

FOR NPS USE ONLY
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 DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
 INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
 Will Marion Cook House
 AND/OR COMMON
 Will Marion Cook House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
 221 West 138th Street
 CITY, TOWN
 New York
 STATE
 New York
 VICINITY OF
 19th
 COUNTY
 New York
 CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
 19th
 CODE
 36
 CODE
 061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Doctors Office

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
 Calvin J. Innis
 STREET & NUMBER
 214 W. 138th Street
 CITY, TOWN
 New York
 STATE
 New York
 VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
 REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
 Registry of Deeds, New York County Courthouse (212) 566-3734
 STREET & NUMBER
 City Hall
 CITY, TOWN
 New York
 STATE
 New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
 New York Landmark Commission Survey
 DATE
 1966
 DEPOSITORY FOR
 SURVEY RECORDS
 New York Landmark Commission
 CITY, TOWN
 New York
 STATE
 New York
 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR
 DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

In this house at 221 West 138th Street in Harlem, Will Marion Cook lived from 1918 to 1944. The blocks of West 138th Street and West 139th Street bounded by Seventh Avenue to the east and Eighth Avenue on the west, was designated "The St. Nicholas Historic District," by the New York Landmarks Commission, in 1966. The four blocks of townhouses with wide service alleys in the rear and shorter transverse alleys between the streets are excellent examples of nineteenth century urban design. The blocks were developed by D. H. King, the builder of the Times Building and Madison Square Garden. Although the blocks were designed by four different architects, they are planned to create "a neighborhood within a neighborhood." The area, known locally as "Strivers Row" has gained national recognition as home for many Black Harlem notables. Strivers Row remains today, much the same as when it was built in 1891.

#221 West 138th Street is on the north side of the street and the east end unit of sixteen townhouses bounded by transverse service alleys. Architects, Bruce Price and Clarence Luce, designed the block in a Georgian style of the eclectic period. All the units are three story buff brick, with a full basement and have similar trim and details.

The street elevation is twenty feet wide, with a flush masonry basement, whose entrance is under the front stoop. The window sizes vary and there are two different window treatments. The first and third story windows have terra cotta splayed lintels with elongated keystones. The second story of the house has an interesting pseudo-Palladian window treatment in terra-cotta. Here a triply divided window is separated by handsome Ionic columns supporting, above its' garlanded horizontal lintel, an arch form above the columns. This arch has alternate voussoirs elongated with blind tympanum with wreath design within.

The doorway is slightly recessed and its' round arched head has an elongated, console like keystone, the arch spings from "Greek-fret" motif impost blocks. Delicate wrought iron balconies extend from the base of the first floor windows, and similar wrought iron work is to be found at the top platform of the stoop and used for handrails for the steps.

A delicate garland pattern is employed in the fascia of the cornice. A horizontal moulding at the base of the fascia displays a tiny, continuous swag-motif. There is an overhanging cornice surmounted by a handsome stone balustrade topping the whole. The fascia, cornice, and balusters in the front balustrade and several in the east side elevation are missing.

The window sizes and details on the east elevation vary and are similar in detail and size to the street elevation. The rear service yard is bounded by a six foot high concrete wall with a metal door opening into the rear service alley. There is an unattached one car garage with a standard overhead door opening into the service alley.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

- PREHISTORIC
- 1400-1499
- 1500-1599
- 1600-1699
- 1700-1799
- 1800-1899
- 1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ART | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION | | |

Afro-American History

SPECIFIC DATES Will Marion Cook (1869-1944) BUILDER/ARCHITECT D. H. King/ Not Known
Residency (1918-1944)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Will Marion Cook has been described as "a musician of international reputation, "one of our (the United States) most popular composers," and a "pioneer in serious musical comedy" who helped open Broadway to black entertainment. Cook, trained in the classical music tradition at Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio, the National Conservatory of Music in New York, and studied for nine years at the Hachschnle in Berlin. Cook applied this classic musical training to a black idiom and developed an authentic form of musical comedy. Teamed with some of the era's most noted personalities including Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Egbert Austin "Bert" Williams and George Walker, Cook produced a prolific amount of material of lasting worth.

