WAYNE D. SHIRLEY

The Coming of "Deep River"

"Deep River" is one of the best known of African American spirituals ("spirituals" from here on in this article). It is perhaps the best-known and best-loved spiritual of all among the general public—the international public that reads books, buys recordings other than current popular recordings, and goes to concerts. Its title is used as the title of record albums; of books ranging from works of religious meditation to steamy novels; of radio shows; even an opera. Because "Deep River" is now so well known, we tend to assume that it was always well known—as "Silent Night" is "the oldest Christmas carol" to children who have not yet developed a historical perspective. Yet it was not among the spirituals that first entered the general public consciousness. Its first documentable appearance comes almost a decade after that of the earliest collections—the 1867 Slave Songs of the United States and Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s words-only article, "Negro Spirituals." (The statement that "Deep River" originated ca. 1820 in Guilford County, North Carolina, which one runs into in various contexts, originates with Miles Mark Fisher and is based on Fisher’s technique of dating the spirituals through textual parallels to historical events. It has no basis in fact.) And "Deep River" did not, in fact, become well known until the second decade of the twentieth century, by which time it had been transformed from its original form (see ex. 1 below) to the form given in the lowest line of example 9.


American Music Winter 1997
© 1997 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois
This article will trace this transformation. It will also try to document the subsequent canonization of "Deep River" as one of the greatest of the spirituals and the increasing acceptance of example 9 as its authentic version. From here on we shall call the example 9 version the "Standard Version," hoping that readers will not take this to mean that other versions are substandard.9

We shall end in 1930, when "Deep River" appears in two important American poems. One of these is Hart Crane's "The River," a section from The Bridge:

---A little while gaze absently below
   And hum Deep River with them while they go.

The "they" with whom we are invited by Crane to hum "Deep River" are not, particularly, black; they are the legendary Mississippi rivermen. So in this year, in a monument of High Modern culture, "Deep River" is considered as a song belonging to all America. The other poem is James Weldon Johnson's "St. Peter Relates an Incident of the Resurrection Day." Some post-1930 appearances of "Deep River" will be mentioned briefly as a postscript.

"Deep River" first appears in print in J.B.T. Marsh's The Story of the [Fisk] Jubilee Singers: With Their Songs. It is not in the earlier Fisk books—Jubilee Singers of 1872 or Gustavus D. Pike's The Jubilee Singers and Their Campaign for Twenty Thousand Dollars of 1873–75.10 Marsh's book (which will be called "Fisk" from now on in this essay) was published in many editions, dating from 1875 to 1903. The earliest edition containing "Deep River" which I have been able to examine, the English "seventh edition" of 1877, prints "Deep River" as song no. 77 on pages 196–97. This is the place it will occupy (unchanged, even to the misprint in m. 1) in most later editions of the book. All later versions of "Deep River," save perhaps for the version in the Lomaxes' American Ballads and Folk Songs,11 stem finally from this version.

"Deep River" is published in Fisk not in the four-part harmonization that we associate with these books, but rather as an unaccompanied melody—a method that Theo. F. Seward, the transcriber/arranger of the songs, used for those songs that did not submit readily to Sunday School–book harmonization. (Several other spirituals published in melody-only form in Fisk have since become well known: e.g., "Nobody Knows," "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," "You May Bury Me in the East," "Ride on, King Jesus.")12 That "Deep River" is published as melody-only is not unusual for Fisk; what is more unusual is the presence of dynamics. "Deep River" is one of five spiri-
tuals in the 1881 edition of Fisk to have dynamics; only one other song in Fisk has a full-scale *pianissimo*.

Example 1 shows "Deep River" as it appears in the Fisk collections—what we shall call "the Fisk version," or, more simply, "Fisk."

Example 1. The spiritual "Deep River" as it appears in the Fisk collections. The first E-natural in the opening measure, a sixteenth note in the original, has been corrected here to an eighth note.

It differs in several ways from the Standard Version. Four of these differences, which will be useful in our discussion, are (in descending order of importance):

1. The form of the Standard Version is a closed form—roughly AABA'. Fisk is an open form—chorus/verse/chorus/verse/chorus . . . , with the verse sung to what is in effect a reciting tone;

2. "I want to cross over into camp ground," which is the final phrase of the A sections in the Standard Version, is a repeated refrain in the Fisk version—"repeated" in itself and "repeated" since it occurs at the end of both chorus and verse (the first statement of the words serves a double function—as the final line of the chorus proper and as the first line of refrain);
3. While the Standard Version is clearly in the major mode, Fisk lies ambiguously between major and relative minor—E major and C-sharp minor as printed (remember this key complex—which we'll abbreviate to “E major”; later versions in this rather unriverish key tend to be taken directly from Fisk);

4. (Most trivial; most useful): The fourth measure of Fisk descends to the tonic (assuming the tune to be in E major), while the Standard Version stops at the second degree. This small detail is a quick and useful way of telling whether a newly found version of “Deep River” is dependent on the Standard Version.

The second of these differences, “I want to cross over into camp ground” as a refrain, is perhaps the most striking difference from the Standard Version. The large-scale design—refrain that occurs after both chorus and verse—is not unusual in early spirituals\(^4\) (the AABA' form of the Standard Version is, on the contrary, completely foreign to the folk spiritual). But the form of the refrain itself in Fisk, the obsessive repetition of a single short text to varying music within a narrow range, is extremely unusual: the nearest parallel in the pre-1910 spiritual repertory is probably “Dum-a-lum” in Calhoun Plantation Songs.\(^5\) To my unexpert ears this refrain (and that of “Dum-a-lum” as well) suggests an African origin.

Anyone singing the Fisk “Deep River” will find it impossible to sing the da capo of the opening in the dreamy, “timeless” manner in which “Deep River” is usually sung: the refrain has set up a strong, slow, march-like pulse that carries over into the da capo. If we sing the beginning as we sing the da capo, we find ourselves with a “Deep River” different in spirit as well as notes from the Standard Version. Had Higginson collected this “Deep River,” he would have classified it among the spirituals of the Church Militant.

There is no known reference to “Deep River” before its publication in Fisk;\(^6\) nor is it mentioned by any informant in the Slave Narrative Collection of the Federal Writers' Project.\(^7\) Those who have worked in this field will know just how little significance to give to this fact: most pre-1870 descriptions of black music do not identify particular pieces, and those that do tend to mention only one or two titles. More to our purpose is the fact that “Deep River” was not much noticed for the quarter century following its publication in Fisk.\(^8\) It is on the basis of this negative evidence that I base my statement that it was little known until after the turn of the century. I know of no specific mention of “Deep River” before 1905, and as late as 1914 it is absent from Henry E. Krehbiel's ambitious survey in Afro-American Folksongs.\(^9\)

Its absence is particularly notable from two literary works of the
The Coming of "Deep River" 497

early twentieth century, one by W. E. B. Du Bois and the other by James Weldon Johnson. The larger of these works is W. E. B. Du Bois’s The Souls of Black Folk, published in 1903. Its final chapter, “Of the Sorrow Songs,” makes an impassioned case for the spirituals as “the sole American music . . . [and] the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas.” In the course of the chapter, Du Bois identifies the “ten master songs—the ten greatest of the spirituals.” “Deep River” is not among them; in fact, “Deep River” is mentioned nowhere in The Souls of Black Folk. And The Souls of Black Folk is shot through with the spirituals: part of the strategy of the book is to present the spirituals as one of humanity’s great creations, and thus to establish the black race’s credentials as a significant contributor to Western culture.

The James Weldon Johnson work in which we might expect to find “Deep River” is “O Black and Unknown Bards,” a poem first published in Century Magazine in November 1908. The poem invokes five of the best-known spirituals: “Steal Away to Jesus,” “Roll, Jordan, Roll,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” and “Go Down, Moses.” The absence of “Deep River” from this list of songs is less indicative than its absence from The Souls of Black Folk: it is the purpose of a poem to select, not to catalog. But it is suggestive. (Johnson would do full justice to “Deep River” later.)

The first person to give serious notice to “Deep River” was Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912) in his 1905 collection, Twenty-Four Negro Melodies Transcribed for the Piano. This volume, Coleridge-Taylor’s most extensive work for pianoforte, was commissioned by Oliver Ditson for its prestigious series, the Musicians Library. Coleridge-Taylor, an Afro-British composer, rather than an African or an African American, relied on published collections rather than on his own memories for all of his twenty-four songs, which included African as well as African American melodies. Coleridge-Taylor did not invariably use entire folk melodies in his settings, which turn out to be fantasies on the tunes rather than straightforward harmonizations: the portion of each tune used is printed above Coleridge-Taylor’s piano version.

“Deep River,” the tenth of the Twenty-Four Negro Melodies, is prefaced by the first four measures of the Fisk version (with a mistake in the second measure which Coleridge-Taylor does not make in his arrangement). At the bottom of the first page of music is the notation, “In the author’s opinion this is the most beautiful and touching melody of the whole series.” “Deep River” has been noticed at last: and it has begun its transformation into the song as we know it.
The most radical aspect of Coleridge-Taylor’s transformation of “Deep River” is his lopping off all of the song after the first four measures. At one swipe are gone the chorus-verse-chorus form of the song, the verse itself with its chanting-tone melody, and the refrain with its quasi-African flavor. The text of the first verse (“Oh, don’t you want to go . . .”) will return in the Standard Version as the B section of an AABA’ form; all the other aspects that Coleridge-Taylor has shorn from the Fisk version will return only in versions—none of them finally successful—which attempt to return to Fisk. The major history of “Deep River” from now on will be the history of its first four measures and of Coleridge-Taylor’s extension of them.

