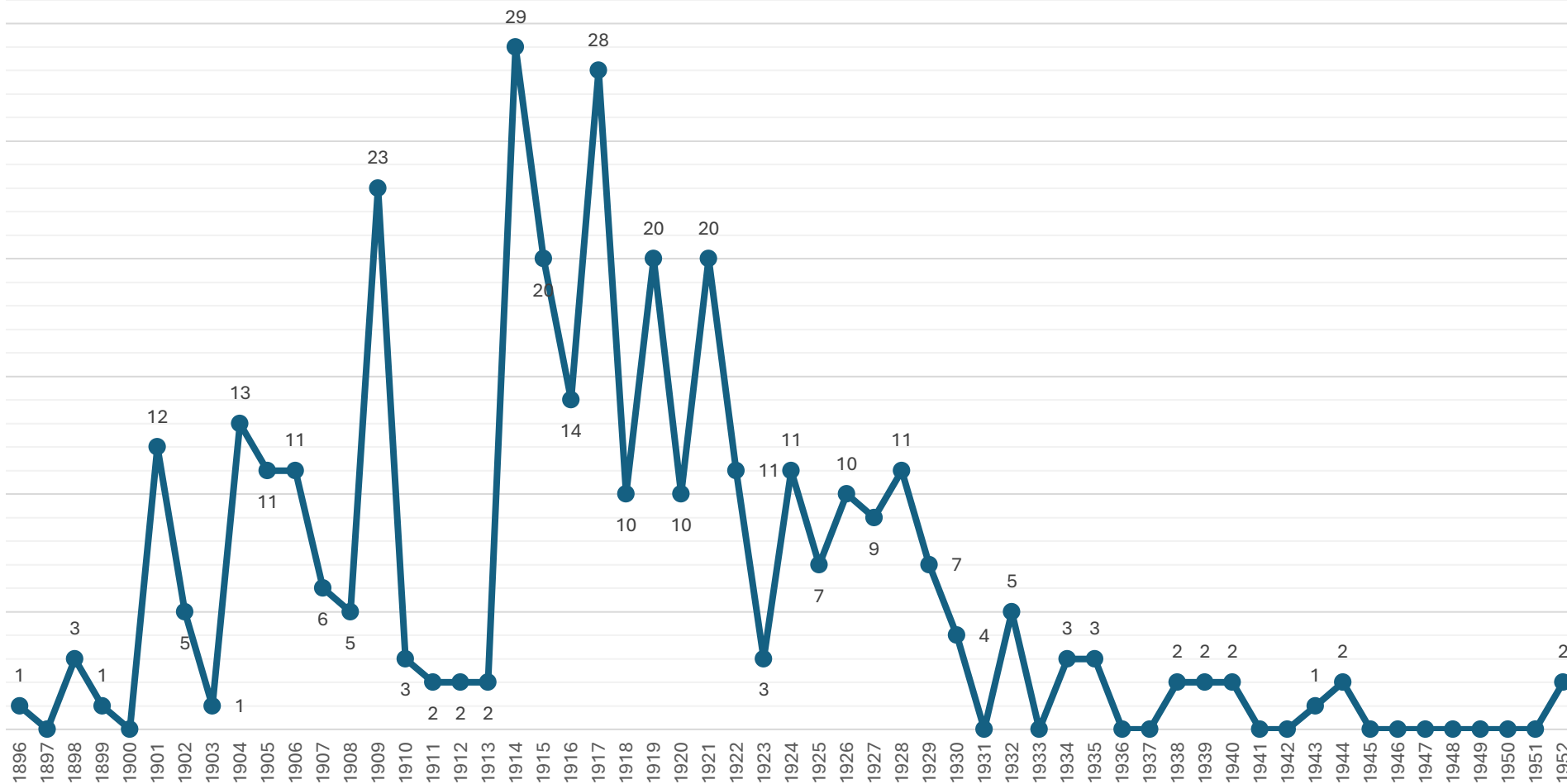
Thou Art Weary, Almona's Song to Yussouf	1914	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Saracen Songs (Cycle)
Three Shadows	1916	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Through Love's Eternity	1906	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Through Peace to Light	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Thy Heart	1902	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Art Song	
Tide	1905	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Till I Wake	1916	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Five Songs of Laurence Hope (Cycle)
Tis Me O Lord	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Tom Big-Bee River	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Trees Have Grown So, The	1923	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Two Negro Spirituals	1913	G. Schirmer	Choral	Spiritual	Standard Secular Choruses
Two Words	1908	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Under A Blazing Star	1918	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Victor, The	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Wade In De Water	1925	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Wade In De Water	1925	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Waiting	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
Wake Nicodemus	1909	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Negro Minstrel Melodies
Walk Together Children	1938	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
Way O' The World, The	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
We Would See Jesus	1904	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Sacred Music	
Weepin' Mary	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Weepin' Mary	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Choral Music	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Were I A Star	1919	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Were You There?	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Were You There?	1924	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"

