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Making Beethoven Black: The New Negro Movement, Black Internationalism, and the Rewriting of Music History

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Abstract

While the idea that Beethoven had African ancestry became popular in the 1960s during the Civil Rights struggle in the United States, its conception arose during an earlier moment: the global New Negro movement of the 1920s. Appearing in newspaper columns, music journals, and essays, Black American writings on Beethoven challenged white musicians' claims to the canon of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. This article argues that the project of making Beethoven Black belonged to a greater and more ambitious endeavour to rewrite Western music history. Black musicologists sought to globalize the Western canon, and in so doing, critique its grand narratives. Locating Black musical idioms in eighteenth-century piano sonatas or conducting archival research on Black European figures such as George Bridgetower, their music histories challenged readers to re-examine just who, exactly, had contributed to the project of cultural modernity and on what grounds.

At a rally in 1967, the African American activist Stokely Carmichael spoke to an audience of high school students with fire and brimstone against the evils of white supremacy in America:

> The problem is that our culture is not legitimatized. They have made us ashamed of it. Forget it! They have never had any culture. They have always stolen ours. That's a fact. The blues ain't theirs. Come on, be serious! [Carmichael laughs] Be serious! The blues? We might let them get away with Bach. Beethoven was Black. They won't even tell you that in school. He was a Spanish Moor – Black as you and I. But they don't tell us that. It's calculated, it is calculated.[1]

In an interview with African American author Alex Haley for *Playboy Magazine* in 1963, Malcolm X similarly recalled Beethoven's Black roots. After converting to Islam in prison, Malcolm X read voraciously through the prison library. He discovered that many of the historical works he had previously known 'have been made into white histories. I found out that the history-whitening process either had left out great things that Black men had done, or

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1 Stokely Carmichael, speech to Garfield High School, Seattle, 19 April 1967, transcr. African American Involvement in the Vietnam War, www.aavw.org/special_features/speeches_speech_carmichael01.html.

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some of the great Black men had gotten whitened.'[2] His examples included Hannibal, Christopher Columbus, and Ludwig van Beethoven. 'Beethoven's father was one of the Blackamoors that hired themselves out in Europe as professional soldiers', Malcolm X tells Haley. '[Joseph] Haydn, Beethoven's teacher, was of African descent.'[3]

The question of whether Beethoven was Black has emerged anew with each passing decade, provoking a fiery storm of debate with each provocation.[4] Black claims to Beethoven have repeatedly caused immediate backlash and racist vitriol. For example, in response to Black journalist Sandra Haggerty's writings in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1970 that stated that Beethoven was Black, readers wrote angry letters to the editor, crying, 'You Blacks are carrying this Black thing too far. Keep your cotton-picking hands off Beethoven!'[5]

Tellingly, however, the first articulations of Beethoven's Blackness did not appear in the post-1945 era, nor did they originate with Malcolm X or Carmichael. The claim's origins date back to an earlier, more vital moment of Black intellectual and musical production: the New Negro movement of the 1920s–30s. Appearing in newspaper columns, music journals, and published and unpublished monographs, Black essays and treatises in the inter-war era formed a corpus of Black thought on classical music that challenged white musicians' claims to the canon of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Producing knowledge from within what Naomi André calls a 'shadow culture' of Black music-making that operated alongside but never within a white majority in classical music, Black musicologists and intellectuals expanded white definitions of art music and to whom it belonged.[6]

In this article, I argue that the project of making Beethoven Black was itself part of an ambitious, modern revision of Western art music history that challenged readers to re-examine who had contributed to the project of cultural modernity and on what grounds. Writing about the history of Black education in the United States, Jarvis R. Givens explains that 'Fugitive pedagogy demanded thinking and imagining beyond Western canons of knowledge, thus leading Black Americans to develop an under-canon that shadowed and critiqued the master narrative.'[7] In a similar manner, Black musicologists and intellectuals sought to globalize the Western canon and, in so doing, critique its grand narrative and the figure at the centre of it: Beethoven himself. It is therefore not the purpose of this article to uncover the truths of the claim that Beethoven was of African descent but rather to uncover what this claim may tell us at the moment of its origin. It is not a coincidence that the discourse of Beethoven's Blackness began in the decades that it did, nor should we treat it as such.

2 Alex Haley, 'A Candid Conversation with the Militant Major-Domo of the Black Muslims', *Playboy*, July 1963, 58.

3 Haley, 'A Candid Conversation', 58.

4 In the 1970s and 1980s, Earl Calloway at the *Chicago Defender* posited a similar line of thinking; in the 1990s, articles in *The Guardian* and elsewhere appeared debating whether there was any truth to the claims that Beethoven had been whitewashed. See Earl Calloway, 'Beethoven, World's Genius Was Black', *Chicago Defender*, 22 March 1979, 16.

5 Sandra Haggerty, 'Beethoven was Black', *Los Angeles Times*, 13 May 1970, a7.

6 Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, and Engagement* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 9.

7 Jarvis Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), 158.

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The goal for Black intellectuals of the New Negro movement was to generate their own corpus of knowledge on Black people in Western art music, one that placed Black people and Black musical idioms at its centre. Their efforts created counter-narratives to a white and elite music history and instead located Black musical talent within the European musical tradition. In this way, their work fits with Gavin Lee and Christopher Miller's definition of global musical modernisms, which aims to 'decolonize Western music historiography by expanding the geographic, genre, and temporal boundaries of Western musical modernism'.[8] Black musicologists in the early twentieth century, we will see, understood their work precisely as a contribution to global musical modernism.

In this article, I illustrate how Black thinkers revised music history in three ways. First, Black writers began to locate Blackness within Western art music itself. In so doing, they intentionally diverged from white American constructs of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. They argued that Bach's music was akin to Negro spirituals and that Beethoven had used Black musical idioms in his own compositions. Austro-German music's Black roots had been, in effect, hiding all along in plain sight. Second, African American intellectuals rewrote Western music history as a Black diasporic project. Their historical accounts of Black composers or Black classical musicians in Europe such as George Bridgetower made it possible for Black classical musicians to imagine classical music as a Black space. Lastly, I demonstrate how some Black writers came to argue not only that Beethoven had been influenced by Negro melodies, but also that Beethoven was Black himself. Their controversial Blackening of Beethoven challenged what people believed to be white and German (classical music) by insisting on its Black origins.

The intellectual contributions of writers such as Alain Locke, Maud Cuney Hare, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others reveal the dynamic globality of the New Negro movement. In fact, the decision of some scholars such as Brent Hayes Edwards to relinquish the term 'Harlem Renaissance' in favour of the 'New Negro' reflects scholars' growing desire to more adequately capture what was an international movement that extended beyond one New York City neighbourhood.[9] 'The New Negro movement frame', Minkah Makalani writes, 'suggests a new range of questions and possible answers if the frame is broadened to include not merely Harlem and London or Harlem and Paris but also Chicago and Paris, Lagos and Hamburg, Liverpool and Marseilles, Cardiff and Accra, Port-au-Prince and Dakar, and Port-of-Spain, Georgetown, and Bridgetown.'[10] Black musicologists, too, travelled beyond the shores of the United States to revise some of the most established narratives of the classical canon.

Their writings on classical music reveal how global and modern in scope and scale their knowledge of music history had become. Black writings of Western art music history were

8 Gavin Lee and Christopher Miller. 'Introduction to the Special Issue on Global Musical Modernisms', *Twentieth-Century Music* 20/3 (2023), 14.

9 Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2.

10 Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 11.

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Black international or diasporic, and they reflected what Robin D. G. Kelley calls a 'kind of diasporic vision or sensibility, shaped by anti-racist and anti-imperialist politics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and deeply ensconced in Black intellectual and historical traditions'.[11] Creating their own imagined community of a shared Black diaspora, past and present, they challenged racist and nationalist histories around them, ones that presented Black people as outsiders to the project of cultural modernity.