Will Marion Cook recognized the value of black folklore and spirituals and through his efforts much was done toward its development and preservation. Cook was an innovator. He was one of the first to introduce a changed form or orchestration, giving rise to independent improvisation, a precursor to the jazz bands of the "Big Band Era." Outside of his own musical accomplishments, Will Marion Cook was a teacher and mentor. He encouraged the careers of his wife, Abbie Mitchell, Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, Sidney Bechet, Buddy Gilmore, Josephine Baker and Duke Ellington. Probably the greatest complement rendered to a musician is recognition by his peers. Duke Ellington, a master in his own right, has referred to Will Marion Cook as "the master of all masters of our people."

BIOGRAPHY

Will Marion Cook, noted Negro composer, songwriter and orchestra conductor, was born in Washington, D. C. on January 27, 1869. Both his father and mother, graduates of Oberlin College in Ohio, had migrated to the nation's capital. His father, John H. Cook, was also one of the first graduates, Class of 1871, of the newly formed Howard University School of Law and later served as Professor and Dean of the Law School from 1876 to 1878. Following the death of her husband, Mrs. Cook taught sewing at Howard in order to provide for her three sons. By indirectly exposing her son to Negro hymns, Mrs. Cook has been credited with influencing young Will's career in music composition. By the age of five "Willie" was performing as a boy soprano and shortly thereafter began playing the violin.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Blesh, Rudi and Janis, Harriet. They All Played Ragtime. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950.

Cuney-Hare, Maud. Negro Musicians and Their Music. Washington, D. C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1936. (continued)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	88,910,90	4,511,818,5,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Will Marion Cook House sits in the center of "Strivers Row" at 221 West 138th Street. This area was designated a historic district by the New York Landmarks Commission in 1966. To the rear of the house is a wide access alleyway, while on the east is a transverse alleyway, now blocked by an ornate wrought iron fence. The house faces south and is connected to a set of row houses to the west.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Lynne Gomez Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

3 February 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, Northwest

TELEPHONE

462-2519

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D. C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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In the early 1880s, Mrs. Cook sent thirteen year old Will to the Oberlin Conservatory of Music to study the violin. After three years at his parent's alma mater, Will received funds for professional training in Germany from the congregation of an integrated church in Washington, D. C. Frederick Douglass, the noted black abolitionist and statesman, played an important role in helping Will to continue his training overseas. He attended the Hachs Schule in Berlin, where he studied under the renowned violinist Josef Joachim. Young Cook made a "splendid impression" on his teacher who gave him special lessons in the privacy of his home. After a nine year stay abroad, ill health forced Will Marion Cook to return to the United States.

Arriving back in the United States in 1895, Cook enrolled in the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. He studied harmony and counterpoint under John White and composition under Anton Dvorak.

As a result of a concert performance that he gave in New York City, critics called Cook "the greatest colored violinist in the world." The classification colored violinist so angered Cook that he laid his violin down and swore never to play the instrument again in an orchestra.

Cook turned his attention away from classical music to the increasingly popular "Ragtime." In 1898, Cook met the famed black comedy team, Bert Williams and George Walker, and gave them several ideas for a musical comedy on the origins of the dance, the "Cakewalk." Walker suggested that Cook write the music for such a comedy.

Returning to Washington with his ideas, Cook was able to convince poet Paul Laurence Dunbar to write the lyrics. The lyrics and music to "Clorindy, The Origin of the Cakewalk" were written by the two men in a night. After much effort, Cook was able to convince Ed Rice, manager of the Casino Roof Garden in New York City, to produce "Clorindy." Starring veteran black comics Bert Williams, George Walker, Ernest Hogan and Miss Belle Davis, the ragtime musical ran the entire summer of 1898. James Weldon Johnson, the noted author, musician, NAACP leader and friend of Cook, described both the public reaction to and the importance of "Clorindy":

Clorindy was the talk of New York. It was the first demonstration of the possibilities of syncopated Negro music. Cook was the first competent composer to take what was then known as ragtime and work it out in a musicianly way. His choruses and finales in Clorindy, complete novelties as they were, sung by a lusty chorus, were simply breath-taking. Broadway had something entirely new.²

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Theatregoers in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati and Washington, D. C. also found "Clorindy" to be "novel," "exciting" and enjoyed such tunes as "Darktown Is Out Tonight," "That's How the Cakewalk Is Done," "Who Dat Say Chicken is Dis Crowd" and "Hottes' Coon in Dixie." By combining the public's craze for ragtime with professional training, Cook was a pioneer in the development of the black musical comedy. However Cook was not writing music to exemplify a Negro stereotype. His "coon songs" were not intended to degrade blacks, but were, according to two students of ragtime, "an apparently innocent way to get something said."