Appendix B
Table of Burleigh's Compositions

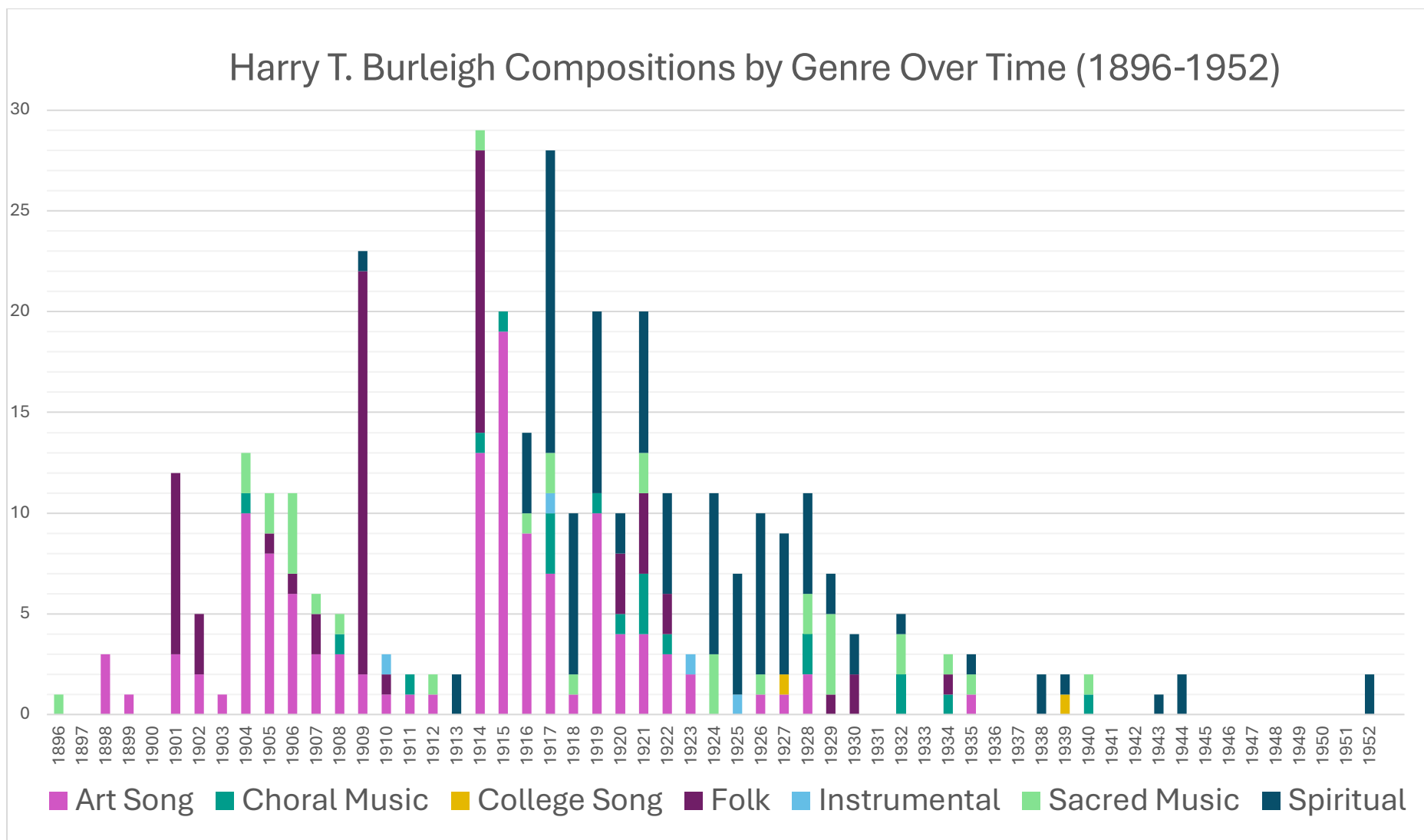
Were You There?	1925	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
Were You There?	1925	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	"Collection of Part-Songs and Choruses for Mixed Voices"
When de Angels Call	1901	Everybody's Magazine	Art Song	Art Song	
When De Debble Come 'Round	1901	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Plantation Melodies Old and New
While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks	1904	G. Schirmer	Choral	Choral Music	
Who Is Dat Yondah?	1930	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
Worth While	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Five Songs of Laurence Hope (Cycle)
You Ask Me If I Love You?	1907	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	
You Goin' To Reap Jus' What You Sow	1938	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
You Goin' To Reap Jus' What You Sow	1943	G. Ricordi (New York)	Choral	Spiritual	
You May Bury Me in de East	1914	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Afro-American Folk Songs
You May Bury Me in de East	1917	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Spiritual	
You'll Get Dar in de Mornin'!	1902	G. Schirmer	Art Song	Folk	Two Plantation Songs
Young Warrior, The	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	
Your Eyes So Deep	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Passionale (Cycle)
Your Lips Are Wine	1915	G. Ricordi (New York)	Art Song	Art Song	Passionale (Cycle)
Yours Alone	1908	William Maxwell Music	Art Song	Art Song	