Although most of the musicians and intellectuals in this article did not espouse politically radical ideas, they nonetheless envisioned themselves as part of a greater world beyond their American locales. The complexities of their lives and careers as Black intellectuals surviving in a colonialist and white supremacist world require more nuance and care to understand their endeavours, not less. Rather than 'relying on the fiction of pure resistance in so-called traditional musics' (which Lee urges us to avoid), scholars today can see how Black writings were sometimes complicated or even occasionally contradictory acts of reclamation.[12] Some figures tried to link classical music and Black internationalism together to free Black people from the limiting and violent gaze of American white supremacy. And while some writers may have lacked radical internationalist politics, their ideas were nonetheless radical within the world of classical music itself. Their form of Black radicalism reminds us that it is too simple to neatly divide classical and vernacular music along the same well-exhausted line of cultural conservatism or radical progressivism.[13]

Was Brahms really a composer of ragtime? Were Negro spirituals and Bach's cantatas derived from the same musical material? Was Beethoven actually Black? It matters less whether or not these arguments were historically accurate and more how they came to be produced and why they gained attention. The dynamic musical visions that African Americans created for themselves were ones that they hoped would be free from white supremacy during an era of extensive white violence. The world of Western art music in the Black imagination became a musical utopia, an island of harmonic transcendence soaring above white American racism, a place that they, too, could possibly claim. Black revisions of music history encouraged readers to listen to classical music in a different key, sung by people of African descent around the world.

Part I: Hearing Classical Music in a Key of Blackness – Excavating the Black Origins of Beethoven's Music

African American musicians, writers, and musicologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had long cultivated a growing and robust discourse on classical music and belonging.[14] For example, James Monroe Trotter's 1878 landmark book, *Music and Some Highly*

11 Robin D. G. Kelley, '"But a Local Phase of a World Problem": Black History's Global Vision, 1883–1950', *The Journal of American History* 86/3 (1999), 1047.

12 Gavin S. K. Lee, 'Global Musical Modernisms as Decolonial Method', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 20/3 (2023), 20.

13 Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 346.

14 Caroline Gebhard and Barbara McCaskill, 'Introduction', in *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture, 1877–1919*, ed. Barbara McCaskill and Caroline Gebhard (New York: New York University Press, 2006.

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Musical People, offers the first comprehensive account of African American musicians written by a Black musicologist. The book documented the lives and careers of many prominent or rising stars in the late nineteenth century, including soprano Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, pianist Thomas Greene Bethune, and the Fisk Jubilee Singers.[15] Moreover, Trotter's work sought to highlight musical compositions by Black composers such as Edmund Dédé and Justin Holland. Similarly, prominent African American magazines and newspapers such as *Coloured American Magazine* reported on Black classical musicians' concertizing around the world and posted obituaries for musicians such as the Afro-Cuban violinist Claudio José Brindis de Salas when he died. Their writings in the nineteenth century were committed to illustrating Black contributions to musical culture both within and outside the United States.

In the inter-war era, however, many African American musicians and writers began to re-examine classical music's relationship to Black musicians and music-making in their writings. Led by musicologist Maud Cuney Hare, aesthete Alain Locke, journalist Nora Holt, and others, these writers represented a newer generation of Black intellectuals – ones who were primarily university-educated. The ideas they presented broke away from previous discourses because they went beyond simply identifying and extolling the music of African American composers such as Nathaniel Dett or Harry Thacker Burleigh. Although praise for a newer generation of classical composers was always present, Black writers also stressed that classical music – independent of African American composers – still carried with it traces of Blackness or Black expression. The DNA embedded in the music of 'the great masters' such as Bach, Schubert, Mozart, Beethoven, and Wagner had a Black strain. In so doing, more writers began to point to the music itself as a locus for Black creativity and belonging.

Some turned to comparative methods to highlight Black presences in classical music, and they pointed out the ways in which classical music was similar to African American music. For example, many Black classical musicians while on tour frequently suggested that the music of the great masters was similar in style or tone to African American music. In interviews, Marian Anderson placed Handel and African American spirituals on the same sphere, and Roland Hayes was outspoken throughout his career that the music of Bach was akin to African American spirituals.[16] 'It is their deeply religious conviction that relates the two types of music, otherwise so apparently far apart', he opined.[17] Hayes insisted that he was not the only one who heard the connection between Bach and African American spirituals. He had learned about this connection from his teacher in Vienna, Dr Theodor Lierhammer. 'I vividly remember his astonishment on hearing me sing some Aframerican folk songs', Hayes recalled, 'an astonishment caused by the spiritual affinity of my songs with the spirit and style of the great German master [Johann Sebastian Bach]. "But you have it all there", he assured me; "it is the same language."'[18] Like the music in Bach's *St Matthew Passion* or the works of

15 James Monroe Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1878).

16 'Die Negersängerin mit der weißen Seele', unnamed newspaper, MS Coll 200 Box 225, 09577, University of Pennsylvania, Annenberg Rare Books and Manuscript Collection.

17 'Bach Akin to Spirituals, So Opines Roland Hayes', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 13 November 1943, 8.

18 Roland Hayes, *My Favorite Spirituals: 30 Songs For Piano and Voice* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 12.

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composers such as Heinrich Schütz, African American spirituals, Lierhammer told Hayes, met 'on the common ground of purpose, feeling and fitting form' and shared a same musical poetic style and religious spirit.[19] Hayes's conviction that African American spirituals and Baroque religious vocal music belonged in conversation together placed both musical traditions on the same plane, thus denying the oft-claimed charge that African American music was too primitive to be worthy of study or adoration.[20]

But African Americans in the inter-war era also went beyond musically rubbing shoulders with German composers. They also located Blackness in classical music itself. Such thinking became prominent around the same time that the Czech composer Antonín Dvořák argued in an interview with the *New York Herald* in 1893 for American music lovers to turn to Black musical idioms as a source for their compositions. He stated, 'all the great musicians have borrowed from the songs of the common people. Beethoven's most charming scherzo is based upon what might now be considered a skilfully handled Negro melody.'[21]

How quickly Dvořák's words caught fire. A year later, in 1894, a writer for the African American newspaper, the *Cleveland Gazette*, argued:

> When Beethoven was writing the 'Moonlight Sonata' (called the Kreutzer Sonata in Count Tolstoi's novel) for a colored piano player from New Orleans who was making a tour of Germany, he asked the American for a motif that was purely Afro-American; but the only tune that the American knew to be of New Orleans creation was a simple air, sung by the Creoles. Anyone who knows the old airs of Provence will find one in the motif of the first part of the 'Moonlight Sonata' and it is the one air which the colored pianist told Beethoven was a native American air from his native place.[22]

The music of Beethoven, in other words, turned out to have a Black context.

Similarly, Cuney Hare argued that Beethoven had borrowed from African American musical idioms. A talented musician from Texas who had trained with German pianist Emil Ludwig and studied at the New England Conservatory of Music, Cuney Hare became one of the most authoritative Black musicologists in the twentieth century. She writes, 'It might be noted in passing that the Allegro in Beethoven's Sonata in E for violin and piano is said to embody a Negro folk theme which was native to Louisiana and belongs to the religious group of folk song of the race.'[23] In other words, Cuney Hare posited that Beethoven's musical compositions could be attributed to Black musical expression, thus implicitly arguing that Black people had contributed to the most well-established musical works in the Austro-German tradition.

19 Hayes, *My Favorite Spirituals*, 12.

20 Kira Thurman, '"Africa in European Evening Attire": Defining African American Spirituals and Western Art Music in Central Europe, 1870s–1930s', in *Rethinking Black German Studies: Approaches, Interventions, and Histories*, ed. Tiffany N. Florvil and Vanessa Plumly (New York: Peter Lang, 2018).

21 'Stray Thoughts on Negro Music', *Negro Music Journal*, 1/8 (1903), 143–4.

22 'Doings of the Race', *Cleveland Gazette*, 17 March 1894, 1.

