




# William L. Dawson's Legacy of Care

Gwynne Kuhner Brown

Gwynne Kuhner Brown  
Professor of Music  
University of Puget Sound  
Author, *William L. Dawson*  
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It's surprising what a close, personal relationship I have with William L. Dawson, considering that he passed away almost twenty years before I first learned about him. The music he created, the material evidence of his life, and conversations with those who knew him have enabled me not only to write a book about Mr. Dawson, but to gain a vivid sense of him as a fellow musician, educator, and human being.

Other contributors to this issue of *Choral Journal* have firsthand experience with the man himself. My own relationship with him, however personal it may

feel, is that of scholar to subject. When I daydream about what it would be like to meet him, I imagine feeling awestruck and more than a little intimidated. Would he like me? Would he approve of my work? I suspect he would appreciate the time and effort I've spent documenting his remarkable life and career. I hope he would forgive the inevitable blind spots of this white Gen-X musicologist. I'm certain he would be polite—and that once we got to know each other a bit better, he would tell me exactly what he thought of my book.



Dawson was a tough customer, renowned for his uncompromisingly high standards. During his quarter century on the faculty of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), he acquired a reputation for demanding and delivering excellence. The intensity of his drive enabled him to raise the Tuskegee Institute Choir to national acclaim, to educate and inspire generations of students, and to create the impeccable arrangements of spirituals that choirs around the world continue to sing and savor.<sup>1</sup>

The strict discipline that Dawson lived by and imposed on others is an important part of his story. Less obvious but equally important is that he was an extraordinarily caring musician, educator, and person. His genius, evident in his musical accomplishments, is equally apparent in the generosity and creativity with which he supported others. Today, when many of our students require more support than ever, Dawson offers an inspiring example of how care can coexist along with an unwavering commitment to excellence (Photo 1 on the next page).

## The Taskmaster

Generations of students who sang in the famous Tuskegee Institute Choir between 1930 and 1955 remembered Dawson's strictness and high expectations. Clyde Owen Jackson, a Tuskegee alumnus who sang under Dawson in the late 1940s and went on to a long and varied career, recalled that "the choir rehearsed six days a week for one hour Monday through Friday (from 6 p.m. until 7 p.m.) and every Sunday morning one hour before the 11 a.m. service."<sup>2</sup> In preparation for a performance, Dawson added additional rehearsals, sometimes requiring students to miss other classes. He locked the door against anyone arriving late and was known to hurl objects (chalk, books, his baton) at choir members who failed to pay rapt attention. He singled out those who sang their part incorrectly, making them stand and repeat a phrase until it was right. Choir members' reminiscences include words such as "stickler," "severe," and "taskmaster." Said one, "He did not permit any foolishness."<sup>3</sup>

Surely the prestige of the Tuskegee Institute Choir

was an incentive for some to join. In 1931, Dawson had hardly hung up his coat before the quality of his choir attracted the attention of Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel. The New York impresario hired Dawson and his choir to perform in the weeks of star-studded concerts that celebrated Radio City Music Hall's opening in 1932-33, bringing national attention to Tuskegee. Over the years the choir performed on radio and television, at Carnegie Hall and the White House, and on an award-winning Westminster Hi-Fi LP. The choir's prestige was further amplified by the national celebrity as a composer Dawson briefly enjoyed in 1934, when his *Negro Folk Symphony* received a highly acclaimed premiere by Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra.<sup>4</sup>

The Tuskegee Institute Choir sustained its high profile under Dawson because it was consistently excellent. It was particularly famous for remarkable performances of spirituals that combined the strengths of any well-trained American college choir with a deep sensitivity to the meaning of the original folk songs. As a reviewer in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a Black weekly, wrote:

It was like a message from another world. The full import of every word was borne on the wings of song, in perfect diction and, ranging from the most delicate [pianissimo] to a full forte, the tones were [i]ndescribably beautiful. This did not represent the spiritual in the rough as sung originally in the cornfields. It was a refined product, in the choral form and a truly artistic rendition; yet the characteristic emotional quality of the singing of the Negroes was not lost. It had that breath of life which makes music complete.<sup>5</sup>