The first five measures of Coleridge-Taylor’s “Deep River” (ex. 2) present—still in the E major of the Fisk version—a “Deep River” already recognizable as the song we know: deep rolling chords over which unfolds the noble, timeless melody. But if the start is the “Deep River” we are used to, the sixth measure comes as a surprise: Coleridge-Taylor, remembering the tonal ambiguity of the original tune, recasts the cadence in C-sharp minor. The effect is of a bit of Brahms wandering into the tune:


The second phrase of Coleridge-Taylor’s arrangement begins the creation of the new material which will become the B section of the Standard Version. Example 3 shows mm. 7–9 of the Coleridge-Taylor version, along with the B section of the Standard Version transposed to E major:
Accustomed as we have become to the Standard Version of “Deep River,” we tend to hear mm. 7–9 of the Coleridge-Taylor version and their extension in his mm. 10–12 as merely a variant of a preexistent version of the tune. It is, I suppose, possible to imagine that Coleridge-Taylor heard such a version during his visit to the United States in 1904 and remembered it when making his arrangement. But this Bartókian interest in folk-music collecting is nowhere else evident in Twenty-Four Negro Melodies, which rely entirely on printed sources eked out by composerly fantasy: it is far more rational to see mm. 7–12 as music original to Coleridge-Taylor.

Coleridge-Taylor’s “Deep River” proceeds to a more assertive B section, più mosso, in E minor/C major, which is primarily a fantasy on the cadential figure (m. 4 of ex. 1) and the octave leap in the second measure: the work in its entirety is not the dreamy fantasy of its opening measures. If “Deep River” has shed the militant cast of its refrain, it has not yet achieved the utter tranquillity of the Standard Version.

Coleridge-Taylor’s “Deep River” did not go unnoticed. In 1911 Oliver Ditson published an arrangement of this version transcribed for violin and piano by the major American violin virtuosa Maud Powell (1868–1920). Powell recorded this version in June of that year with pianist George Falkenstein—the first version of “Deep River” to be recorded.

The Coleridge-Taylor “Deep River” is the earliest work to appear in the records of the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress under
that title—that is, it is the earliest work you will find if you look in the copyright files under the word “Deep.” (Maud Powell’s arrangement of Coleridge-Taylor is the next earliest.) For the remainder of this article the records of the Copyright Office will be our frequent companion: it may be as well to state here the limits of their helpfulness.

Looking in the Copyright Office files under “Deep River” you will not find an entry for a version of “Deep River” published only as a part of a collection. (Thus the various editions of the Fisk collection, several of which were copyrighted, do not turn up under “Deep River.”) Nor does the Coleridge-Taylor Twenty-Four Negro Melodies turn up as a collection under “Deep River”: his “Deep River” shows up under that title in the copyright files only because each of the twenty-four was copyrighted separately.) Looking under “Deep River” you will not find a version copyrighted as part of a suite (e.g., William Grant Still’s Folk Suite, no. 4), used as part of a work based on folk melodies (e.g., Daniel Gregory Mason’s String-Quartet on Negro Themes), or quoted incidentally (as in Charles Ives’s “Tom Sails Away”). You will not find a version of “Deep River” copyrighted under another title (e.g., Creamer and Layton’s “Dear Old Southland”). You will not find a work which was, simply, not copyrighted (e.g., Sousa’s violin-and-band arrangement of the Coleridge-Taylor/Powell work).27 And, finally, the mere appearance of the title in the copyright files does not assure us that the music represented is indeed a version of the spiritual: we must examine such pieces as the W. C. Handy publication “Deep River Blues” and Frank Harling’s opera Deep River to see whether they involve our melody (neither one does). If we remember these cautions, we shall find copyright records useful for this study.

In fact the next known copyright for a version of “Deep River”—a version crucial for the history of the song—appears under that title in the files of the Copyright Office only as an instruction to “see Burleigh, H. T.”28 This is the 1913 publication Two Negro Spirituals, which contains the first of Henry T. Burleigh’s arrangements of “Deep River.” Here is this version, for mixed chorus, in its entirety (see example 4).

This is very close to the Standard Version of “Deep River.” We are out of the key of E major, into the Rhenish key of E flat (not, in fact, a change in the melody itself, but significant for the history of the song); “I want to cross over into camp-ground” has shed its refrain-like function; the fourth measure does not dip down to the tonic; and mm. 17-24, which in the Standard Version will be “the B section,” begin with a phrase similar to mm. 7-10 of the Coleridge-Taylor version but flower out into a return of the opening motive an octave higher (see example 5).
The Coming of "Deep River"


(Note that the opening of the B section is even closer to the Coleridge-Taylor than is the Standard Version.)

Burleigh 1913, as we shall call this version, has also acquired the repeat of the opening section which makes the form of the Standard Version AABA' rather than ABA'. It is not, in fact, a literal melodic repeat: the first time "I want to cross over into camp-ground" starts on the tonic and moves to the third degree, rather than starting on the submediant and moving to the tonic. When, in the near-repeat, it starts on the submediant (as it did in Fisk) it is as though we have seen even deeper into the singer’s soul. (Paul Robeson, who trusted to memory more than to notes, sings the submediant-to-tonic version both times on his classic recording.)
Deep, deep river, want to cross

Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into camp ground.

Deep river, want to cross

A tempo

O, don't you want to go to that gospel feast, that prom is'd

Want to go to that

land where all is peace? Oh, deep river.

Example 4b.

Burleigh 1913

Coleridge-Taylor, transposed

Example 5. Burleigh 1913, mm. 17–22, contrasted with Coleridge-Taylor, mm. 7–9. Shows the return of the opening motive.

The most striking difference between Burleigh 1913 and the Standard Version is that in 1913 there is no extended return of the opening section. The form of this “Deep River” is not, in fact, AABA’, but rather that of a fantasy on the opening measures of the melody.29

Most readers of American Music will not need a general introduction to the life of Harry T. Burleigh (1866–1949). In 1913, when Two Negro
Spirituals was published, he was already in his late forties; he had studied at the National Conservatory during Dvořák’s tenure as director (though, as he was careful to point out, not with Dvořák himself).30 He had toured as baritone soloist with Coleridge-Taylor on several of the composer’s American tours, including one in 1906—the year after the publication of Twenty-Four Negro Melodies.31 It is probable that on this tour Coleridge-Taylor shared with Burleigh his enthusiasm for “Deep River”: it is evident from Burleigh’s reworking of mm. 7–9 of Coleridge-Taylor’s setting that he knew the Afro-British composer’s version of the song. Coleridge-Taylor, a younger man than Burleigh, died on September 1, 1912, his death a great loss to the musical world in general and the world of choral music in particular: perhaps Burleigh’s choice of “Deep River” to harmonize was made partly in homage to his fallen comrade.

By 1913 Burleigh was an acknowledged song composer: his first important song, “Jean,” had appeared in 1903. He had published voice-and-piano arrangements of spirituals as early as 1901.32 Immediately before arranging Two Negro Spirituals he had arranged several songs for Kreibiel’s Afro-American Folksongs: indeed that collection had yielded the other of the Two Negro Spirituals, the Bahaman song “Dig My Grave.”33 But, though there had been a Burleigh Choral Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, since 1902,34 he had published no choral music prior to 1913.

The occasion for Burleigh’s mixed-chorus arrangement of “Deep River” seems to have come from Kurt Schindler (1882–1935), the founder and conductor of the Schola Cantorum of New York.35 Though the Schola Cantorum often performed with orchestra (by the end of 1913 it had appeared in works as varied as Liszt’s The Legend of St. Elizabeth and “Sirènes” from Debussy’s Trois nocturnes) Schindler had a particular interest in the choral performance of folksong arrangements. Burleigh’s Two Negro Spirituals are dedicated “To the Chorus of the Schola Cantorum, New York/Kurt Schindler, Conductor” (the Schola Cantorum gave the work its second performance); it was published (in advance of its first performance) by G. Schirmer, for whom Schindler served as a reader and editor. It is reasonable to assume that it was Schindler who requested a set of choral arrangements of Negro spirituals from Burleigh. We can assume that the choice of the particular spirituals to arrange was Burleigh’s own.

The Two Negro Spirituals were first performed on March 11, 1914, at Carnegie Hall, as part of “a concert . . . made up of compositions by negro musicians and interpreted by them.”36 This was in fact the third and last of the annual “Clef Club” concerts given in Carnegie Hall for the benefit of the Music School Settlement for Colored People, though with James Reese Europe’s resignation from the Clef Club
its name could no longer be used in connection with the concert.\textsuperscript{37} A. Walter Kramer, who reviewed the concert for \textit{Musical America}, gave the two spirituals pride of place, calling them “among the best things heard” at the concert. (He was less happy that Burleigh, as a singer, performed Alex Rogers’s sassy “Why Adam Sinned.”) Less than a month later, on April 1, again at Carnegie Hall, the \textit{Two Negro Spirituals} were performed by the Schola Cantorum, on a program that also contained Moussorgsky’s \textit{Joshua}. Singing the contralto solo in \textit{Joshua} was Mary Jordan (1879–1961), who would be the dedicatee of Burleigh’s voice-and-piano version of “Deep River.”