Appendix C
Graphs of Burleigh's Publishing Output

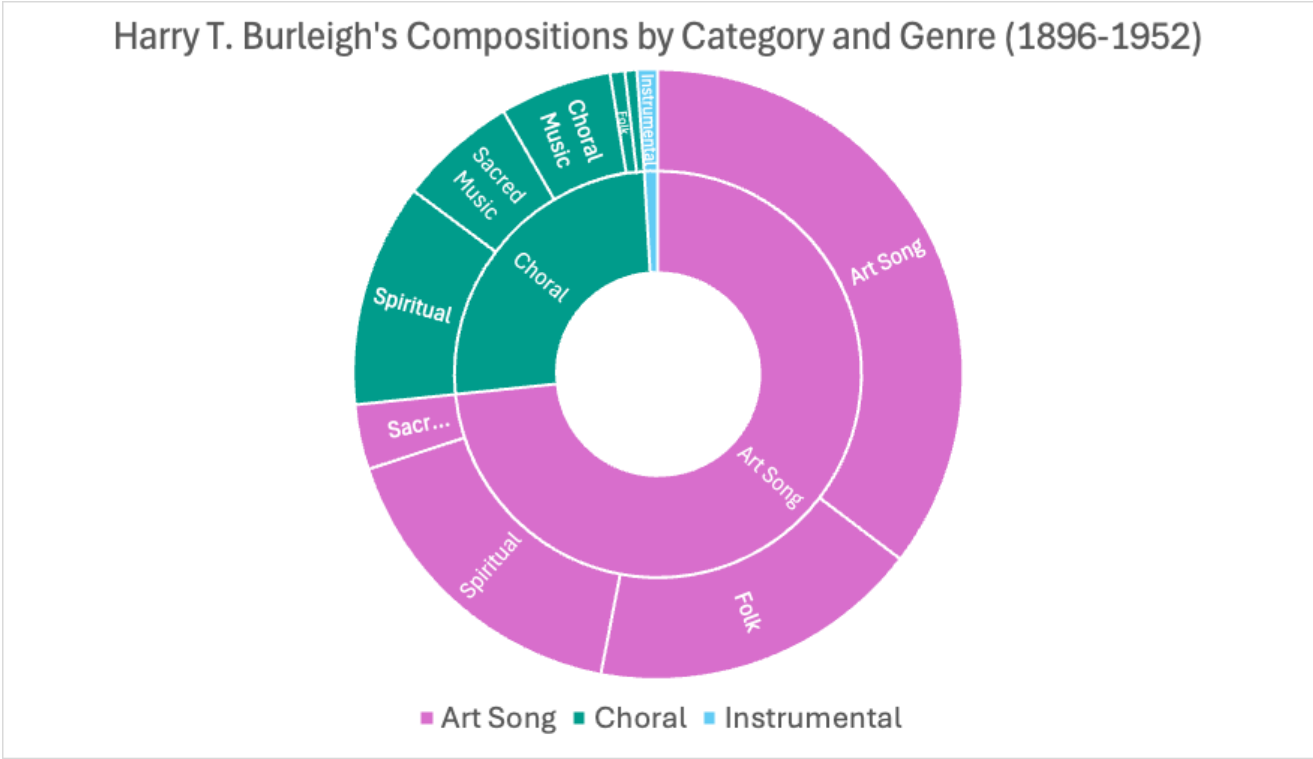
Harry T. Burleigh Compositions Published Overtime (1896-1952)