White reviewers sometimes complained that Dawson's choir did not fulfill their expectations of Black performers. This desire for apparent spontaneity and unfettered emotion—unreasonable to expect of any college choir—was shaped by movies like *The Green Pastures* (1936), and by the persuasive simulations of folk music-making provided by professional Black choirs led by Hall Johnson, Eva Jessye, and others.<sup>6</sup> Even these unsatisfied critics tended to applaud the Tuskegee Institute Choir's "tonal unity" and "excellent balance."<sup>7</sup>



Photo 1. William Levi Dawson papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Used with permission. Date unknown.

They also routinely singled out Dawson's direction. Wrote one, "The outstanding impression left... was that of the extraordinary discipline of the large group. Mr. Dawson evidently has the gift of drilling a choir into a nearly perfect mechanical unit."<sup>8</sup> Most reviewers cast the ensemble's unity in a positive light. The 1955 LP, for example, led one to write, "Virility rather than sweetness characterizes the composite quality of the ensemble; but its high precision is reflected in close shading and pliancy as well as in crispness of attacks and releases."<sup>9</sup>

The distinctive quality of the choir's performances sprang from Dawson's approach in rehearsals, which could also have been characterized as emphasizing

"virility rather than sweetness." However, Dawson was not bound by this problematic gendered dichotomy.<sup>10</sup> Listening to the LP, the choir's support of the tenor soloist on *There Is a Balm in Gilead* is generous, sensitive, and moving—anything but mechanical. The skill, spirit, and versatility audible on every track of the album testify to the choir's high morale and eagerness to excel.<sup>11</sup> The several choir members David Lee Johnson interviewed for his 1987 dissertation confirm this impression. According to one alumna from the 1930s, "The entire choir was very close and felt close to Mr. Dawson all through my years at Tuskegee." A graduate from twenty years later concurred: "The choir had a deep respect and love for Mr. Dawson, and they want-

ed to do their part to maintain the best.”<sup>12</sup>

Dawson's care for his students extended beyond music. He was especially sensitive to the needs of those who lacked money, giving them advice about finding affordable clothing and maintaining a personal budget. He even pulled strings to enable at least one student to afford enrollment at Tuskegee. According to Elinor Hastings Foster:

I had to be out of school for a quarter in 1935. My family was large, with three sisters in school. When I went to pay the tuition for that year, I found I only had enough for two quarters. So I decided to let my sisters go and I would stay out for a quarter. Nobody knew the reason why I wasn't in school. Mr. Dawson was passing by one day and asked my father, "Why isn't your daughter in school this quarter?" My father told him we did not have the money this quarter, but I would be back next quarter. The next day Mr. Dawson called my father and said, "She can go to school this quarter! Send her on up here!" I know Mr. Dawson made some kind of financial arrangements for me to go to school, but we have never talked about it.<sup>13</sup>

As the oldest of seven children born to parents of limited means, Dawson empathized. He worked to support the educational, social, and financial needs of students like Foster, and did so with discretion and respect.

To understand Dawson the educator, it helps to appreciate how Tuskegee Institute shaped him as a student. Founded in 1881 under the leadership of Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee was unusual among HBCUs for putting African Americans in top leadership positions from the beginning. It lifted up Black achievement by celebrating the academic and professional accomplishments of its faculty. It paid tribute to Black history and culture, requiring the singing of spirituals at meals, assemblies, and chapel services. Like its model, Hampton Institute, Tuskegee initially emphasized practical skills and careers that could quickly be put to use for the benefit of Black communities. For many years every student was required to work on campus, making

enrollment accessible to all students regardless of their ability to pay. In other words, it was a school that took seriously the distinctive backgrounds and needs of its students. These factors enabled the thirteen-year-old Dawson to enroll, persist, and thrive. By his graduation at twenty-one, Tuskegee had instilled in him the self-confidence and sense of mission that would fuel his storied career.