Burleigh’s \textit{Two Negro Spirituals} have an importance beyond that of establishing the full arch of the Standard Version of “Deep River.”\textsuperscript{38} From our current perspective we are too likely to see Burleigh’s choral harmonizations as the continuation of a tradition: were not the spirituals, when first presented in concert in 1871 by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, sung chorally? In fact Burleigh’s two harmonization represent a new venue for the spiritual. Before \textit{Two Negro Spirituals} appeared, the spirituals had been considered the particular property of African American touring groups that specialized in this repertory: you would no more expect a mainly white mixed chorus of the period to sing spirituals than you would expect one of our large municipal choruses of the present day to sing “Up with People.” (Male choruses were somewhat more welcoming—see the simple but handsome arrangements done for the Mendelssohn Glee Club of New York by Arthur Mees that are published in Krehbiel.)\textsuperscript{39} It is Burleigh’s choral arrangements, often dedicated to major civic choruses,\textsuperscript{40} which freed the spiritual for performance by choruses in general. One suspects that this was a conscious design of both Burleigh and Kurt Schindler. Our next “Deep River” will suggest Schindler’s further involvement in the development of the choral spiritual.

It is less difficult to see the musical advances of Burleigh’s “Deep River” on the earlier jubilee-singer publications of spirituals in choral form. The jubilee-singer books limited themselves to straightforward Sunday School harmonizations in primary chords: most are completely without accidentals. Textures are either homophonic—soprano and alto most often in thirds, tenor and bass most often in fifths and octaves—or straightforward call and response. In Burleigh’s “Deep River” we hear for the first time the full Dvořákian panoply of late nineteenth-century harmony applied to a mixed-chorus arrangement of a spiritual; we also hear for the first time a spiritual arrangement using a moderately complex choral texture.

There were certainly models for Burleigh’s harmonic treatment of “Deep River.” Coleridge-Taylor’s \textit{Twenty-Four Negro Melodies} is per-
haps the strongest model. We can see specific spots in which the Col-
eridge-Taylor "Deep River" has suggested Burleigh's harmonies: the
flat seventh in the fourth measure of Coleridge-Taylor gives Burleigh
the harmony at the parallel spot in his version (Burleigh's desire to
have this magical harmony on the downbeat causes him to avoid the
tonic in the melody in his previous measure).

There are other models as well: Arthur Mees's arrangements for the
Mendelssohn Glee Club; and, possibly, the oral tradition of male-quar-
tet singing described later by James Weldon Johnson in his preface
to The Book of American Negro Spirituals. But no previous choral (or
vocal) arrangement of a spiritual had handled this harmonic palette
with such assurance, with such a knowledge of choral texture, or had
put it to the service of such profound expression. Like Heinrich Isaac's
arrangement of "Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen," like Michael Pra-
etorius's arrangement of "Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen," like Hall
Johnson's arrangement of "I Been 'Buked," this is a major work in a
small compass.

During the program that contained the premiere of Burleigh's choral
arrangement of "Deep River" there was a ceremony:

David Mannes, who is largely responsible for musical educational
opportunities being offered the negroes, made a short address in
which he announced the results of the prize-competition offered
by the settlement [the Music School Settlement for Colored Peo-
ple] for a work by a negro musician based on negro themes. Carl
Diton, of Paine College, Augusta, Ga., was awarded first prize
for "Four Mixed Choruses," being arrangements of Jubilee Songs,
and R. Nathaniel Dett second prize for a chorus "Listen to the
Lambs." The judges were Rudolph E. Schirmer, David Mannes
and Kurt Schindler.

Both prizewinning works were promptly published by G. Schirmer.
The second-prize winner has turned out to be the more significant
work: Dett's "Listen to the Lambs" is as important in the history of
the choral spiritual as Burleigh's "Deep River." But it is Diton's "Four
Mixed Choruses," the second of which is a setting of "Deep River,
which concerns us here.

It is extremely unlikely that Carl Diton (1886-1962) had seen Bur-
leigh's setting of "Deep River"—his choice of it as one of four jubilee
songs to harmonize is, rather, an indication that Coleridge-Taylor's
enthusiasm had touched others besides Burleigh. Yet Diton's "Deep
River" seems written almost apurpose to contrast with Burleigh's.
Where Burleigh alters the melody to his taste, Diton accepts the full
Fisk version, transposing it to F major but otherwise changing only
the final note to put the melody unambiguously in the major. Where Burleigh uses a rich harmonic palette, Diton’s arrangement is entirely without accidentals, save for its two-measure introduction. In only one respect are they similar: both reject the ruthless homophony of the Jubilee Singer style for a flowing melody-and-accompaniment texture.\textsuperscript{45} Diton’s “Deep River” is a footnote in the history of the song: yet it serves to remind us that others besides Burleigh perceived the song’s significance before 1916.

It was probably the contralto Mary Jordan—who, as we have seen, was part of the program on which the Schola Cantorum performed Burleigh’s choral arrangement of “Deep River”—who suggested that Burleigh arrange the spiritual for voice and piano.\textsuperscript{46} The dedication to her is prominent on the cover of the vocal version: she was the first to perform the piece,\textsuperscript{47} and she remained one of its warmest champions. Mary Jordan is an obscure name today (though she does earn ten lines in the 1978 \textit{Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians}), but in the mid-teens of this century she was an imposing figure on the New York musical scene, a major contralto in her mid-thirties (readers who have browsed through \textit{Musical America} for that period will know her name).\textsuperscript{48}

Burleigh actually made three separate voice-and-piano versions of “Deep River” in 1916. All were published by G. Ricordi & Co. of New York, where Burleigh worked as an editor. All versions were published in more than one key: when it is necessary to speak of pitches we shall use the version in D flat—the low key common to all publications—the key, presumably, in which Burleigh would have written for Mary Jordan. (We have come from Fisk’s “unriverish” E major, through the Rhine’s key of E flat, to the key of the second movement of the \textit{New World Symphony}—Dvořák’s synthetic spiritual, which Burleigh is challenging with the real thing.)

In all three versions the melody is close to Burleigh 1913; in none of them is it exactly the same. The melody in the last of the three versions, “Version C,” is that of the Standard Version we have invoked earlier.

The earliest published voice-and-piano version, “Version A,” was deposited for copyright on June 5, 1916. It ends, as had Burleigh 1913, with an extremely brief gesture of recapitulation: a mere resetting of the opening two words of the song, with an introductory “Oh” (see example 6).

Burleigh soon realized that this brief return, satisfactory for the relatively heavy medium of large mixed chorus,\textsuperscript{49} does not provide enough recapitulation for the lighter medium of voice and piano. He prepared a new version, which brings back essentially mm. 13–16 of
the melody (mm. 15–18 of the arrangement, which starts with two measures of introduction). This version ("Version B") was deposited for copyright on June 17, 1916, less than two weeks after the first copyright.

Other than the change in the ending, Versions A and B are identical. The principal difference of the melody in Versions A and B from that of Burleigh 1913 is due to Burleigh’s desire to work a bit of contrapuntal subtlety in the accompaniment (ex. 7):

To foreshadow the diminution in m. 20, Burleigh alters the melody in m. 19.

Late in 1916 Burleigh made a final revision of his voice-and-piano arrangement of "Deep River," our "Version C" (= the Standard Version). Most of the changes are in the accompaniment, the most instantly audible being in mm. 11–13 (ex. 8 a–b):
Example 8a. "Deep River." Burleigh A and B, mm. 11–14.


But it is Version C that finally establishes the beginning of the B section as it is now best known.

Version C was deposited for copyright on January 5, 1917, when the phenomenal success of "Deep River" had already begun. It remains the standard Burleigh voice-and-piano "Deep River," the version you can now buy at a music store. But Version B, which had been bought by many singers, had a long half-life: both the 1927 Paul Robeson recording and the Marian Anderson recording of 1936 use Version B.

Example 9 gives Burleigh’s four principal versions of the "Deep River" melody. Burleigh 1913 has been transposed to D flat, and the two measures of rests that begin Versions A through C have been omitted. When all four versions are in agreement, only a single line has been used. Dynamics and phrasing have been omitted in the interest of simplicity (see example 9).

If the melody of Burleigh’s voice-and-piano arrangements of "Deep River" is nearly identical with those of the choral version, the harmonization is not. Nor is the harmonization of Versions A and B in-
variably the same as that of Version C (the Standard Version). All of the voice-and-piano versions begin with the timeless rolled chords of the Coleridge-Taylor setting—now rewritten (ex. 10) as half-notes and transposed to D flat.

In general the harmonies of the 1916 arrangements are somewhat richer—or at least more adventurous—than those of Burleigh 1913. Here, for example, are mm. 15–18 of Versions B and C. Note the B-flat major triad at the cadence of m. 16 and the full ninth chord at the start of m. 17 (see example 11).

Perhaps the most surprising harmonic change from Burleigh 1913 is the plain D-flat triad in m. 7 of Version C (= m. 5 of Burleigh 1913). Gone is the rich D-flat seventh that had prompted the change in the fourth measure of the melody: but the change had been made and had become ineluctably part of the tune.

When the voice-and-piano version of “Deep River,” presumably Version B, appeared in print, it was reviewed rapturously in Musical America by A. Walter Kramer, who had wished in 1915 for “a volume of our negro spirituals harmonized with regard for racial traits.”

A superb art-song has been made of the old negro melody, “Deep River,” by H. T. Burleigh. Of all the negro melodies, “spirituals”

and otherwise, there is none in which there is a stronger appeal than in this one. It has made an impression on many a musician; Coleridge-Taylor made one of his fantasies on it... and Maud Powell, the distinguished violinist, liked it so well that she made a free transcription for the violin of Coleridge-Taylor's piano setting.