23 Maud Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1936), 181–2.

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Like others who came before and after her, Cuney Hare used Dvořák's words as a shield to protect her own. Dvořák's status as a celebrated Central European composer (whose music, despite its Czech origins, had been endorsed by Johannes Brahms and Viennese critics as German) ensured that his statements carried great weight, or certainly greater weight than if African Americans had said them. Thus, in her writings, Cuney Hare references Dvořák to strengthen her own claims, stating, 'The beauty of this music of the Negro was recognized by Anton Dvořák, a musician of world fame.'[24] If Dvořák claimed that African American music was a legitimate foundation for not only his own compositions but also for Beethoven's, then this claim must have a degree of validity. Were there other white European composers who had turned to Black music to inspire their musical creativity?

Apparently, the composer Johannes Brahms. First documented in the 1933 biography *The Unknown Brahms*, white American author Robert Haven Schauffler shared an anecdote from white American violinist Arthur Abell that later made its way through African American circles. A year before Brahms's death, the composer allegedly asked the violinist if he knew any ragtime music, for Brahms supposedly stated that he had encountered it from an American woman who had performed it on the banjo. Brahms proceeded to hum, 'Hello, My Ragtime Gal' to Abell. '"Well", the Master continued, with a far-away look in his eyes, "I thought I would use, not the stupid tunes, but the interesting rhythms of this Ragtime. But I do not know whether I shall ever get around to it. My ideas no longer flow as easily as they used to".'[25] As this apocryphal tale suggests, an ancient, grumpy Brahms had been taken by ragtime music enough to possibly compose in its style. Composer William Grant Still was so captivated by the thought that Brahms might have composed Ragtime-inspired music that he lectured and published on this topic throughout his lifetime.[26]

Hearing the music of even the most sacred of composers in the Western art canon in a key of Blackness suggested that Black musical expressivity was and had always been a worthy and even noble endeavour. Moreover, the notion that Black people and Black music had been positively inspiring to classical composers since the time of Beethoven was a proposition that continued to gain ground. Those who suggested it promoted the growing argument that Black contributions were of equal importance to musical modernity (and just as aesthetically pleasing) as the music of German composers. In fact, the two operated in tandem.

Part II: The Politics of Locating Black People in Western Art Music History

Perhaps the most radical way that African Americans began to Blacken classical music was through their growing insistence, starting in earnest in the 1920s, that more classical musicians were of African descent than had been previously acknowledged. Many composers'

24 Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 70.

25 Robert Haven Schauffler, *The Unknown Brahms: His Life, Character and Works: Based on New Material* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1933), 176–7.

26 For example, William Grant Still stated in a 1950 article for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, 'it is interesting to note here some of the famous European composers who were attracted by and, in some cases, strongly influenced by American jazz'. William Grant Still, 'Fifty Years of Progress in Music', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 November 1950, 21. Many thanks to Douglas Shadle for this information.

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African ancestry had received only a passing mention by previous biographers. African American writers in the New Negro movement sought to correct this gross oversight. Louis Moreau Gottschalk, for example, became not simply an American musician, but a mixed-race composer whose Creole roots were central to his musical output. In so doing, their writings insisted that Black people had long been involved in the modern project of cultural evolution and progress.

Although Black musicologists in the nineteenth century such as James Monroe Trotter had documented the presence of classical musicians in the United States and in Europe before, their works had focused on the immediate social worlds around them. What made the contributions of intellectuals in the inter-war era different from what had come before was the historical nature of their efforts. In short: writers began to inscribe Black people into centuries-long histories of classical music. In so doing, they made the powerful argument that Black people had always contributed to Western music history. They had never been outsiders to it.

It is imperative to understand that African American intellectuals who rewrote music history had legitimate grounds for distrusting white histories and white knowledge production in the United States. As Jarvis Givens explains, 'The American Curriculum inspired white students by telling them that their race – referring to a homogenous white identity, beyond ethnic and national difference – was responsible for all notable progress in the world.'[27] Such instruction made it plain that white European men were the sole bearers of modernity, cultural progress, and the aesthetic legacies thereof. Although predominantly white institutions and scholars claimed impartiality and objectivity, their own lenses into a global past were skewed towards an outcome of global cultural history that took only white European contributions into account.

Moreover, the Hegelian notion that Black people were 'a people without history' had permeated institutions of higher education and the project of knowledge production in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Carter G. Woodson complained about this very fact, writing that, 'The oppressor . . . teaches the Negro that he has no worthwhile past, that his race has done nothing significant since the beginning of time, and there is no evidence that he will ever achieve anything great.'[28] Operating in a zero-sum game, many white institutions and scholars wrote their historical records driven by the belief that whatever white creators had made was not only superior to but also obliterated any need to study Black cultural production.

Not only did white scholarship assume that Black people were divorced from the project of global modernity, but they also refused to trust Black scholars as capable of producing historical scholarship that illustrated otherwise. For the longest time, Earl Lewis explains, American academia did not recognize African American historians as contributors to historiography, 'nor were they perceived as architects of their own destinies'.[29] Many historians at established

27 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 95

28 Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of African American Life and History [1933]), 3. Quoted in Jarvis Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 95.

29 Earl Lewis, 'To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas', in *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 5.

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institutions wrote and taught under the assumption that the burgeoning field of African American history – comprising its own historical narratives and figures – was marginal or illegitimate, if one could even call it a field at all. For these reasons, the subject of African American history did not appear regularly in many universities' course offerings until the 1960s.[30] Nor did scholarship by Black intellectuals appear in academic journals. The flagship journal *American Historical Review* did not publish anything written by an African American scholar between 1910 and 1980. Similarly, the flagship journal for musicology, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, produced little scholarship written by Black musicologists before Eileen Southern's article in 1977. My 2019 article was the first peer-reviewed article written by a Black woman to appear in JAMS since Eileen Southern's publication.

The dearth of Black scholarship was not lost on Black historians and musicologists. By the 1920s, more African American students began to challenge institutional biases against Black histories and Black historical scholarship – at both Black and white institutions. At Morehouse College, for example, a student named Edward Maddox complained about the lack of Black history in an article titled 'Why Not Negro History?' Why, he asked, were Morehouse students learning so much about European history and culture? 'It seems very inconsistent that Morehouse College, one of the leading colleges in the country for Negroes and one from which much of our race population expects to receive its leaders, should list European history rather than Negro history as a required subject for graduation', he writes.

> Must we ever have Charlemagne, Garibaldi, Luther, Richelieu, and other great Europeans idealized to us and live in darkness of the heroic achievements of our darker brothers who since the early Reconstruction days in spite of numerous prejudiced obstacles have proved themselves equal to any task? What scientist surpasses Carver? What statesman surpasses Douglas? What educator surpasses Booker T. Washington?[31]

Maddox continues,

> there is much inspiration to be gained from the noble work of our ancestors if we will only learn about it. It is good to learn that *all great things were not done by white men* – as they would have us believe; but that the Negro has played an important part in the history of our control, and of the world. Therefore, if it is compulsory that we learn history, why not Negro history?[32]

30 Matthew Johnson, *Undermining Racial Justice: How One University Embraced Inclusion and Inequality* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); Stefan M. Bradley, *Upending the Ivory Tower Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Ivy League* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz, eds., *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

31 Edward C. Maddox, 'Why Not Negro History?', *Maroon Tiger*, October 1936, 5. Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library.

32 Maddox, 'Why Not Negro History?', 9.

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Black intellectuals and academics began to write exactly those histories. In fact, the establishment of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) and Black academic journals such as the *Journal of Negro History* – both founded in 1915 and 1916, respectively, by Woodson – were vital to the institutionalization of Black historical scholarship. Many histories written in the 1920s were what Wilson Moses calls 'vindicationist histories', meaning that they both pointed out the socially constructed nature of white historical scholarship and offered replacements to it.[33]

Equally as important for this article, Black intellectuals in the New Negro era wrote from a global perspective. Their works examined not only ancient Egypt and African history but insisted on recognizing Europe's Black pasts as well. For example, John Edward Bruce's self-published 1920 pamphlet, 'Was Othello a Negro?', traversed the long history of Northern African migration to the European continent, examined Russian art depicting the Virgin Mary as a Black woman, and discussed the life and career of the Black professor Juan Latino who taught at the University of Granada in Spain in the sixteenth century. Bruce argued that 'the colour line, it would therefore seem, obtains [*sic*] only in certain parts of Europe, where English is spoken, and in all parts of America where catfish aristocracy and social cads have their habitat'.[34] Writings such as Bruce's suggested that Black pasts could be located not only in the United States – which wished to repress Black historical writing – but also in Europe, a continent often held in high esteem by Americans.