Appendix C
Graphs of Burleigh's Publishing Output



Appendix C
Graphs of Burleigh's Publishing Output



Appendix D
Program Margaret Bond's Burleigh Memorial Concert

Page 1 of 3

Entire program arranged by Margaret Bonds
Norman J. Seaman's TWILIGHT CONCERTS presents SATURDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 3, AT 5:30

HARRY T. BURLEIGH

MEMORIAL
CONCERT

Participating Artists: (THE MARGARET BONDS CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY)

CHARLOTTE HOLLOMAN, soprano

IDA JOHNSON, contralto

LAURENCE WATSON, tenor

EUGENE BRICE, bass

THE CUMBO STRING QUARTET

MARGARET BONDS, pianist

- I. Two Spirituals. Harry T. Burleigh
Deep River
Go Down, Moses
Miss Johnson, Cumbo Quartet
- II. Saracen Songs (Fred G. Bowles). Harry T. Burleigh
1. Almona (Song of Hassan)
2. O, Night of Dream and Wonder (Almona's Song)
3. His Helmet's Blaze (Almona's Song of Yussouf to Hassan)
4. I Hear His Footsteps, Music Sweet (Almona's Song of Delight)
5. Thou Art Weary (Almona's Song to Yussouf)
6. This is Nirvana (Yussouf's Song to Almona)
7. Ahmed's Song of Farewell
Miss Pettigrew, Mr. Watson, Miss Bonds
- III. Memory (Arthur Symons)
Jean (Frank Stanton)
Lovely Dark and Lonely One (Langston Hughes)
Ethiopia Saluting the Colors (Walt Whitman). . . Burleigh
Mr. Brice, Miss Bonds
- INTERMISSION
- IV. Quartet No. 1. Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson
(First Performance)
Allegro
Andante Moderato
Allegro vivace
The Cumbo Quartet
- V. Worship. Clarence Cameron White
At the Feet of Jesus (Langston Hughes). Toy Harper-Hall Johnson
Dear Friends and Gentle Hearts (Countee Cullen). William Lawrence
Ride On, King Jesus. Hall Johnson
Miss Johnson
- VI. Band of Angels (Spiritual). Carl Diton
Oh, Didn't It Rain. Burleigh- Vene- Bonds
Joy (Langston Hughes). Margaret Bonds
The Ensemble

CARNEGIE RECITAL HALL

Harold Jackman, Secretary
Margaret Bonds Chamber Society
50 Morningside Avenue
New York 26, New York

SPONSORING COMMITTEE

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Adele Addison	Charlotte Holloman
Constance Berksteiner	Nora Holt
Edward Boatner	Langston Hughes
Thelma Berlack Boozer	Ivie A. Jackman
Carol Brice	Harry Jompulsky
Jonathan Brice	David Labowitz
Alfred Cain	William Lawrence
W. A. Coiro	Cornelius McDougald, Jr.
Ben Ivor Coleman	Abbie Mitchell
Charles L. Cooke	Charlotte Wallace Murray
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Karen Gustafson	Ralph Satz
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William Christopher Handy, Jr.	William Warfield
Helen E. Harden	Clarence Cameron White
Lola Hayes	Lawrence Winters
Roland Hayes	John Work

Dear Friend,

You are cordially invited to add your name to the list of sponsors for the Harry T. Burleigh Memorial Concert to take place on Saturday, November 3rd, 1956 at 5:30 p.m. at Carnegie Recital Hall.