Fine as is the Coleridge-Taylor version, it lacks the authenticity of treatment that has been given it by Mr. Burleigh... Mr. Burleigh has done his task con amore... The harmonies are
rich, characteristically negro in feeling, never sophisticated and beautifully felt. Emotionally sung this melody cannot fail to stir hearers to the depths. Mr. Burleigh has added to his name as a composer in making this artistic, yet democratic setting. He has dedicated it to Mary Jordan … who should sing it magnificently.  

I have not been able to find the date and place of the first performance of the Burleigh voice-and-piano version of "Deep River." As we have seen, it was given by the dedicatee, Mary Jordan. If we rely on the subjunctive at the end of A. Walter Kramer's review (quoted above), she had not yet sung it by mid-June 1916 (the deadline for a
review published July 1 of that year; by September 16 (according to an advertisement quoted below) she was already singing it "at all her recitals." By the end of the year it had become a staple of vocal recitals. The New York Tribune noted on November 24, reviewing a concert by Emma Roberts, that "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 programmes of song recitalists during the last three weeks." 52 A. Walter Kramer's review of Version C, which appeared in January 1917, began: "The many singers of high rank and the general public as well, which this season has learned to love this old negro melody as arranged for voice and piano by Mr. Burleigh, have a treat in store in the new edition." 53 That May, reviewing Christopher O'Hare's arrangement, Kramer noted the song's continued popularity: "'Deep River' is in the air and has been since the winter of 1916. No song has since appeared more frequently on recital programs." 54

The runaway success of "Deep River" is amusingly chronicled in a series of advertisements in Musical America. In September 1916 G. Ricordi inaugurated a series of small advertisements that would feature a singer each week and mention the G. Ricordi songs he or she performed. The inaugural ad, which appeared on September 16, featured four singers: one of them was Mary Jordan, who "sings at all her recitals Deep River by H. T. Burleigh." 55 From then on the ads became a near-weekly chronicle of who was singing "Deep River": Christine Miller (Sept. 23, p. 26); Edgar Schofield (Sept. 30, p. 26); Anita Rio (Oct. 21, p. 27); Christine Miller again (Oct. 28, p. 23); Arthur Herschmann and Frances Alda (Nov. 18, p. 4 and 28—two ads). On December 2 there was a list of eight major artists—Frances Alda, Pauline Donalda, Percy Hemus, Arthur Herschmann, Mary Jordan, Christine Miller, Emma Roberts, and Francis Rogers—who had sung "Deep River" (Dec. 2, p. 28); then, after a hiatus of a week (Umberto Sorrentino had sung Burleigh's "Just You"), the near-weekly litany of singers of "Deep River" began again with Louise Homer (Dec. 16, p. 34). The series of ads continued through March 17, 1917 (the redoubtable Christine Miller again, p. 36), when it was discontinued—its main message having been not "everybody sings a G. Ricordi song" but "everybody sings 'Deep River.'" Follow-up ads in the next two issues emphasized the number of performances Burleigh had received that season: the one on March 24 (p. 36) listed Burleigh songs in the repertory of members of the Metropolitan Opera; the one on March 31 listed New York performances of Burleigh songs during the 1916–17 season. The latter lists, along with the aforementioned musicians, Frieda Hempel and Christine Lavin as also having sung "Deep River."

The next year, in its end-of-season ad listing performances of Bur-
leigh songs, G. Ricordi was more efficient. The publisher merely ended the ad with the note:

DEEP RIVER—arranged by H. T. BURLEIGH—is sung by so many of our best concert singers that the limitations of space forbid printing a complete list of them here.\(^56\)

Six copyrights were issued in 1916 for versions of “Deep River”: two each for Versions A and B (each for high and low key); one for a hotel-orchestra arrangement of Burleigh’s Version B; and one for the William Arms Fisher version, which we shall discuss below. In 1917 nineteen such copyrights were issued—a staggering number for any title for a single year. Three were for Burleigh’s Version C (high, medium [D flat, formerly the lowest key], and really low, C major [“the Paul Robeson key”]). One was for a new Burleigh arrangement for male chorus. This arrangement reflects (at a dignified distance) the barbershop-like tradition of male jubilee singing discussed in James Weldon Johnson’s introduction to *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*.\(^57\) Worth performing by any male chorus, disconcertingly unlike Burleigh 1913, it had little influence on the spread of “Deep River.”\(^58\)

Four of the 1917 copyrights represent arrangements of Burleigh’s Version C for various forces: for organ (arr. Richard Keys Briggs, copyright May 16); for piano (arr. A. Walter Kramer [in G flat!], copyright May 17); for violin and piano (also by A. Walter Kramer, also copyright May 17); and for women’s chorus (by N. Clifford Page, copyright Nov. 10). Their covers list yet further arrangements not deposited for copyright: for violoncello and piano by Beatrice Harrison; and another version for women’s voices—perhaps a ghost—by H. Alexander Matthews.

Other publishers who copyrighted versions of “Deep River” in 1917 used various methods to distance themselves from Burleigh and his copyright. One method of doing this was to return to the original Fisk version. Most important of the return-to-Fisk versions was one by Christopher O’Hare, published both for voice and piano (copyright Apr. 21), and for chorus (copyright Sept. 17) advertised as “The Famous Old American Negro Spiritual in Complete Form”\(^59\) (note that “Deep River” is now a *famous old* spiritual). A. Walter Kramer, despite his interest in Burleigh, gave O’Hare’s vocal version an enthusiastic review.\(^60\) It made enough impact to be reissued in 1930 and 1932 in versions for two- and three-part chorus; it is forgotten today. Oddest of the 1917 copyrights—far odder ones would come later—were those for Clarence Lucas’s version, based on Fisk but with “words and melody partly rewritten,” for mixed chorus and for male quartet. The melody has been “partly rewritten” to come closer to Burleigh without infringing his copyright. The revised words are disastrous:
... Deep river, Lord,
I want to cross over into Canaan.
O don't you want to go to the golden shore,
Where the wicked can't come through the pearly door?

The most important 1917 copyrights, however, aside from those for versions by or related to Burleigh, were those registered to the publisher Oliver Ditson. If G. Ricordi owned the rights to Burleigh, Oliver Ditson, which had published *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*, owned the copyright to Coleridge-Taylor’s version. As early as December 16, 1916, Ditson copyrighted an arrangement of “Deep River” for voice and piano by William Arms Fisher (1861–1948), who would later redo the Largo of Dvořák’s *New World Symphony* as “Goin’ Home.” Lest Fisher’s version be challenged by Ricordi, the bottom of the first page of music stated firmly (and honestly): “Note: In making this arrangement the beautiful piano transcription by the late Coleridge-Taylor has been closely followed.” Despite its “close following” of Coleridge-Taylor, the shape of Fisher’s “Deep River” is the AABA shape Burleigh imposed on the spiritual. Fisher’s version of the B section begins (after a piano interlude closely recalling the Coleridge-Taylor) as in example 12:

Fisher’s “Deep River” was widely sung, though not so widely as Burleigh’s: by January 1917 Ditson could advertise that the Fisher arrangement was in the repertory of ten distinguished American singers, including Alma Gluck and Alice Nielsen. Nor did it disappear quickly from the repertory: when “Deep River” first shows up on Paul Robeson’s programs in 1924, it is in the William Arms Fisher version (it was not until 1926 that Robeson sang the Burleigh version).

During 1917 Ditson published four versions of “Deep River” based on William Arms Fisher: for violoncello and piano (arr. Karl Rissland); for mixed chorus (arr. W. A. Fisher); for women’s chorus (arr. Victor Harris); and for organ (arr. James H. Rogers). The organ version lists on its cover not only all these versions, plus those of Coleridge-Taylor and Coleridge-Taylor/Powell, but two further arrangements copyrighted later: piano trio (arr. Karl Rissland, copyright 1919); and for male chorus (arr. W. A. Fisher, copyright 1918). It also lists an arrangement not deposited for copyright: a version for “quartet and chorus of mixed voices” by J. Rosamond Johnson, who would do the most important post-1920 arrangement of “Deep River.”

This was a formidable outpouring of “Deep Rivers” by a major publisher, and it did have an impact on the reception of the song. Most important, perhaps, is that the earliest major recording of “Deep River,” made by Frances Alda (1883–1952) in 1917, represents a version closer to Fisher than to Burleigh. (The landmark recordings of Burleigh came later—Paul Robeson’s in 1927, Marian Anderson’s in 1936.)

The runaway popularity of “Deep River” in 1916–17 did more than establish the tune, specifically Burleigh’s version of the tune, in the public consciousness. It also changed the public attitude toward solo-voice versions of spirituals as part of the concert repertory. Solo versions of the spirituals had been sung in concert before: Burleigh had sung three, “accompanying himself at the piano,” at the all-black concert that included the premiere of his 1913 “Deep River”; and “Deep River” described Burleigh as having made a “superb art-song” of it—i.e., freed it for use on the concert stage.) Burleigh himself began to publish a regular series of voice-and-piano versions of spirituals—twelve in 1917 alone, according to Anne Simpson’s useful bi-
ography. The first major concert singer to perform an entire group of spirituals was the baritone Oscar Seagle (1877–1945), who did such a group during his recital at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on March 25, 1917 (Burleigh, who was in the audience, approved of Seagle’s interpretations). The concert spiritual, one of the glories of American music, was on its way.