Primary source collecting was an essential component to the new mission of narrating global Black stories during the New Negro movement, so much so that Margarita Castromán Soto argues that 1925 is 'the year of the Black archival turn'.[35] A decade earlier, during the summer of 1915, Woodson anticipated the need to archive Black primary sources when he wrote to a local minister in Washington, DC, named Jesse Moorland, stating, 'Something must be done to save the records of the Negro that posterity may know the whole truth.'[36] Whether they were documenting and transcribing slave narratives and songs such as Zora Neale Hurston's ethnographic and ethnomusicological research, creating a rich archive of materials as Afro-Puerto Rican Arturo Schomburg, or as Bruce and Schomburg founding the Negro Society for Historical Research in 1911, which functioned as both a lending library and a primary source repository throughout its existence, Black historians collected documents as a way to redress what they correctly identified as a glaring problem of racial inequality in historiography.[37] The primary sources that they preserved

33 Wilson Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22.

34 John Edward Bruce, 'Was Othello a Negro?', New York, 1920, 13.

35 Margarita Castromán Soto, 'Schomburg's Black Archival Turn: "Racial Integrity" and "The Negro Digs Up His Past"', *African American Review* 54/2 (2021), 73.

36 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 67.

37 Vanessa K. Valdés, *Diasporic Blackness: The Life and Times of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2017); Jesse Hoffnung-Garskoff, *Racial Migrations: New York City and the Revolutionary Politics of the Spanish Caribbean* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

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would finally make it possible for Black Americans to 'learn from their story how important a part African played in the ancient times', Woodson argued.[38]

Black writings of music history functioned similarly. For Black musicologists, the aim was to overturn white thinking and promote Black visions of a global musical past and present, however much mainstream musicology may have tried to shut out Black voices. The race to rescue Black musicians and composers from temporal obscurity and place them in music history books was part and parcel of the same mission to place Black stories in standard historical narratives. Amateur historians and musicologists scoured through music history textbooks and combed through archives to dig up new treasures to present to a reading public. The writings of Locke (*The Negro and His Music*, 1936), Cuney Hare (*Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 1936), and others during the inter-war era plucked out Black musicians from the past to present to a reading public and stretched Black musical histories to ancient Egypt, the Greco-Roman world, and medieval and early modern Europe, thus presenting a wider history of Black musicianship beyond America's shores. Black European musicians such as Bridgetower, Edmund Dédé, Claudio José Brindis de Salas, Luranah Aldridge, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de St-Georges all became bright stars orienting music lovers towards a luminescent path of Black progress.

The purpose of Black musicological texts was to correct many established narratives of Western music history. Some of the writers of these documents were classically trained musicians who had been reared on the values passed down to them through the conservatory of music: musical universalism, moral fortitude, and social progress. Cuney Hare's scholarship in particular strove to present Black subjects in Western music history in an objective, almost positivistic manner. Others, such as Locke, were well-established aesthetes dedicated to detailing and pondering the merits of Black artistic excellence.[39] Regardless of educational status or social background, their experiences as university-educated African American intellectuals in the inter-war era meant that their scholarship was, as Givens argues, 'a schooling project set against the entire order of things'.[40] In this way, their writings shared a similar perspective, if not confessional goal: to break with contemporary established narratives of classical music by presenting a richer history of classical music's Black past.

Appearing only a few years after Woodson's landmark text, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933), which lambasted the dominant hegemonic practices in the American educational curriculum that placed white cultural norms at the centre of modernity, musicologist Cuney Hare's 1936 groundbreaking work *Negro Musicians and Their Music* (1936) has remained a vital source for musicologists to the present day. Comprising fifteen chapters and well over 400 pages, it narrates the progression of Black musical expressions out of Africa and around the world. Having visited archives in Europe, Cuney Hare documents the rise of Black musicians and places them into the narrative of global musical modernity.

38 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 143.

39 Jeffrey C. Stewart, *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

40 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 13.

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For example, Cuney Hare dedicates her thirteenth chapter called 'World Musicians of Colour' to charting out the history of Black musicians since antiquity. Beginning in ancient Egypt and roaming around sub-Saharan Africa, Cuney Hare's book takes an expansive definition of Black music-making to heart. 'It is interesting to discover that musicians of Negro blood have been of sufficient importance to have had their names carried down through the centuries', Cuney Hare writes.[41] In the same chapter, Cuney Hare locates Black musicians in seventeenth-century India – she writes of 'the Negro, Naubat Khan Kalāwant, Viña player of the early seventeenth century, employed at the Court of Jahangir in India' – and later identifies prominent Black musicians in the Arabian peninsula (in particular, Mabed ibn Ouhab, Ibn-Sourëidj, and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī).[42] Her work examines Black Spanish composer Ignatius Sancho, noting that Spain's musical culture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was 'influenced by that of imported Africans',[43] and also narrates the life and career of Black French composer St-Georges. 'Negroes among these people at that time made important contributors to their culture', Cuney Hare argued. In rescuing them from 'a seeming obscurity', she writes, 'we add them to our list of gifted musicians'.[44] While her prose was often modest, the endeavour of her project – to weave Black musicians into music historiographies – was anything but small.

Locke's book, *The Negro and His Music*, also appeared in 1936 and committed itself to the same task of presenting an earlier, global history of Black musicians dedicated to the pursuit of art. Like Cuney Hare, Locke dedicates an entire chapter to illuminating the biographies of Black musicians outside of the United States, focusing on St-Georges, Bridgetower, Dédé, Joseph White, and Louis Moreau Gottschalk. 'They were cut off', Locke writes, 'like the earlier Negro poets and writers, from the folk tradition. Their story is one, therefore, of isolated promise and achievement.'[45] Tellingly, to offer these historical narrations, Locke does not turn to white historians or musicologists but rather cites other Black musicologists such as Cuney Hare, Trotter, and Penman Lovingood, whose 1921 book, *Famous Modern Negro Musicians*, celebrated the achievements of Black classical musicians such as Coleridge-Taylor, Dett, and William Kemper Harreld.[46]

Black musicological writings on Afro-German musicians in German-speaking Europe were especially effective at tying Black people to cultural modernity – thus creating a distinct form of legitimacy to their historical scholarship. Because of the centrality of the Austro-German canon to classical music writ large, discovering Black figures who had studied with Haydn and performed with Beethoven had the potential to overwrite even the most well-known biographies in music history. Considered unmovable and unshakeable within classical music history, the legitimating power of the 'great German masters' now extended to Black lives past and present, uprooting assumptions of classical music's whiteness to its very core.

41 Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 278.

42 Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 305.

43 Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 196.

44 Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 278.

45 Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Washington, DC: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), 8.

46 Penman Lovingood, *Famous Modern Negro Musicians* (New York: Press Forum Co., 1921).

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The historical figure that best illustrates African Americans' reclaiming of an Austro-German musical tradition is George Bridgetower (1791–1860). Excavated from seeming obscurity in the 1920s, Bridgetower was the son of an Afro-Caribbean servant at the Esterházy palace and a white European mother. A trained violinist who lived and performed in Vienna in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, he enjoyed a close friendship with Beethoven, who initially dedicated a violin sonata to him (*Sonata Mulattica*) until the pair broke apart over a woman.