In 1898, Will Marion Cook married singer-actress Abbie Mitchell who had appeared in "Clorindy." Miss Mitchell, then only fourteen, continued to appear in works by her husband and later became a leading lady of the black stage. Musically, Will Marion Cook was to have a profound effect upon his wife. In a recollection, Abbie Mitchell stated that from her husband she "learned to appreciate the beauty of our folklore, and how to sing the beautiful songs of the black folk."³ Although the two were later divorced, they did have two children, a son, Will Mercer Cook, noted French scholar and later United States Ambassador to Niger and Senegal, and a daughter, Mrs. Marian Cook Douglass.

In the summer of 1899, Will Marion Cook wrote the musical "Jes Lak White Folks" produced at the New York Winter Garden. In 1900, he wrote the music to a comedy "The Policy Players." Neither the casts nor the material was as good as the musical "Clorindy," consequently these shows were not as successful.

The decade 1900 to 1910 was one in which Cook reached his peak as a musical composer. In 1900, he wrote the tune "Down de Lover's Lane" for the Broadway musical "The Casino Girl." In 1902, he and Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote "My Little Gypsy Maid" for the musical "The Wild Rose," starring vaudeville star Eddie Foy, Sr. His greatest successes came as the composer for the three highly successful musical comedies starring Bert Williams and George Walker. In 1902, "In Dahomey," a satire of the American Colonization Society, made black theatrical history by opening in Times Square in New York City. With lyrics by Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alex Rogers and music by Will Marion Cook, "In Dahomey" featured songs such as "Every Darkey is King" and "When Sousa Comes to Coontown." The play also ran in Boston and later ran for one hundred and fifty performances at the Shaftesbury Theatre in London. A reviewer in Boston wrote:

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the composer (Will Marion Cook) has succeeded in lifting Negro music above the plane of the so-called "Coon Song" without destroying the characteristics of the melodies; and he has provided a score which is likewise unusually diversified.⁴

In 1904, Cook wrote the music for the comedy "The Southerners." The play only had a run of thirty-six performances, but two of his songs "Mandy Lou" and "Allus de Same in Dixie" became quite popular. In 1906, he again teamed up with the pair Williams and Walker, writing the music for the musical comedy "Abyssinia." Describing a song from "Abyssinia" entitled "Song of Reverence to the Setting Sun," one New York critic called the song a "little too high-brow for a darky show."⁵ In spite of his musical genius and success, Cook was still viewed in some quarters as a composer of darky songs. Two years later, he wrote the music, again in conjunction with the lyricists Jesse A. Shipp and Alex Rogers, for the comedy "Bandana Land," a spoof of black life in the South. According to one contemporary critic, Will Marion Cook "outdid himself on the Bon Bon tune from the popular standpoint."⁶ This clearly defined his universal talents and national appeal.

The death of George Walker in 1911 ended the comedy team of Williams and Walker. Because of his ties with music and Broadway producers, Cook was able to convince a leading producer, presumably Flo Ziegfeld, to star Bert Williams and Fanny Brice together. The Ziegfeld Follies of 1910, co-starred the most prominent black comedian and one of the most famous white female singers and comediennes and was a huge success. Cook and Joe Jordon wrote "Lovie Joe" (that ever lovin man) for Miss Brice's feature number. This number, according to one music historian, "outraged ragtime."

Besides his fame as a composer for Williams and Walker, Cook was instrumental in the development of the first black jazz band. Organized as the Memphis Students in 1905, this band, in reality a string orchestra, consisted of banjos, mandolins, guitars, saxophones, trumpets, trombones, a violin, a double bass and drums. What made this orchestra unique was that its performances included singing and dancing. Heard first at Proctor's Theatre in New York, the orchestra later performed at the Olympia Theatre in Paris.

In 1911, Cook helped James Reese Europe to organize the Clef Club's Syncopated Orchestra. Composed of one hundred and twenty-five black musicians playing guitars, cellos, basses and wind instruments, the Clef Club performed at New York's Carnegie Hall in May of 1912. Cook,

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through the persuasion of James Reese Europe, agreed to play with the Clef Club Orchestra. Although his playing of the violin would be a retreat from his prior conviction, Cook consented only on the condition that he would not be introduced. Because the concert was such a "crowning event," Europe was forced to introduce Cook to a cheering audience. The composer was so overcome with joy that he was left speechless.