While welcoming and affirming, the Institute was also uncompromising. It subjected Dawson and his fellow students to a strict discipline that included daily room inspections, a rigid daily schedule from morning to night, and an exacting code of personal conduct. Washington and other authority figures regularly gave speeches exhorting students to live virtuous and productive lives. Dawson's older roommates held him to account, scolding him when his efforts were "not good enough for Tuskegee."<sup>14</sup> Finding himself capable of excelling in such an environment, he won the esteem of teachers and classmates alike. He always remembered his rigorous Tuskegee experience with affection and pride.

Returning to his alma mater as a faculty member in 1930, Dawson amplified the twin components of support and discipline that had shaped his own Tuskegee experience—components that were (and remain) essential in music education. Although the Institute stopped offering music majors in 1937, Dawson was able to sustain his top-notch choir because he welcomed every interested student to join, then required them to rise to his demands. For a quarter century, hundreds of students chose to spend hours every week in the choir rehearsal room with Dawson, trusting that beneath his chalk-throwing exterior lay a caring heart and an unshakeable belief in their potential for excellence.

### The Composer

Dawson's creative and original choral arrangements of spirituals, particularly those from the 1930s and '40s, set the standard for the choral spiritual genre. These works accomplish three important tasks at once: they preserve the heritage of the African American religious folk songs created during slavery, provide rich opportunities for the musical and vocal development of ama-



teur singers, and succeed in performance. Pieces like *Ain't-a That Good News* and *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit* are so familiar today that we can take their high quality for granted and forget how groundbreaking they were. As Vernon Huff has written, Dawson's spiritual arrangements "completely transformed the genre."<sup>15</sup>

These pieces are wide-ranging in their appeal and popularity, but Dawson created most of them with a very specific community in mind: his students, almost all of whom were Black. His first published arrangements, including *King Jesus Is A-Listening* and *I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray* (H.T. FitzSimons, 1925 and 1926), were written for his choir members at Lincoln High School in Kansas City, Missouri. The majority of his most famous choral works, of course, were composed for the Tuskegee Institute Choir. Dawson's artistic engagement with the folk songs of his enslaved ancestors is a powerful sign of commitment to his race—as was his decision in 1930 to leave behind a flourishing career in Chicago and join the Tuskegee faculty.

Exactly like the folk songs upon which they were based, Dawson's pedagogically attuned choral works met the needs of the community that sang them. He gave students two or more generations removed from slavery a way of engaging positively with their forebears' experiences, spirituality, and artistry. Through Dawson's music, young African American singers encountered and embodied music that proved the value and beauty of their cultural heritage. The high standard of excellence Dawson upheld in rehearsals, and his own stature as one of the most accomplished Black musicians of his generation, showed that spirituals were worthy of the same respect as European classics, which the Tuskegee choir also sang.

The energy Dawson expended on arranging and performing African American religious folk songs reflects his care for his students' spiritual, psychological, and political wellbeing. Wonderfully, the music itself also provides abundant evidence of his care. On the most basic level, his arrangements typically provide both accessibility and challenge, setting young singers up for success while building their skills. Dynamics and articulations are notated with great specificity, developing students' musicality and attention to detail. Dawson's mastery of polyphony ensures that every vocal

part is interesting and rewarding to sing. The melodies are memorable, the harmonies interesting and well-voiced, the rhythms satisfying. In short, these would be model works for high school and college choir no matter what genre of music they belonged to.

The fact that they are spirituals, however, makes Dawson's arrangements a profound demonstration of sensitivity to his Black students' needs. For example, he approaches dialect differently from one piece to another, sometimes using exclusively Standard American English (*There Is a Balm in Gilead*), sometimes including elements of African American Vernacular English (*Soon Ah Will Be Done*). He never turns a folk song's "ain't" or "a-turnin'" into more formal language that would render it stiff and awkward, and he carefully writes each text to yield the right pronunciation (*I Wan' To Be Ready*). In his published essay on the meaning and performance of spirituals, Dawson emphasizes that the distinctive speech patterns of the enslaved resulted from their preference for the "soft and euphonious vocables of [their] native African speech" over the "harsh and guttural sounds" of English.<sup>16</sup> Respect for the aesthetic agency of the songs' creators is evident in Dawson's own careful choices about his song texts, rejecting the thoughtless, derogatory linguistic caricatures that were commonly found in mass media depictions of African Americans.