One further thing happened to “Deep River” in 1917: it became a point of reference in another work of art. In this year Charles Ives, reacting to America’s entry into World War I, wrote three songs representing radically differing reactions to the war but welded into a cycle by their common use of the tune “The Red, White, and Blue” (“Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean”). The songs were “In Flanders Fields” (war as sacred duty), “He Is There!” (flag-waving patriotism), and “Tom Sails Away” (war and the individual). With “In Flanders Fields” and “He Is There!” we have nothing to do, but “Tom Sails Away” invokes “Deep River” for a purpose that shows the deep impression the melody had already made on listeners.

“Tom Sails Away” conjures up a childhood memory (not one of Ives’s own, though the text for this song is his) and contrasts it with the wartime world of 1917. In this memory the Tom of the title is a babe in arms, younger than the singer:

Mother with Tom in her arms is coming
towards the garden . . .
Daddy is coming up the hill from the mill,
We run down the lane to greet him . . .

Now he is a soldier, just shipped out to Europe:
But today! In freedom’s cause Tom sailed away
for over there.69

Under this line are quoted “The Red, White, and Blue,” which binds “Tom Sails Away” to the other two war songs, and George M. Cohan’s “Over There,” which establishes “there” as World War I Europe. Framing the song are lines that establish the childhood scene as reminiscence:

[opening]: Scenes from my childhood are with me . . .
[last line]: Scenes from my childhood are floating
before my eyes.

Both lines are set to substantially the same music, which also forms the one-measure prelude to the song. Example 13 shows the beginning of the voice part.

Text as well as tune quote “The Old Oaken Bucket” (ex. 14).


(And indeed the phrase “how dear to my heart” haunts the listener throughout the song.) But “Deep River” is equally audible. Example 15 shows the two songs and how they relate to the opening vocal line of “Tom Sails Away.”

Example 15. “Deep River,” “The Old Oaken Bucket,” and the beginning of the voice part of Ives’s “Tom Sails Away.”

The effect is of “The Old Oaken Bucket” flowering into “Deep River.” For many years I fought hearing “Deep River” in this song. What place did a Negro spiritual, even the most sublime of them, have in a song that is so utterly a New England reminiscence? But it is impossible not to hear it. And knowing the place of “Deep River” in 1917 America makes its presence in “Tom Sails Away” understandable. Every few years a folksong, newly discovered by the general public, takes on for awhile the image of a universal musical speech
of all humanity. During the past half-century we have seen this happen to “Simple Gifts,” to “Amazing Grace,” and, more briefly, to “Morning Is Breaking” and “El Condor Pasa.” (We seem to be going through a second cycle of “Simple Gifts” in the mid-1990s.) “Deep River” was that song in 1917. Ives wants his New England reminiscence to flower into the experience of all humanity—“what I am feeling people are feeling all over the world.” For this he invokes the song which, for that moment, spoke most deeply of the Oversoul. (I hope that this article will help us to hear this piece in this way again.)

No year from 1918 to 1930—which is the year we have taken as the end of our inquiry—saw remotely as many copyrights granted for versions of “Deep River” as did 1917. But most of them saw the copyrighting of more than one new version of “Deep River”; only 1921 saw no new “Deep River” arrangements at all.74

Some of the post-1917 “Deep River” arrangements were further reworkings of Burleigh and Fisher. Many were arrangements for songbooks or choral series which compilers felt should include a “Deep River.” But others were fresh arrangements by well-known musicians: a 1918 “Concert Transcription” for violin and piano by Charles Ives’s bête noire, Mischa Elman (1891–1967); a 1925 arrangement for string quartet by Alfred Pochon (1878–1959) of the Flonzaley Quartet; and an arrangement for harp, published the same year by Carlos Salzedo (1885–1961). Much as the arrangements differ in purpose and in ability of the individual arrangers, it is easy to see a change in attitude toward “Deep River” as a melody as the years go on. The earlier arrangements tend to be aware that the middle section of the Standard Version is a composed melody, not a folktune: they either revert to the Fisk version for all of the tune after the opening or else fashion their own middle section. But by the mid-1920s, arrangements tend to present something like the Standard Version as though it were a folktune, in blissful (and probably innocent) disregard of the laws of copyright. A particularly good example of the wholesale acceptance of the Standard Version as folksong is the Salzedo arrangement of 1925, which is quite specifically an arrangement for harp of the Standard Version. The accompaniment is Salzedo’s own—he scrupulously avoids those rolled chords, so natural for the harp, as another man’s property. But he sees the Standard Version as public property, a genuine folktune.

The year 1921 saw no copyright of a piece with the title “Deep River.” But it did see the publication of the next significant work in the history of the song: “Dear Old Southland,” with lyrics by Henry Creamer (1879–1930) and music by Turner Layton (1894–1978).
Creamer and Layton were an important black songwriting team, best known now for “After You’ve Gone” (1918) and “Way Down Yonder in New Orleans” (1922). “Dear Old Southland” is an AABBA popular song (without verse), in which the A sections are a straightforward reuse of the opening measures of “Deep River” (ex. 16):


The B section, in the parallel minor, is based on “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” The treatment of the musical material is more inventive than in the A section; the words are worse. “Dear Old Southland” was a considerable hit: it was recorded enough times by
jazz groups to make the Crawford-Magee Core Repertory of Jazz Standards, and it was recorded by singers such as Jules Bledsoe and Paul Robeson.

Lovers of the spirituals, shocked by the popularity of "Dear Old Southland," wrote in protest of this debasement of a great song. Lucien J. White, music columnist for the New York Age, devoted his column of July 8, 1922, to the "Desecration of 'Deep River'" (he deals with "Dear Old Southland" entirely in terms of "Deep River": "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" was yet to have its day). And Burleigh, who had not commented about competing arrangements of "Deep River," thundered in a letter that the NAACP press service duly made public:

How can it be stopped? These gentlemen seem not to realize that they offend the deepest sentiments of the race. They seem incapable of comprehending the enormity of the offense and the far-reaching effect upon future generations. . . . [Can they be made to have] sufficient racial pride to refuse to prostitute the inherent religious beauty of our Spirituals? Can we not convince them that it is all in bad taste: that it is like polluting a great, free fountain of pure melody?76

We cannot dismiss "Dear Old Southland" as Lucien White and Burleigh did: there have just been too many great performances of this jazz standard. "Dear Old Southland" has given jazz groups the chance to play "Deep River" (and "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child") without putting on their somewhat constricting jazzing-the-classics outfits, and the great melodies have rewarded the performers.

The first jazz recording of "Dear Old Southland,"77 by James P. Johnson's Harmony Eight (the only such recording of the tune made in the year of its publication), is a straightforward early 1920s record, enjoyable "if you like that sort of thing" (I do), but not remarkable78 (James P. Johnson himself is not audible in the recording). But the rediscovery of the tune by jazz groups in the late 1920s produced an extraordinary set of recordings, starting in 1928 with the Original Wolverines,79 the first time the "Deep River" changes are used as the basis for jazz improvisation. Other recordings include the Louis Armstrong/Buck Washington performance "to entertain the boys"80 and the 1941 Ellington recording,81 in which Cootie Williams's muted-trumpet solo approaches the sound of human speech so closely we feel we can almost take down its words—words far more eloquent than Creamer's lyrics.

For Sidney Bechet, in particular, "Dear Old Southland" becomes an anthem of jazz, recorded many times through many years. At the end
of his autobiography Treat It Gentle, discussing how hard it could be to get "Negro music" performed, he reminisces about Shuffle Along:

Noble and Eubie had to write their songs to what they could, to the kind of budget they had for getting them produced. . . . But they made real numbers of them. It was really music: you couldn't help it being that. Some of those numbers are still famous: I'm Wild about Harry was one of them; and Dear Old Southland, that was from that show too.82

Bechet's memory has played him false in assigning "Dear Old Southland" to Shuffle Along—perhaps the fact that he first recorded it with Noble Sissle's orchestra has caused the slip of memory. But clearly he sees "Dear Old Southland" as a song in its own right—not as a version of "Deep River"—and as a major song worth invoking in an extremely selective list of the monuments of "Negro music."83 In this passage, and in his several recordings of the tune, Sidney Bechet has signed the passport to immortality of "Dear Old Southland": we reject it at our peril.

No rewrite or recording of "Deep River" came along at this time to mediate between Burleigh and the new world of black gospel, as "Dear Old Southland" mediated between Burleigh and jazz. The only version of "Deep River" listed in Godrich and Dixon's Blues & Gospel Recordings, 1902–1943 is the Lomaxes' field recording discussed above.84 (A quartet-style recording by the Oriole Male Quartet, tentatively datable as early 1927, was recently discovered by Doug Seroff;85 but the significant history of "Deep River" as a gospel number begins in 1959–60, too late for the time frame of this article.)86

There also appeared in 1921, in the June issue of The Crisis, Langston Hughes's first published poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Hughes's poem is certainly no trope on "Deep River": profoundly animist, carefully excluding any Christian reference, it invokes rivers the Negro actually experienced—the Euphrates, the Congo, the Nile, the Mississippi—rather than the metaphysical Jordan. It is perhaps only in an essay such as this that a connection can be suggested between "Deep River" and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." But "Deep River" is there, if only to be overcome: the new poet will not mortgage his muse to the old pieties, however beautiful.

One more major arrangement of "Deep River" is relevant to our study. Like "Dear Old Southland," this arrangement does not show up under the title "Deep River" in the Copyright Office files; but while "Dear Old Southland" attempted to convert the song to the uses of
popular music, this arrangement, made by J. Rosamond Johnson for The Book of American Negro Spirituals, is a straightforward voice-and-piano version of the spiritual itself.