The participating artists will be members of the Margaret Bonds Chamber Society, a group dedicated to the perpetuation and promotion of the contribution of Negro composers and

poets. Participating in the concert are:

Naomi Pettigrew, Soprano
Ida Johnson, Contralto
Laurence Watson, Tenor
Eugene Brice, Bass
The Cumbo String Quartet
Margaret Bonds, Pianist

The first half of the program will be devoted to the art songs of Mr. Burleigh. The latter half will include compositions of Clarence Cameron White, William Lawrence, Toy Harper, Hall Johnson, Thomas Kerr, and the first performance of a string quartet by Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson. Settings of the poetry of Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson and Countee Cullen will be included on the program.

The concert is one of a series, "Twilight Concerts," under the management of Norman J. Seaman. Harold Jackman is the secretary of the Chamber Society.

If you would like to have your name listed among the sponsors of this testimonial to Mr. Burleigh, we should appreciate receiving your reply and your check by October 20th.

Please reserve _____ tickets @ \$2.50. Enclosed find my check for _____

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(Please make checks payable to: Harold Jackman, 50 Morningside Ave., NYC 26.)

Appendix E
*Correspondence between Neil Scott and Bruno Zirato regarding
Harry T. Burleigh Music Festival 1948*

MOument 2-5201

Neil Scott and Associates
Public Relations and Publicity

400 MANHATTAN AVENUE
NEW YORK 20, N. Y.

May 24, 1948

Mr. Bruno Zirato
New York Philharmonic Orchestra
118 West 57th St.
New York 19, New York

Dear Mr. Zirato:

I should like to take this opportunity to thank you for becoming a sponsor of the Harry T. Burleigh Music Festival which is to be held at Lewisohn Stadium on August 11, 1948. We think that Mr. Burleigh deserves the greatest honors that the city of New York and the music lovers of the world can bestow on one of its most beloved citizens. Unquestionably, he has labored hard, and his labor has brought forth good fruit for which all mankind has benefited, and which a race of people has been uplifted and dignified.

Taking the above thoughts into consideration, I should like to ask you if it would be possible to use the name of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in our promotions for the festival, in as much as we have engaged ninety members of the orchestra to play at the festival. Our conductor will, in all probability, be Dr. Fritz Reiner. With Robert Merrill, Carol Bruce, Camille Williams, Helen Traubel, Roland Hayes, and several other outstanding soloists along with the Wings Over Jordan Group, Howard University Choir, Fisk Jubilee Singers, and a special thousand voice choir under the direction of the noted choral conductor, Hall Johnson. At any rate you may rest assured that we shall treat the hallowed name of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra with the high tribute, care and dignity that it so richly deserves, and that no act shall be engaged which will disparage the greatness of the wonderful New York Philharmonic Orchestra. We beseech you to grant us a favorable reply for the use of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra's name, and I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Neil Scott
Neil Scott

Approved
NS:mem

5/26/1948

SPONSORS OF THE HARRY T. BURLBIGH MUSIC FESTIVAL

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Extra Special Concert

May 27, 1948

Mr. Neil Scott
400 Manhattan Avenue
New York 26, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Scott:

It pleases me to inform you that the Society will grant you permission to use its name for the Burlingame Music Festival to be held at the Leisler Stadium on August 11, 1948 with the understanding that you will use the same personnel engaged by Stadium Concerts and also that in all programs and advertisements you will carry a line as follows:

90 members of the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of N.Y.

It is necessary, in other words, that you mention the number of the men comprising the orchestra, as you realize it is not the full Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra.

We wish you all possible success at this concert as the late Burlingame deserves recognition in the musical world.

Sincerely yours,

a/f

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