In 1912, Cook wrote the music to the comedy "The Traitor." In addition, he appeared as one of the stars in the play. In the same year, Cook's A Collection of Negro Songs was published. Professor Eileen Southern, a historian of black music, calls this collection "an original, distinctive approach to the composition of songs inspired by Negro folk music."⁸ This collection contained some of Cook's most famous compositions such as "Swing Along," "Rain Song," "Exhortation - A Negro Sermon," "My Lady" and "Wid de Moon, Moon, Moon." These songs have been used over the years as concert numbers and as choral arrangements.

Two years later, Cook wrote the music for the comedy "In Darkeydom." He also wrote two ballads "My Lady" and "Springtime" and collaborated with James Weldon Johnson, writing the music to Johnson's "An Explanation, Characteristic Negro Verses." In 1915, in collaboration with James W. Johnson, Cook wrote the music to "My Lady's Lips Am Like De Honey Words."

During the years 1915 to 1921, Cook aided and befriended a pair of up and coming musician-composers, Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle. They recorded several of his compositions "Mandy Lou" and "Rain Song." The latter recording, part of the Eubie Blake Piano Rollography, created a sensation whenever it was played. More importantly, Cook taught orchestral conducting to Eubie Blake. He also developed the title "Sounds of Africa" for a collection of piano solos released by Eubie Blake in October of 1921.

During 1918, Cook organized the New York Syncopated Orchestra, a symphony of fifty black musicians and singers. This assemblage of musicians, including such future jazz greats as clarinetist Sidney Bechet and drummer Buddy Gilmore, has been described as "the finest aggregation of musicians ever before heard in what is termed distinctly Negro music."⁹ After a tour of such cities as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, San Diego, Minneapolis - St. Paul, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Chicago and Pittsburgh, the Orchestra travelled to Europe. Their concerts consisted of music from Brahms, the Vienna Waltzes, W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" and "Memphis Blues" and a cappella spirituals. A highlight of the Orchestra's stay in London was a command performance before King George V at Buckingham Palace in August of

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1919. In Paris, the Orchestra performed at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees. The trip was a musical success as Cook helped to create the "vogue for Negro musicians in England and all over the continent."¹⁰

In 1924, Cook became one of the six Negro charter members of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). The other black members were Harry T. Burleigh, J. Rosamond Johnson, James Weldon Johnson, Cecil Mack and Will Tyers. Of these men, Cook was regarded as the "most original genius among all the Negro musicians."¹¹

In 1927, Cook composed the jazz standard "I'm Coming Virginia." He served, in 1929, as the vocal coach for the Broadway musical "Great Day!." That same year, he adapted and arranged the Negro spiritual "Trouble in Mind," while his son Mercer wrote the lyrics.

Cook criticized the credit received by whites as the originators of the dance crazes of the "Roaring Twenties." Claiming that dances such as the "Charleston" and the "Black Bottom" were the creation of blacks, Cook, in a letter to the New York Times, deplored the promoting by white theatrical producers of these dances as original.

During the 1930s, Will Marion Cook was one of several black musicians who served as either consultants, composers and/or performers in several special programs such as the Chicago Century of Progress International Exposition, 1933-1934; the Golden Gate International Exposition, 1939-1940; and the New York World's Fair, 1939-1940. He and his son wrote a ballad for Alberta Hunter, the radio singer, in 1938; the first popular song that Cook had written in more than twenty years. For the last six years of his life, Cook retired from the music world as a result of a severe heart ailment. On July 19, 1944, Will Marion Cook died in Harlem Hospital at the age of seventy-five.

Will Marion Cook left a preponderance of musical scores which attest to his capabilities as a musician, composer and theatrical organizer. His music, provides testimony to his skill and genius as an Afro-American artist in the highest tradition.

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Will Marion Cook
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1. Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971), p. 353.
2. James Weldon Johnson, Black Manhattan, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 103.
3. Maud Cuney-Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music, (Washington, D. C. : The Associated Publishers Inc., 1936), p. 370.
4. Ibid. p. 160.
5. Loftin Mitchell, "I Work Here To Please You," in The Black Aesthetic, ed. Addison Gayle (Garden City, New York : Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 298.
6. Sigmund Spaeth, A History of Popular Music in America, (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 355.
7. Maud Cuney-Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music, (Washington, D. C.: The Associated Publishers Inc., 1936), p. 165.
8. Mercer Cook, "Will Marion Cook: He Helped Them All," (Crisis , October, 1944) pp. 322, 328.
9. Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971), p. 353.

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