The Book of American Negro Spirituals, edited by James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938) and J. Rosamond Johnson (1873–1954) and published in 1925 by Viking Press, was an attempt to produce something like a definitive collection of the important Negro spirituals: a sort of Oxford Book of Spirituals, if you will.87 James Weldon Johnson contributed an eloquent (and by now much-cited) preface—which, unlike his “O Black and Unknown Bards,” frequently invokes “Deep River.” J. Rosamond Johnson did the arrangements (the anthology also contains five arrangements by Paul Robeson’s accompanist Lawrence Brown). The arrangements, written for voice and piano in concert-spiritual style, may well represent the spirituals as performed by Taylor Gordon with Johnson at the piano in their recitals of the early 1920s. The piano parts are full-fledged piano scores, not aids for singers around the piano, as we have come to expect from folksong anthologies: they are, however, discreet rather than overpowering. They almost invariably contain the vocal line (to those used to the accompaniments of the Hall Johnson era they seem somewhat heavy).

For those spirituals that had appeared in the Fisk collections Johnson regularly returns to the Fisk version—even for “Nobody Knows de Trouble I See,” a song for which the Fisk version is so different from the standard version that Johnson notes, “This is a rare version” above his arrangement.

Johnson turns to Fisk for his arrangement of “Deep River” as well. (Of the four differences between the Fisk version and the Standard Version listed earlier, Johnson follows Fisk in all but no. 1.) We are even back to the full key-complex of Fisk—E major/C-sharp minor, with C-sharp minor triumphing at the final cadence (see example 17).

Some influence of Burleigh is inevitable. Johnson pays homage to the deep rolled chords of Coleridge-Taylor and Burleigh in his opening (see example 18).

If the reader agrees with me in finding in Fisk a militancy absent in the Burleigh arrangement, then Burleigh has influenced this aspect of Johnson as well. Johnson seems to sense the urgency of the repeated refrain, which he restores from the Fisk version,88 and which he marks “gradually growing a little quicker and louder”; but the main tempo is the tempo of the opening—the “timeless” “Deep River” of the 1920s.

By 1925 Burleigh’s arrangements had caused “Deep River” to be seen as a closed ABA form rather than an open alternation of chorus and verse.89 Johnson accepts the ABA form but completely discards Burleigh’s B section. Johnson’s B section is not based on the simple
The Coming of "Deep River"

[Very slowly] slowly—gradually dying away softly

I want to cross over into camp-ground, Lord!
slowly—gradually dying away


Very slowly (with expression)


reciting-tone of the Fisk verses but is rather a free composition of his own, using both the first of Fisk’s verses (which serves as Burleigh’s B section) and also, slightly altered, the second verse:

Walk into Heaven and take my seat,
And cast my crown at Jesus’ feet . . .

Johnson prepares for the C-sharp minor ending of the arrangement by setting his B section in that key. In sharp contrast to the neutral reciting-tone of the Fisk verses, Johnson’s B section is bold and wide-ranged (ex. 19).
Here, in the spot that diverges the furthest from Fisk, Johnson captures the militancy of the Fisk "Deep River."

The J. Rosamond Johnson "Deep River" is important less for itself (I know of no recording of this version, nor have I ever heard it performed) than for its influence on later works. It is particularly important for Odetta's recorded version of 1957 and as the source for the final chorale-like spiritual of Michael Tippett's 1941 oratorio *A Child of Our Time.* These two works fall outside the boundaries of this article. I should note, however, that Johnson's "Deep River" is not merely a neutral source for either, but is a positive force in shaping both.

Odetta's 1957 recording is one of the most remarkable versions of "Deep River." The shifting harmonies of guitar and bass, the antithesis to the static rolled tonic chords of Burleigh A–C, keep the great tune flowing on: this river may be deep, but it has a powerful current. But it is the B section, with its "Walk into Heaven . . .," learned from *The Book of American Negro Spirituals,* which establishes this "Deep River" as entirely Odetta's: suddenly we can no longer hear this as a willful folk-revival trope on the Standard Version and must accept it on its own. Folk and folk-revival singers have tended to stay away from "Deep River" as a song hopelessly stained by the concert-spiritual tradition—Odetta's own words of introduction, "I do love to sing this song," can be read as an apology. The unexpected words give the work back to the folk tradition: in Odetta's performance they ring like a cry of freedom.

Tippett, too, gains from having Johnson's version of "Walk into Heaven . . ." to work with. *A Child of Our Time* is the most ambiguous of oratorios, its message of hope barely plucked from defeat. Its final movement needs a burst of triumph as well as a basic texture of consolation: for this moment the music of ex. 19 appears transformed in blazing Technicolor:
This final movement must also acknowledge the ambiguity of the entire work: the tonally ambiguous Fisk ending, rescued by Johnson, seems as though created especially for the oratorio.\textsuperscript{95}

If J. Rosamond Johnson sensed the militancy of the Fisk version of "Deep River," and if he communicated this idea to his brother, then he is also an influence on our final "Deep River," which, like our first (from Hart Crane), is literary rather than musical.

In 1930 James Weldon Johnson wrote and published his poem, "St. Peter Relates an Incident of the Resurrection Day." In 1935 he chose it as the title poem for his Selected Poems.\textsuperscript{96} In the foreword to that book he explained its genesis:

He read one morning in the newspaper that the United States government was sending a contingent of gold-star mothers to France to visit the graves of their soldier sons there; and that the Negro gold-star mothers would not be allowed to sail on the
same ship with the white gold-star mothers, but would be sent over on a second and second-class vessel. He threw aside the manuscript on which he was working and did not take it up again until he had finished the poem, "St. Peter Relates an Incident of the Resurrection Day."

"St. Peter Relates an Incident," its usual shortened title, is a poem of 155 lines—long for Johnson, though shorter than "Noah Built the Ark" and "Let My People Go" from God's Trombones. Its closest predecessor is Byron's (much longer) "The Vision of Judgment," another poem where a benevolent comic vision of Heaven is used as a vehicle for bitter comment on earthly events: Johnson's AABB rhyme scheme even echoes the final couplets of Byron's ottava rima.

Like most of Byron's angels (though Byron's Recording Angel, facing the carnage of the early nineteenth century, is overworked to exhaustion), Johnson's angel host is bored; in Johnson's poem the boredom is due to the eons of perfect bliss in Heaven since the Last Judgment. The angels ask St. Peter for a story. He obliges by telling them the reaction of American patriots to the trump of Resurrection:

The word went forth . . .
That all the trusty patriotic mentors,
And duly qualified Hundred-Percenters
Should forthwith gather together on the banks
Of the Potomac, there to form their ranks,
March to the tomb, by orders to be given,
And escort the unknown soldier up to heaven.

But their enthusiasm ends when they find out that the Unknown Soldier is black. Consternation—"The Klan was all for burying him again"—the patriots flee:

In a moment more, midst the pile of broken stone,
The unknown soldier stood, and stood alone.

That evening St. Peter locks the Pearly Gate for what he believes is the last time, looks over the jasper wall, and sees

The unknown soldier, dust-stained and begrimed
Climbing his way to heaven, and singing as he climbed:

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, I want to cross over into camp ground.

Nearer and nearer the soldier comes. St. Peter flings open the gate for him and he enters:

Singing and swinging up the golden street,
The music married to the tramping of his feet.
Tall, black soldier-angel marching alone,
Swinging up the golden street, saluting at the
great white throne.
Singing, singing, singing clear and strong.
Singing, singing, singing, till heaven took up the song:
  Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
  Deep river, I want to cross over into camp ground.

Here, in a work of literature (I do not believe it can be done in mu-
sic) is a complete merging of the militant "Deep River" of Fisk and
"Deep River," the universal symbol forged from the Fisk version by
Coleridge-Taylor and Burleigh. And here, with the heavenly host sing-
ing "Deep River," is as good a place as any to end our history.

NOTES

During the many years of this paper's gestation I have been helped with it by many
people: this note can only start to discharge my debt. Pride of place belongs to the
Choral Arts Society of Washington and its conductor Norman Scribner: it was perform-
ing Burleigh 1913 as a second tenor with Choral Arts that determined me to chronicle
the history of "Deep River."

Among readers of drafts of this article, I am particularly grateful to Jean Snyder,
William H. Kenney, Gayle Murchison, and Yolonda Kerney. Jean Snyder's help with
the Burleigh material, especially that on the "Dear Old Southland" flap, immensely
strengthened the paper; William H. Kenney brought Sidney Bechet into the paper;
Gayle Murchison strengthened the paper's harmonic aspect (that it is still somewhat
meager is not her fault); Yolonda Kerney got me to finish what I had thought of as an
eternal Work in Progress. Josephine Wright, the ideal editor, challenged my assump-
tions about the Fisk collections; if I retain them, I hope I have articulated them some-
what better. Lynn Abbott contributed far more to this paper than the occasional ac-
knowledgements in my footnotes would suggest: he even located a copy of that
"steamy novel" invoked in the first paragraph. Loras Schissel knew many versions of
"Deep River" unrevealed by the Copyright Office.

My colleagues in the Music Division of the Library of Congress were endlessly pa-
tient with my obsession, while those in the Recorded Sound Section not only put up
with my numerous requests to hear obscure recorded versions of the song, but their
comments helped me to hear the recordings better. The Recorded Sound Section, and
particularly Larry Appelbaum, also helped me in the presentation of a talk to the lo-
cal chapter of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) on the history
of recordings of "Deep River." Too little of that talk is represented here. (It did con-
vince me that the principal history of "Deep River" through 1930 is that of publica-
tion and live performance, not of recording.) Tom Brodhead was the careful and con-
scientious engraver of the musical examples.