Although Bridgetower had first appeared in Alfred Thayer's famous three-volume biography of Beethoven in the nineteenth century, he had most likely been inaccessible to the American public because Thayer's biographies were written in German (the lingua franca for musicological writing at the time). Only in 1921, when Henry Krehbiel (another German-American) translated Thayer's biography into English did African Americans most likely encounter Bridgetower for the first time. Quickly, writings by Clarence Cameron White and others began to celebrate the life of a Black violinist and former confidante of Beethoven.[47]

Nonetheless, Cuney Hare popularized Bridgetower in the United States by lecturing on him to Black audiences and publishing foundational articles on the violinist. Her account was the most authoritative and archivally based to date, and her training as a university-educated musicologist also granted her biography more weight. Its appearance in *The Crisis*, the official mouthpiece of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and founded by W. E .B. Du Bois, also granted her words credence. Moreover, according to biographer Douglas Hales, Cuney Hare was also the first scholar to bring previously unseen letters between Bridgetower and Beethoven to light.[48]

At Du Bois's request, Cuney Hare also published the first Black publication on Bridgetower, which appeared in *The Crisis* (Du Bois's well-read weekly newspaper) in June 1927. Writing to her at her home in Jamaica Plains, MA, in March 1927, Du Bois asked, 'What was the name of the coloured man who was a friend of Beethoven and to whom he dedicated a symphony? Rush me the facts if you have them.'[49] Replying, 'My Dear Du', Cuney Hare delivered a document that, after some editing and editorial exchanges, became her foundational article on Bridgetower that June.

Observing the centenary of Beethoven's death in 1927, Cuney Hare notes that 'over 10,000 articles concerning Beethoven are said to have been written during the week which marked the hundredth anniversary of his death'.[50] Countless biographies and pictures of Beethoven's friends and contemporaries had also received publication, but except for 'one instance have we noted tribute paid to the great mulatto violinist, for whom Beethoven

47 Clarence Cameron White, 'Music Notes: Famous Negro Violinist', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 April 1927, B8; Robert Edwards, 'Who was Bridgetower?' *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 1925, 16.

48 Douglas Hales, *A Southern Family in Black and White: The Cuneys of Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2003), 115.

49 W. E. B. Du Bois, telegram to Maud Cuney Hare, 29 March 1927. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives.

50 Maud Cuney Hare, 'George Polgren [*sic*] Bridgetower', *The Crisis*, June 1927, 122.

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wrote the famous *Kreutzer Sonata* and with whom it was first played'.[51] White musicologists, her writing implies, had ignored or missed one of Beethoven's greatest companions. But Cuney Hare would not let Bridgetower languish in obscurity any longer.

In her article, Cuney Hare creates a portrait of Bridgetower's glamorous life (Figure 1).[52] Documenting his upbringing in Biała Podlaska, Poland, in various regions of the Habsburg Empire, and in Great Britain, Cuney Hare emphasizes Bridgetower's close ties to political and musical royalty. He was beloved by King George IV of England, applauded by a patron list including 'Le Prince Esterházy, le Prince Lobkowitz, and Le Prince Schwarzenberg at L'Envoyé d'Angleterre'.[53] George Bridgetower 'was destined to have his name linked with Beethoven, the great German master, and to become the first interpreter of the famous work known as the *Kreutzer Sonata*'.[54] Bridgetower, her article writes, was a figure in the First Viennese School: he was a pupil of Haydn, a friend of Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and an attendee at a rehearsal at the home of violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh.

Cuney Hare's style of historical writing brings an air of dignity and respectability to Bridgetower's biography. A careful, cautious writer, Cuney Hare uses an astonishing number of primary sources in her two biographies of Bridgetower, including newspaper accounts, police reports (police licences, she informs the reader, were 'necessary in order to give concerts in Vienna'[55]), and personal letters between Beethoven and Bridgetower.[56] Citing her sources, she acknowledges that she used Krehbiel's translation of Thayer's biography, *Life of Beethoven*, to gather information on Bridgetower. Cuney Hare's writing is more descriptive than analytical. Rarely does she insert her own voice in her prose. Trying to write behind a veil of objectivity, her own perspective on Bridgetower's life rarely pierces through her documentation of his activities. 'From a picture of this period, we find that Bridgetower was handsome in appearance', she admits.[57]

Nor does Cuney Hare comment on any racial dynamics in Bridgetower's life, but rather chooses to simply document them. A 1790 source that appeared in her article called the young Bridgetower 'Bridgetower of Africa who is ten years', but the source's location of Bridgetower's heritage in Africa (as opposed to the Black diaspora, Poland, or Germany) does not receive comment.[58] It is also unclear if Cuney Hare viewed Bridgetower as Central European, for nothing in her prose ascribes to Bridgetower a particular national identity. Rather, her cautious, historical presentation of Bridgetower's life is a dignified, aristocratic one.

51 Cuney Hare, 'George Polgren [*sic*] Bridgetower', 122.

52 It is worth nothing that there is little difference between her article in *The Crisis* and her subsection on Bridgetower in her book, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*.

53 Cuney Hare, 'George Polgren [*sic*] Bridgetower', 123.

54 Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 296.

55 Cuney Hare, 'George Polgren [*sic*] Bridgetower', 122.

56 Cuney Hare, 'George Polgren [*sic*] Bridgetower', 122.

57 Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 296.

58 Cuney Hare, *Negro Musicians and Their Music*, 298.

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George Polgren Bridgetower

MAUD CUNEY HARE

Violinist and Mulatto Friend of Beethoven

THE Beethoven Centenary which has recently been celebrated throughout the world by numberless performances of the great musician's works calls to mind the name of the talented virtuoso, George Polgren Bridgetower, violinist and intimate friend of the immortal master. Over 10,000 articles concerning Beethoven are said to have been written during the week which marked the hundredth anniversary of his death. Numerous pictures of his associates, friends and contemporaries have been published and have been exhibited; however but in one instance have we noted tribute paid to the great mulatto violinist for whom Beethoven wrote the famous Kreutzer Sonata and with whom it was first played.

The details of Bridgetower's family history are unknown. He was, however, the son of an interesting character by the name of Bridgetower, who had been introduced in the best circles of London before 1790 and was familiarly called "The Abyssinian Prince". He was said to have come from Africa and migrated to Poland where he married a German or Polish woman. He afterwards lived in Dresden and died at Budissen on September 11, 1807.

John Frederick Bridgetower and his wife, Marie Ann, became the parents of two sons, both talented musicians, one a violoncellist and the other, George, the violinist who was born in Biala, or Viala, Poland in 1779. In 1790, the father was seen in London with young George who was then known as a violin prodigy of exceptional gift and talent. The mother was living at this time in Dresden with the other son. We hear nothing further of this youth, whose initial was "T", except that he evidently became a cellist of some note as he took part on an important program with his brother in 1803.

THE son, George, was destined to have his name linked with that of Beethoven, the great German master who was born at Bonn on the Rhine and to become the first interpreter of his greatest violin and piano sonata. For a personal description of young Bridgetower, historians rely on the information given on a pass which was probably a permit to travel to Dresden and to London to play. The permit found in Vienna police records is dated July 27, 1803. It reads:

"George Bridgetower; occupation, tone-master; born in Viala, Poland; 24 years of age, middle height, smooth brown face, dark brown hair, brown eyes and somewhat thick nose." From a picture taken of Bridgetower at this period, we find that he rightly deserved the description, "the handsome mulatto", which was afterwards given him.

G. P. Bridgetower

The boy was a pupil of Giorn (or Jarnowic) and of Haydn with whom Beethoven also studied for a short time. Showing great talent at the early age of ten, Bridgetower in his youth became a musician in the service of the Prince of Wales, who later became George IV. His first concert appearance was in Paris at a "Concert Spirituel" given April 13, 1789. His playing was of such excellence, that another concert was given eight months later and attended by 550 persons. In a review, *The Morning Post* of December 8 stated:

"Ranzzini was enraptured and declared that he had never heard such execution before even from his friend La Motte who was, he thought, much inferior to this wonderful boy. The father was in the gallery and so affected by the applause bestowed on his son, that tears of pleasure and gratitude flowed in profusion. The profits were estimated at 200 guineas."