Two thank-yous are for things that predate my work on this paper. First, to my par-
ents for acquainting me with the spirituals; their knowledge of them may have come
from Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson records, but I learned them from parental
lips as a small child just as surely as did the informants of Slave Songs of the United
States. Second, to Annabelle Bernard who, as the encore to her Master of Music recital
at the New England Conservatory in the late 1950s (a recital that had to that point been
a brilliant traversal of what the well-trained singer of that era sang in recital), stood alone on the stage and sang, unaccompanied, "Deep River." It was in this performance that I first sensed the many meanings of this song.


4. Frank Harling’s "native opera" Deep River was performed on Broadway in 1926. The surviving music, mainly love duets in a semipopular style, suggest that it was more an ultra-serious operetta than an opera.

5. A good example of the assumption that "Deep River" was always well known is William W. Austin’s remark in "Susanna," "Jeanie," and "The Old Folks at Home," 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 39, "The worldly youths from the city [the "few youths from Savannah" mentioned by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in his Atlantic Monthly article about the spirituals] were foreign to the coherent group of rural natives [in Higginson’s regiment] who sang ‘Deep River’.” In this passage Austin is using "Deep River" generically to mean "the spiritual." Higginson does not mention "Deep River" either in the Atlantic Monthly article or in its reprint in Army Life in a Black Regiment; but Austin, wanting an instantly recognizable name of a spiritual, reaches for "Deep River."


8. Miles Mark Fisher, Negro Slave Songs in the United States (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1953), 41. The convincing-looking footnote 4 in Fisher’s book merely establishes the existence of the Manumission Society of North Carolina: the work cited contains nothing about a "conservative slave" who "told his Quaker benefactor that he wanted to 'cross over' to Africa, the home of camp meetings." (And if this is all "Deep River" means, why do we bother with it?) Those who want to check Fisher’s footnote will find the document published as vol. 22 of James Sprunt Historical Studies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1934). Thanks to Carole Treadway of the Friends Historical Collection, Guilford College, for this citation.

9. In fact, what we tend to remember as "the tune of ‘Deep River’" is not the entire Standard Version but the Standard Version shorn of its quasi-repeat of the first section—an ABA’ rather than an AABA’. A good example of the song as it is actually remembered is the version in Vy Higgensen’s "collection of gospel music for the family" This Is My Song! (New York: Crown, 1995; musical arrangements by Wesley Naylor). Higgensen has clearly looked at various versions of "Deep River"—hers is the first post-1930 version I know to contain all the verses of the Fisk version—but the version she gives in this book, meant to be a collection of gospel standards, in their standard form is essentially that of mm. 9–28 of our Standard Version. (The differences are informative and useful but beyond the scope of this paper.)


11. John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, American Ballads and Folk Songs (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 594–95. Last Cavalier, Nolan Porterfield’s recent biography of John A. Lomax (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), gives details of the collecting of this version, which is undocumented in American Ballads. It was collected in Texas in
June 1933: "The music instructor at Prairie View...took the Lomaxes down into the Brazos River bottoms to look for a spiritual entitled 'Deep River' that they had heard about. There a mulatto woman sang it for them with such power and beauty that it transported Lomax's imagination to 'the turgid, slow-moving rivers in African jungles'" (297–98).

The Lomaxes, then, were looking specifically for a version of "Deep River." The version of "Deep River" in American Ballads has always struck me as what might be sung by an obliging and adept informant who had heard the Burleigh "Deep River" a few times and was willing to fill in the gaps with improvisation; but I am not an impartial judge. (The Lomaxes never found another "Deep River.")

12. The Fisk collections are often seen as the first step in the move from the folk spiritual to the spiritual as a genre of work for the concert hall. Certainly the four-part versions are to an extent "arrangements." But the one-line versions I feel should at least be treated with the respect we give the transcriptions in Allen, Ware, and Garrison's 1867 Slave Songs of the United States.

13. The others are no. 21, "Keep Me from Sinking Down"; no. 24, "Steal Away"; no. 97, "Now We Take This Feeble Body"; and no. 105, the elaborate "Bright Sparkles in the Churchyard." No. 104, "Gideon's Band," has accent marks.

14. Among the first twenty-five spirituals in the Fisk collection, for example, this form is represented by no. 5, "From Every Graveyard"; no. 7, "Roll, Jordan, Roll"; no. 13, "I've Just Come from the Fountain"; and no. 24, "Steal Away." (Spirituals in which the ending of the refrain becomes the response of a call-and-response verse are omitted from this list.)


17. I have relied on the entry "Spirituals" in Donald M. Jacobs's Index to the American Slave (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981) in searching this collection.

18. The extremely useful "Song Index" in Southern and Wright's African-American Traditions gives only three citations for "Deep River": Fisk; the Coleridge-Taylor Twenty-Four Negro Melodies, which we discuss below; and an article by Daniel Gregory Mason, "Folk-Song and American Music," Musical Quarterly 4 (July 1918): 323–32.


20. It may be worth noting here that in his preface to The Book of American Negro Spirituals (New York: Viking, 1925), 22, where Johnson reminisces about the spirituals he heard in his youth, he does not mention "Deep River," which is otherwise a powerful presence in this preface.


22. William Tortolano, in Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Anglo-Black Composer (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1977), 196 and 200 respectively, lists two further works by Coleridge-Taylor based on "Deep River": a work for orchestra (presumably an orchestration of the version in Twenty-Four Negro Melodies) and a "Slow Movement on a Negro Melody, Deep River" for violin and piano. Both of these works remain in manuscript; neither affects the further history of "Deep River."

23. Coleridge-Taylor by no means avoided the Africanisms in other arrangements
found in *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*: see particularly his melody in no. 15, "I Was Way Down A-Yonder (Dum-A-Lum)."

24. Jewel Taylor Thompson makes this mistake in her excellent book on Coleridge-Taylor, stating that "Deep River" is one of the two *Negro Melodies* in which Coleridge-Taylor "use[s] more of the melody than the portion quoted at the top of the score" (*Samuel Coleridge-Taylor: The Development of His Compositional Style* [Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994], 117).

25. In imagining this we would have to take into account the radical difference between this putative version and the Fisk "Deep River"—no refrain, no reciting-tone verse.

26. I cannot hear Coleridge-Taylor’s version of "Deep River," as Jewel Taylor Thompson does, as theme-and-variations (*Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, 124): but Thompson has Coleridge-Taylor’s own statement that “The plan adopted [in the *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*] has been almost exclusively that of the *Temà con Variazioni*” going for her (Coleridge-Taylor, *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*, [xiii]).

27. Manuscript in the Sousa Archive, University of Illinois.

28. A later hand has added the title, “Two Negro Spirituals,” in pencil.

29. For a consideration of another work with a severely truncated recapitulation, and a discussion of the avoidance of extensive recapitulation as an African American trait, see Rae Linda Brown, "The Woman’s Symphony Orchestra of Chicago and Florence B. Price’s Piano Concerto in One Movement," *American Music* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 94–99.


31. Ibid., 34–36.

32. Ibid., 384. I have not tried to sort out which of the pre-1913 songs Simpson lists under “Art Songs and Religious Songs” (367–73): they may be in fact arrangements of folk spirituals (Simpson classifies any song which contains a credit for author of words as an art song rather than a spiritual—a good rule-of-thumb for a pioneering study but not an entirely safe method of sorting arranged folk material from composed material in folk style).

33. Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs*, 104. Though Krehbiel’s book was published in 1914, its preface is dated “Summer 1913”: the source of “Dig My Grave” in Burleigh’s *Two Negro Spirituals* is specifically cited as “the collection of Henry E. Krehbiel.” It is reasonable to suppose that Burleigh did the arrangements for Krehbiel before he did the *Two Negro Spirituals*.

34. Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 27. There is no indication in Simpson that the Burleigh Choral Society was still in existence in 1913.

35. The group was founded in 1909 as the MacDowell Chorus. It was renamed the Schola Cantorum in 1912.


37. For the politics of this concert, see Reid Badger’s *A Life in Ragtime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 93–94.

38. The full arch if not the right-hand pediment.

39. I am not competent to deal in detail with the early history of the spiritual arranged for male chorus. Those interested in this history should look in college songbooks as well as in commercial publications and Jubilee Singers books.

40. Notably “Were You There?” (New York: G. Ricordi, 1924), perhaps his most impressive choral arrangement after “Deep River,” which is dedicated “To Dr. H. A. Fricker, Director of Mendelssohn Choir, Toronto, Canada.”

tions of this passage, see Lynn Abbott’s “‘Play That Barber Shop Chord’: A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony,” American Music 10, no. 3 (Fall 1992): especially 299–301. But the one set of transcriptions from actual black male college quartet singing of the period, Natalie Curtis Burlin’s four-volume Hampton Series: Negro Folk-Songs (New York: G. Schirmer, 1918–19), shows a harmonic style that does not at all suggest Burleigh’s.

42. This is perhaps the place for a brief consideration of “Dig My Grave,” the other of the Two Negro Spirituals. Burleigh had previously arranged this spiritual for voice and piano in Krehbiel’s Afro-American Folksongs, 104. Burleigh seems to have chosen this spiritual for the kinship of its text with that of the Prayer in Humperdinck’s Hänsel und Gretel, thinking that this relationship to a familiar piece would make it accessible to audiences. “Dig My Grave” in its original version is fairly discursive—three separate textual-musical ideas held together by mere sequentiality—and Burleigh’s setting does nothing to solve this problem. After an extremely strong first page—if only it were all this good!—it lapses into a perfectly acceptable but uninteresting jog-through of the remainder of the song. (A friend once remarked after a read-through that “it seems to exist principally to make ‘Deep River’ seem even better.”) To those interested in harmonic development, it is useful in having two full-fledged ninth chords (m. 11, third measure from end) against “Deep River”’s one less convincing ninth chord (third measure from end, the B-flat in the tenor can be heard as a suspension resolving to A-flat).

Early editions of Two Negro Spirituals put “Dig My Grave” before “Deep River”: now “Deep River” appears first, with “Dig My Grave” as a puzzling appendix. (Thanks to G. Schirmer’s for not simply letting it slide out of print.)

43. Musical America 19, no. 20 (Mar. 21, 1914): 37. The text gives Diton’s post as being at “Pains College.”

44. Diton’s arrangements appeared in print individually under the general title “Four Jubilee Songs Arranged for Five-Part Chorus of Mixed Voices.” The other three were “Pilgrim Song,” “Little David, Play on Your Harp,” and “Ev’ry Time I Feel the Spirit.” Diton’s “Deep River” was received by the Copyright Office on May 10, 1915.

45. Diton’s texture is melody-in-first-soprano-with-four-accompanying-parts-humming throughout, save for the three verses (up to the verse-refrain), which are for first soprano unaccompanied.

46. The advertisement for her concert of Feb. 8, 1917, notes that it was “Arranged for . . . Miss Jordan” (Musical America 25, no. 13 [Jan. 27, 1917]: 10).

47. Musical America 25, no. 16 (Feb. 17, 1917): 45.

48. Feature articles on her can be found in Musical America 20, no. 12 (July 25, 1914): 6; 25, no. 21 (Mar. 24, 1917): 8; and 30, no. 4 (May 24, 1919): 13, which states “Mary Jordan Urges Artists to Champion Earlier American Music.”

49. As one who has sung Burleigh 1913 many times, I can bear witness to the satisfactory effect of its ending in performance.

50. Musical America 21, no. 14 (Feb. 6, 1915): 34. Kramer was reviewing a volume of Mexican and South American folksongs: he found the songs uninteresting and the harmonizations (by Edward Kilenyi) conventional.

51. Musical America 24, no. 9 (July 1, 1916): 40.


55. Musical America 24, no. 20 (Sept. 16, 1916): 16. The series of advertisements heavily featured the songs of Burleigh, and Burleigh’s photograph was in the center of the initial ad. The advertisements seemed to be designed as much to promote Burleigh as to promote G. Ricordi; they are, however, a good measure of the popularity of “Deep River.”
58. It does provide a cautionary tale for the folksong collector. The only two recordings of "Deep River" listed in the Field Recordings file of the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress are in fact straightforward performances of this arrangement (the "Deep River" of the Lomaxes' *American Ballads* is not in this file, which does not include the Lomaxes' cylinder recordings of 1933).
62. Programs in the Robeson Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. The first program to list "Deep River" is that of Nov. 2, 1924 (Boston, Copley Plaza). The first to list the Burleigh version is Nov. 28, 1926 (New York, Comedy Theatre). [A program tentatively dated 1925 listing the Burleigh seems to me to be misdated.]
63. It is, in fact, an arrangement for singer and recording-studio orchestra. The assessment of the Frances Alda recording as "the most important early recording" is based on the fact that this recording in its various issues receives more listings in the Rigler and Deutsch index of 78 rpm recordings than any other single recording of "Deep River" (Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson, both with multiple recordings, are the two singers with the most listings under the title). The dating of the record was done with the aid of Steven C. Barr's *The (Almost) Complete 78 rpm Record Dating Guide* (Toronto: Privately printed, 1979).
65. Cheatham recorded spirituals as early as 1910 (e.g., "Scandalize My Name"). For a report of her "negro impersonations" in London, see *Musical America* 14, no. 13 (Aug. 5, 1911): 4.
66. Simpson, *Hard Trials*, 386–87. These arrangements, and those of later years, were published separately but with a general cover which reads, "Negro Spirituals arranged for solo voice by H. T. Burleigh." It is this series which is sometimes cited as a single work under the title *Jubilee Songs of the United States of America*. The latter is a ghost, if a persistent one: Simpson documents her inability to establish its existence in *Hard Trials*, 447.
68. I am considering the various arrangements of "Deep River" itself—those by Coleridge-Taylor, Maud Powell, the several Burleigh arrangements, Fisher and its spinoffs, and Diton—to be versions of "Deep River" rather than new works of art based on the Fisk publication.
69. Thus in the published song. Those who, like me, grew up on the Helen Boatwright/John Kirkpatrick recording think of this line with its original words: "But today! Today Tom sailed away . . . ."
70. "Measure" is used loosely here in this song, whose barlines only roughly correspond to measures of 4/4 meter.
71. The published phrase is, "How dear to this heart." But singers tend to sing, "How dear to my heart." It was with the words "How dear to my heart" that I, a New Englander like Ives, learned the song from my parents.
72. The key—back to the original E major—is in this case pure happenstance. The other two appearances of the "Deep River" motive in "Tom Sails Away" are in other keys.
73. At least impossible for me. John Kirkpatrick heard "Deep River" but not "The Old Oaken Bucket" (*A Temporary Mimeographed Catalogue of the Music Manuscripts . . . of*)

74. Some of the “Deep Rivers” had only the title in common with the song: Frank Harling’s opera of 1926; two pieces, entitled “Deep River Blues” (Dave Peyton, 1923; and Lucile Marie Handy, 1924); and—strangest of all—the 1927 “Deep River Black Bottom” of Vivian Ellis, which came along with “How to dance ‘The Black Bottom’. . . by E. Scott Atkinson, world’s professional tango champion, 1925 . . . full description with photographs inside.”

75. Richard Crawford and Jeffrey Magee, Jazz Standards on Record, 1900–1942: A Core Repertory, CBMR Monographs, 4 (Chicago: Center for Black Music Research, 1992).


77. For the purposes of this article, a “jazz recording” of “Dear Old Southland” is a recording listed in the Crawford-Magee Core Repertory.

78. OKe 4504.

79. Vocalion 15708. The recording of the same year by Red Nichols and His Five Pennies (Brunswick 20070), after a saccharine beginning, rewards the patient listener with some lively up-tempo improvisation.

80. OKe 41454.

81. Victor 27564.


83. In fact, “Deep River” is never mentioned in Treat It Gentle; but then few spirituals do appear in Treat It Gentle by name.


85. Oriole 893 (I thank Lynn Abbott for a tape of this rare recording). The Oriole Male Quartette sings an intelligent “quartettification” of the Standard Version (in the context of this article, “arrangement” bears too much of a suggestion of something written down): there is no trace of Burleigh’s male-chorus arrangement in what they sing. I suspect that this performance is an arrangement by an ad hoc group of something asked for by a record producer rather than a document of something in the repertory of an established group.

86. Those interested in tracing this history (I do not feel myself at the present capable of doing so) will find Cedric J. Hayes and Robert Laughton’s Gospel Records, 1943–1969: A Black Music Discography (London: Record Information Services, 1992) an invaluable aid. But they will need also access to a collection containing recordings of various independent labels flourishing in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

87. A second volume, The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, by the same editors and from the same publisher, came out the next year. Reissues of these books commonly publish them together, and they are therefore usually perceived (by this writer also) as a single collection. In this paper I consider only The Book of American Negro Spirituals.

88. Johnson’s version of the refrain differs slightly from Fisk. For the purposes of
this article, however, they can be considered to be essentially the same ("the same" as Johnson would have seen them, not "the same" in the terms of the Society for Ethnomusicology—or of the literalist, who would say "but the Johnson anthology is written in doubled note-values").

89. Many of the arrangements in The Book of American Negro Spirituals are chorus- and-verse; indeed it is the standard form for arrangements in the collection.

90. Johnson does not use Fisk's third verse:

Oh, when I get to Heaven, I'll walk all about,
There's nobody there for to turn me out...

91. Odetta at the Gate of Horn, Tradition Records TLP 1025.

92. Tippett states specifically, "I sent to America for a book of American spirituals, and when it came I saw there was one for every key situation in the oratorio" (Tippett, Those Twentieth Century Blues: An Autobiography [London: Hutchinson, 1991], 50).


93. The music to which she sings this verse is also related to Johnson's setting. In the notes to Tradition TLP 1025, Odetta says she found the verse in John and Alan Lomax's "Folk Songs U.S.A."—i.e., Folk Song U.S.A. (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1947). But there is no version of "Deep River" in Folk Song U.S.A., nor does any collection by the Lomaxes contain a version of "Deep River" which has the verse "Walk into Heaven ..."

94. Tradition TLP 1025, liner notes.

95. In fact the conflict between E and C-sharp—basic to Fisk, but which Tippett would have known through Johnson—appears at the very opening of the oratorio. (For more about pitch centers in A Child of Our Time, see Kemp's Tippett, 168–70).

96. The Selected Poems do not include God's Trombones, which he wished to continue to be available in the handsome 1927 edition with illustrations by Aaron Douglas.


98. Johnson may also have wanted to show that a comic vision of Heaven need not resemble the Celestial Fish-Fry of The Green Pastures, which had opened on Broadway on Feb. 26, 1930. But the bitterness against The Green Pastures was largely of a later date.