The *Bath Journal* published a letter from the lad's father who wrote appreciatively of the warm reception given his talented boy.

ON February 19, 1790, George made his first public appearance in London at Drury Lane Theatre, where he played a violin solo between parts of Handel's "Messiah". On the following second of June, he and Clement (then a lad of about the same age), gave a concert under the patronage of the Prince of Wales at Brighton.

In 1802, we hear of him visiting his mother in Dresden. He took advantage of the baths at Teplitz and Carlsbad and had his permit extended so that he could spend a few months in Vienna. Appleby speaks of him at this time as being very industrious although inclined to be melancholy.

He spent much time playing in Vienna, while successful appearances in Dresden, both in public and exclusive affairs, gave him entry into the highest musical circles. At one of the private musicals he made the acquaintance of Held. Some years earlier he had received the warmest praise from Abt Vogler. At his first Dresden concert, July 24, 1802, given under the direction of Schulz, a Mozart symphony opened the program. In January, 1803, the Prince of Wales through Frederick Lindemann granted young Bridgetower permission to arrange a number of English concerts.

On the 18th of March a concert was given at which the well-known singer, Mlle. Gruenwald was to have sung, but having contracted a cold she was unable to appear. The program which was given without a singer, included a symphony by Beethoven and a violoncello concerto by T. Bridgetower, brother of the violinist who played a rondo and a concerto. Another concert was given on April 26 under notable patronage. Other public concerts were planned for the year 1803 and at this time, Bridgetower asked the assistance of Beethoven. This was willingly given and the first of a series took place in May. At this time a police license was necessary in order to give concerts in Vienna. The following statement appears on the reverse side of a permit granted May 9th:

"At this concert, (date indefinite—probably May 24th) the celebrated A Major Sonata, Op. 47, dedicated to

(*Turn to page* 137)

Figure 1 Maud Cuney Hare, 'George Polgren [*sic*] Bridgetower'. *The Crisis*, June 1927, p. 122. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Following Cuney Hare's publication for *The Crisis*, Bridgetower appeared more in New Negro-era publications and in Black concertizing. An all-Black 'Bridgetower String Quartet' formed in Philadelphia in 1932, for example, led by Charles McCabe, a member

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of Leopold Stokowski's All-American Orchestra. The ensemble concertized regularly from the mid-1930s until the late 1950s.[59] McCabe also founded the Bridgetower Chamber Orchestra, which existed in the 1960s.[60] Other iterations of 'Bridgetower' ensembles have come to fruition ever since, including a prominent string quartet in the 1980s that concertized regularly in New York City.[61]

The birth of string quartets, orchestras, poetry, and musical compositions dedicated to Bridgetower are a testament to the excavation work that Black musicologists undertook in the 1920s to unearth his biography and reintegrate Bridgetower into Western art music history. Black rewritings of music history illustrate the immense power of historicization as a form of legitimization. Projects such as the revitalization of Bridgetower were particularly successful because they directly targeted what Robin D. G. Kelly calls 'the fabrication of Europe as a discrete, racially pure entity that was responsible for modernity, on the one hand, and the fabrication of the Negro, on the other'.[62] Their works rewrote music history in every fundamental sense, thus countering the myth of a lack of a Black cultural past while also insisting that Black people had always belonged and participated in the Austro-German musical tradition. Moreover, as Lucy Caplan argues, Black writings such as Cuney Hare's during the New Negro movement 'rejected racist attempts to keep African Americans out of the concert hall and embraced a communal approach to knowledge production'.[63] Forming a community among and between Black musicologists and cultural historians, Black intellectuals of the New Negro movement produced their own global histories of music that insisted that not only was it the right of Black diasporic peoples to perform, compose, and listen to art music, it was their inheritance.

Part III: Making Beethoven Black

Scant evidence exists to suggest that African Americans widely considered Beethoven a composer of African descent in the nineteenth century. For example, in Will Marion Cook's unpublished memoir, he recounts the fights he picked with teachers over the real racial identity of historical figures in the past. He had argued that the ancient Roman military general Hannibal, for example, was Black. Yet when he attended Oberlin's Conservatory of Music in the 1880s, he had to admit that he could not make similar arguments about German composers. 'In music I was on less dangerous ground', he writes, for 'not even Willie could claim that Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart were of Black African descent.'[64] Cook's experience suggests that little in the world of classical music encouraged Black musicians to see themselves as part of it.

59 'Helena Maylle, Soprano Hit in Philly: Assisted by Bridgetower String Quartet', *New Journal and Guide,* 16 March 1940, 19.

60 'Charles McCabe Was Educator, Master Musician 42 Years; Now He's Retired', *Philadelphia Tribune*, 12 August 1969, 8.

61 Earl Calloway, 'Gala Concert features James Mack's Quartet', *Chicago Defender*, 11 February 1985, 17.

62 Kelley, '"But a Local Phase of a World Problem"', 1062.

63 Lucy Caplan, '"Strange What Cosmopolites Music Makes of Us": Classical Music, the Black Press, and Nora Douglas Holt's Black Feminist Audiotopia', *Journal of the Society for American Music* 14/3 (2020), 309.

64 Marva Carter, 'The Life and Career of Will Marion Cook' (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1988), 408.

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When did the idea of a first Black Beethoven emerge among Black musicians and writers? Many point to the Black British composer Coleridge-Taylor, who first argued that Beethoven had 'coloured blood in his veins' in 1907 during an interview for a British newspaper. Coleridge-Taylor said, 'I think that if the greatest of all musicians were alive today, he would find it somewhat difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to obtain hotel accommodation in certain American cities.'[65] The phrase most likely reached Black American readers in the 1920 after Berwick Sanders's biography of the composer was published in 1915. A review of Sanders's biography appeared in the Black newspaper *New York Amsterdam News* in 1928, for example, in which the reviewer heralded Sanders for writing 'the best life of Coleridge-Taylor obtainable'.[66]

The proliferation of new biographical works and English translations of Beethoven biographies celebrating the centenary of Beethoven's death also certainly opened the door for popular American interest in the composer again. And each English-language translation had to confront the question of how to describe Beethoven's appearance based on the original German. For example, German-Jewish writer Emil Ludwig's (not to be confused with Emil Ludwig, the piano professor at New England Conservatory of Music) writings on Beethoven sparked general interest in 1928 when he first began publishing on the composer for popular American magazines. Although the full English translation of Ludwig's biography did not appear until 1943, excerpts of it first debuted in the Hearst publication *Cosmopolitan* in 1928. In it, Ludwig writes, 'Was [Beethoven] not ugly? Little, squat, broad-shouldered, with a short neck, a big head, a blunt nose; his skin a blackish-brown, the hands hairy, the fingernails broad.'[67] Similarly, Krehbiel's 1921 translation of Thayer's biography describes Beethoven as 'short of stature, broad shoulders, short neck, large head, round nose, dark brown complexion; he always bent forward slightly when he walked. In the house he was called Der Spagnol (the Spaniard).'[68] Detailing Beethoven's physical appearance was an inescapable conundrum for modern American translators, for eighteenth-century German-speaking Europe was its own complex tapestry of racial terms and organization that could, on occasion, either align with or compete against twentieth-century American ones.

65 Berwick Sanders, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Musician: His Life, and Letters* (London: Cassell and Company, 1915), 203. Quoted in Michael Broyles, *Beethoven in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 269. Similarly, Bruce said of Othello that 'If Othello were a living entity and now resided in America, his gentlemanly demeanor, his clean character, his personal charm, his moral and public worth, his dignity, and his genius as a great general would count for little in securing to him in public places the courtesy and consideration due to one of his prominence and distinction. He would most unquestionably be treated as a Negro and treated as such by white men.' Bruce, *Was Othello a Negro?*, 15.

66 Aubrey Bowser, 'Book Review: The Vast Cry of a Buried Continent', *New York Amsterdam News*, 17 October 1928, 16. Sanders's biography also states that during Coleridge-Taylor's time in the Royal Conservatory of London, students used to take his hat and place it on Beethoven's head as a prank, delighted by the likeness of the two figures. 'It was a small hat for so large a head, but it helped to show the remarkable likeness that existed between the sovereign composer and the young coloured one.' Sanders, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor*, 72.

67 Emil Ludwig, 'Beethoven', *Cosmopolitan*, 85/6 (1928), 24.

68 Alexander Thayer, *The Life of Beethoven,* Vol. 1, trans. Henry Krehbiel, rev. and ed. Elliot Forbes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 72.

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Black debates about Beethoven's supposed African ancestry picked up in the 1930s, during the same decade that Cuney Hare and Locke wrote their own authoritative works detailing Black historical figures in the greater global world of music-making. The most vocal preacher pronouncing Beethoven as a Black diasporic figure was Joel Augustus Rogers (1880–1966), a Caribbean journalist who had emigrated to the United States in the 1920s. Rogers spent the entirety of his career attempting to debunk what he saw as the racist narratives of global history, authoring books such as *The World's Greatest Men of African Descent* in 1931, followed by *World's Greatest Men and Women of African Descent* in 1935. He also embodied the internationalist nature of the New Negro movement, for Rogers resided in Paris twice (from 1925 to 1927 and again from 1930 to 1933), toured most of Europe, spent time in Cairo, and attended the coronation of Haile Selassie in Ethiopia in 1930.

Rogers first hinted at this potentially explosive possible fact in his 1931 tract, *The World's Greatest Men of African Descent*.[69] The appendix promised a future edition that included a section called 'Great Men and Women, Hitherto Thought White, Who Were Evidently of Negro Descent', which listed as people of African descent the Greek poet Sappho, King Charles XIV of Sweden, King Gustavus IV Adolphus of Sweden, the Napoleonic military commander and later king of Naples Joachim Murat, Anita Garibaldi, and Beethoven. In his 1934 book, *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro*, Rogers expanded on Beethoven's Blackness further. 'Beethoven, the world's greatest musician', he writes, 'was without a doubt a dark mulatto. He was called the "Black Spaniard".'[70]

Perhaps borrowing from Coleridge-Taylor's 1907 remark that Beethoven would not have been able to stay in most hotels in America, Rogers concluded his book excerpt on Beethoven by stating, 'In short, the general description of Beethoven, even to his frizzly hair, fits that of many an Afro-American or West Indian mulatto. In the Southern States Beethoven would have been forced to ride in a jim crow [*sic*] car.'[71] Rogers then dropped another bombshell: 'His teacher, the immortal Josef [*sic*] Haydn, who wrote the music for the former Austrian National Anthem, was coloured, too.'[72]

What are we to make of these conspiracies of Beethoven's Blackness? Their works used similar strategies to present what they perceived to be the Black origins of Beethoven's biography. First, Black thinkers relied on the heavyweight authority of German scholarship to make their claims. What is striking about Rogers's claims is how he chose to make them: by directly quoting from the most authoritative biographies and historical eyewitness reports on Beethoven's life and career. 'I've read every available description of Beethoven by those who saw him – the only authority that really counts', Rogers defended, 'and I've yet to see where he is spoken of as being other than Negroid in colour and appearance.'[73] Rogers revelled in using

69 J. A. Rogers, *The World's Greatest Men and Women of African Descent* (New York: J. A. Rogers Publications, 1931).

70 J. A. Rogers, *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro with Complete Proof: A Short Cut to the World History of the Negro*, rev. Helga M. Rogers (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), xvii.

71 Rogers, *100 Amazing Facts*, 8.

72 Rogers, *100 Amazing Facts*, 12.

73 J. A. Rogers, 'Rogers Says: Little Known Facts of History Proved Many Europeans Had Negroid Stain', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 February 1943, 7.

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German-language sources that had been translated into English, including Frau Fischer, who he described as 'an intimate acquaintance of Beethoven', and biographers such as Thayer.

Rogers also incorporated the writings of German biographers, musicologists, and anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to legitimate his claims. Musicologist Paul Bekker, Rogers writes, said that Beethoven's face possessed a 'wide, thick-lipped mouth, short, thick nose, and proudly arched forehead', which to Rogers suggested phenotypical traits associated with African ancestry.[74] German anthropologist Frederick Hertz, Rogers also noted, had referred to Beethoven's Black physical traits twice in his publication, *Race and Civilization* – he had mentioned his 'dark' skin and his 'flat, thick nose';[75] 'One may easily trace in Beethoven's face slightly Negroid traits.'[76] Much of German scholarship on racial science from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has of course been debunked, overturned, and dismissed outright if not condemned. Yet the fact that German thinkers had presented Beethoven in this manner held power, if only because German academic scholarship was still considered central to American education. If German scholars had said that Beethoven was Black, Rogers implies, then it must be true.

Second, and relatedly, Beethoven's Blackness was – and continues to be – expressed through the language of conspiracy. Because much of Black knowledge production during the inter-war era was itself an act of mutiny against white forms of knowledge, to declare a Black Beethoven was to declare a deep distrust of how mainstream historical and musicological scholarship was produced. For example, in February 1943 African American editor and journalist Carl Murphy (who had earned his doctorate from the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany, in 1913) expressed outrage that Ludwig's descriptions of Beethoven's appearance had been forcibly changed during the publication of Ludwig's book. While his 1928 *Cosmopolitan* article described Beethoven as having 'Blackish-brown skin', for 'reasons of propriety' the editors of Ludwig's 1943 book had apparently demanded that Ludwig changed the description of the composer to 'swarthy, with an ugly red face' when Ludwig's book finally made its US debut.[77] In the 1943 book publication, Ludwig's description of Beethoven from *Cosmopolitan* did not survive, either. Rather than attributing his moniker of 'Der Spagnol' to Beethoven's 'dark brown complexion', Ludwig's 1943 book associated with his supposed half-Spanish/half-Dutch heritage.[78] When a Black physician named Dr B. M. Rhetta wrote to Ludwig to ask him why he had changed his description of Beethoven, Ludwig allegedly confessed that 'he was making this concession to white America'.[79] A conspiracy was afoot. Beethoven's alleged Blackness, Murphy supposed, 'came as [too great] a shock to some worshippers of this world's greatest musical composer

74 Rogers, *100 Amazing Facts*, 8.

75 Rogers, *100 Amazing Facts*, 8.

76 Frederick Hertz, *Race and Civilization* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1928), 123.

77 Carl Murphy, 'The Week: Beethoven's Colour; Biographer Says It Was Blackish-Brown', *Afro-American*, 13 February 1943, 1.

78 Ludwig, 'Beethoven', 24.

79 Murphy, 'The Week: Beethoven's Colour', 1.

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of all time'.[80] Yet, Murphy believed, it was his responsibility as a journalist to uncover the truth.

Pouncing on Murphy's article, J. A. Rogers chimed in two weeks later in the *Pittsburgh Courier* to reiterate that Beethoven 'had Negroid stain'.[81] Yet, like all good conspiracy theorists, Rogers lamented that no one believed him. Both Black and white readers, including his good friend the late Black historian Arturo Schomburg, refused to accept the truth. In a lengthy story, Rogers claimed that one day when he was visiting the Mundaneum in Belgium with Schomburg, he and Schomburg met Dr Otto Neurath, the leading curator of the archive. Neurath confirmed Rogers's claim that Beethoven was Black in the presence of Schomburg. 'He said in Schomburg's presence', Rogers writes, 'that not only Beethoven was coloured, but that Goethe, Germany's literary figure, was coloured, too. Later, Dr Neurath sent me the sources from Vienna.'[82] Rogers also claimed that soon after this excursion, he discovered a book in Schomburg's own library by a German racial anthropologist named Hertz called *Race and Civilization*, that stated that Beethoven had 'Negroid traits'. 'I showed it to Schomburg', Rogers gleefully writes, 'who marked them in the book and was thereafter silent on the subject.'[83] Rogers was right; Schomburg was wrong. Schomburg, who had died in 1938, was unable to refute.

Third, Black claims to Beethoven were either in direct relationship with or in opposition to biographies of Bridgetower. Bridgetower's existence as a Black violinist, it turns out, made it possible for listeners to imagine other Black lives in German spaces. Sometimes the two musical figures went hand in hand; reports of Beethoven's Blackness appeared in the same articles as historical accounts explaining who Bridgetower was. Citing Cuney Hare, Murphy links Bridgetower and Beethoven together. 'It is altogether surmise on my part, but if contemporaries called Beethoven's skin "black brown-ish" and referred to that of mulatto Bridgetower as "smooth brown", it would appear that the mulatto violinist was lighter in complexion than Beethoven, whom we heretofore mistakenly regarded as an Anglo-Saxon.'[84] (Similarly, a Baltimore *Afro-American* article in 1946 called both Beethoven and Bridgetower 'coloured men of German nationality'.[85]) Yet Rogers made no mention of Bridgetower in his writings of Beethoven, nor did he incorporate Bridgetower into his evidence of Beethoven's own Black identity. It is striking to consider, then, when and how the existence of Bridgetower could function as an arsenal in a Black writer's weaponry proving Beethoven's Blackness or detracting from it.

Lastly, Black claims to Beethoven relied on both the visual *and* the sonic to locate Blackness. Visual descriptions of what we would consider to be racial phenotype was of course the pattern of diagnosing Beethoven's Blackness. Beethoven's death mask, for example, provided one

80 Carl Murphy, 'The Week: Spangy Beethoven His Hair Frizzly; A Lawyer's Notes Haydn Coloured Too', *Afro-American*, 6 March 1943, 1.

81 Rogers, 'Rogers Says', 7.

82 Rogers, 'Rogers Says', 7.

83 Rogers, 'Rogers Says', 7.

84 Murphy, 'The Week: Spangy Beethoven', 1.

85 'Moors of Music', *Afro-American,* 30 March 1946, 14.

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example of physical evidence that Black writers believed portrayed the truth of Beethoven's Black ancestry. The *Afro-American* reported for example that, 'The great Beethoven, whose music ranks at the top of the classics, had . . . these distinguishing marks of Negroid people. His death mask is the proof of our assertion.'[86] The author, like many others, understood Beethoven's biological Blackness as an incontrovertible fact, located in the supposed phenotype of African-descended peoples, evidenced in the material legacy of the composer's death mask.

Yet those who argued that there were sonic markings of Beethoven's Blackness presented a more complex and, frankly, interesting case. Murphy pushed his argument that the best of classical music actually had Black origins further when he insisted that Beethoven's Blackness was a sonic fact. Agreeing with the notion (proposed by 'white friends') that 'jazz and coloured people have an affinity', Murphy cheekily writes, 'the first piece of jazz on record is Beethoven's Quartet in B Flat, No. 6. The way to prove it is to substitute a wailing saxophone for the first violin, add a good drummer, and stop at the third measure from the end.'[87] Murphy relies on instruments associated with Black popular music such as the saxophone and drums to make his point. It is as if Beethoven's music had been calling out to be played on a saxophone and with percussion (instruments associated with jazz) all along; only now were listeners catching up to the fact.

Contemporary musicological discourses on race have long pointed out the problems with this form of sonic essentialism. Murphy here insists that Black people inherently possess an organic musical impulse (usually rhythmic) that is inherent to their musical compositions, a sonic imprint as recognizable and embedded as a strand of DNA.[88] Nonetheless, what Murphy claimed was not that different from other Black musicologists and thinkers had been pointing out prior to his publication: classical music had never been a white medium, even if their everyday realities in white America insisted otherwise. Black musicologists had proven the existence of Black people in classical music in medieval and early modern European histories, and even the most venerated of composers (the German masters) had been inspired by Black musical creativity in their own compositions. Bach's music shared an affinity to spirituals, Brahms was a lover of ragtime, and Beethoven had composed using Negro melodies.

Over time, the potency of Beethoven's possible Black heritage took on a life of its own. One reader named Elmer A. Carter, for example, wrote to the *Afro-American* in March 1943, praising the efforts of all investigators who had unveiled the truth of Beethoven's racial heritage. 'You deserve the congratulations of all intelligent people for your insistent probing of the ethnic origin of Beethoven', he writes. 'When once the full implications of your researches [*sic*] dawn upon certain Americans, panic may result. Do you think they will abandon the musical insignia, which is the symbol for victory of the United Nations and which comprised

86 'You Probably Have Some Coloured Blood in You', *Afro-American*, 28 August 1937, 12.

87 Murphy, 'The Week: Spangy Beethoven', 1.

88 For more information, see Kofi Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman, eds., *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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the stirring opening of the First Movement of the Fifth Symphony? After all, they still separate blood plasma.'[89] Most likely referring to the Red Cross's decision to segregate Black and white blood donations in the 1940s, Carter pokes at the myth of unity in an era of extreme racial violence and discrimination. Beethoven, who represented to many white and Black Americans truth, beauty, and righteousness, exposed white Americans' hypocrisy on the very ideals they claimed to espouse.

To whom did Beethoven belong? Who in America could claim the great German masters? As Black historians, musicologists, and public intellectuals rewrote music history, they found new and empowering answers to those questions. The great German masters did not belong to white people. The great German masters were not even white. Their music and biographies were meant for all, including, or especially Black people. The Blackening of Beethoven proved that the Austro-German canon could be reworked and refashioned to serve Black causes.

A Black Beethoven in a White Musicological World

In this article, I have been fundamentally uninterested in uncovering the truths of the claim that Beethoven was of African descent and more committed to uncovering what this claim may tell us about the moment of its flourishing. It is not a coincidence that the discourse of Beethoven's Blackness began in the decades that it did, nor should we treat it as such.

Arising during the inter-war era, Beethoven's alleged Black ancestry took root at a time of immense Black intellectual productivity, a moment when a generation of Black intellectuals had committed themselves to the task of collecting and documenting the history of Black diasporic peoples on a global scale. It is in this context, and in this spirit, where any kind of untouched or previously unthinkable Black history felt possible, that the idea of a Black Beethoven emerges. Germany, it turns out, was a site of the Black diaspora, a land where Black musicians had long resided, and the biographies (some questionable, some unquestionable) of Bridgetower, Beethoven, and Haydn had proved that. Black talent and German art music had fused together in the body of Beethoven.

In his book on the reception history of Beethoven in America, Michael Broyles writes, 'Beethoven is European, yet Black nationalists and Black separatists wanted to purge themselves of European culture.'[90] But the earlier generations of Black musicologists and intellectuals featured in this article did not wish to purge themselves of European culture. Rather, they sought to expand just what European culture was and to whom it belonged. In this manner, their works were part of a new, emerging discourse of global musical modernisms that challenged and decolonized Western music historiography, dismantling not only the notion that Western musical modernism was the teleological endpoint of music history but also unsettling just where, exactly, was its beginning. In so doing, they demythologized what had long been considered white spaces (European culture, classical music) by instead pointing out the Black figures who had contributed to it centuries ago.

89 Melvin Grant, 'What AFRO Readers Say', *Afro-American*, 13 March 1943, 4.

90 Broyles, *Beethoven in America*, 285.

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Among these conversations, the Black Beethoven claim became a way to skewer white hegemonic scholarship. Its proponents were deeply uninterested in what, whether, or to what degree white American academics believed them because white American scholarship had little moral ground to stand on. Rather, Black thought, in ways that were both subtle and highly provocative, undermined the very foundation upon which the narratives of music history had been built. By insisting that 'neither the Black race nor the white race is superior or inferior to each other' and that 'each has made progress in its own way', Black musicological and historical scholarship worked to undo the racist frame that placed Black people outside of global modernity and to create new pathways of music-making for future generations to explore.[91]

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91 Bruce, *Was Othello a Negro?*, 6

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