Counteracting racist stereotypes was part of the labor done by touring HBCU choirs all the way back to the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1871. With their formal attire, restrained bearing, and polished performances, these choirs consciously performed what should have been a self-evident fact: that Blackness could coexist with education, artistry, and self-control. Such a performance took part in what is sometimes termed "the politics of respectability."<sup>17</sup> As Michelle Alexander explains, "This political strategy is predicated on the notion that the goal of racial equality can only be obtained if [B]lack people are able to successfully prove to whites that they are worthy of equal treatment, dignity and respect."<sup>18</sup> It is sobering to contemplate the anti-Black racism giving rise to such a strategy and the burden borne by those employing it, including Dawson, his students, and countless others.<sup>19</sup>

Far more than any message the Tuskegee Institute

Choir might convey to audiences, Dawson cared about the message his music sent to his students. And just as the spirituals had different meanings for those who first created and sang them than for white people who might hear them, his arrangements do their most important communicating in the shelter of the rehearsal space.<sup>20</sup> Striking evidence of their inward orientation lies in the subtle way these works engage with European classical music.

Dawson acquired great skill in European contrapuntal techniques through his extensive formal education in composition, and he loved and frequently programmed polyphonic works by Tomás Luis de Victoria, George Frideric Handel, and others. Although his spiritual arrangements frequently employ polyphonic textures, they do not strike the ear as Baroquifying folk music (so to speak). Dawson knew, both from childhood experiences of spirituals and from attentive listening as an adult, that richly textured, multi-part singing was part of African American folk practice. That tradition's numerous individual parts, *ostinati*, and call-response structures formed a natural bridge to Dawson's sensitive incorporation of European contrapuntal techniques. From the graceful imitative polyphony of *There Is a Balm in Gilead* to the ecstatic whirling of *Ezekiel Saw de Wheel*, the composer deploys his formal training in service of the text, mood, and history of the original folk songs. In addition, the musicianship fostered by polyphonic passages in his arrangements helped his students to perform a wide variety of music.

More basically, Dawson's scores were no less detailed or specific than those of European composers. Because the Tuskegee Institute Choir performed both, students could see the similarity, and Dawson's insistence on fidelity to the markings in the score (whether his or another composer's) drove the point home. Since audience members don't typically follow the score, this message is only for the singers.

To my mind, *Ezekiel Saw de Wheel* contains the most delightful example of internal communication in Dawson's choral music. In the third verse of his arrangement, the text reads:

Some go to church for to sing an' shout  
Before six months dey's all turn'd out

Dawson interpolates a series of "hallelujahs" between the two lines, evoking the singing and shouting of the congregation. Surprisingly, the interpolation evokes not the texture and energy of a Black congregation, but rather a late Baroque piece such as Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." Additionally, Dawson abruptly shifts key during this brief passage from B<sup>b</sup> major to D major, the key of the famous "Hallelujah." The allusion to Handel is sufficiently subtle that it is easily (and routinely) overlooked, but Dawson undoubtedly highlighted the connection in rehearsal, and his regular programming of the "Hallelujah" chorus would have made it a familiar work to his students.

By not actually quoting Handel's famous work, Dawson avoids eliciting a laugh from audiences, which he never sought to do with any spiritual. As he wrote, "It cannot be stressed too strongly that these songs should never be sung for the expressed purpose of amusing or even entertaining the hearer. There is nothing humorous in the sentiments expressed by the words or rhythms of the music."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, his allusion allows him to appropriate Handelian style without drawing a startling contrast between European and African American music, as a direct quote would unavoidably do. Dawson fervently believed that spirituals had a place in the American concert hall, whether in arrangements or through their incorporation in pieces like his own *Negro Folk Symphony*. In none of his compositions does he seek to contrast spirituals with other musical genres or styles.

Dawson was deeply concerned with developing his students' knowledge, and his students would have understood the many differences between their enslaved ancestors' music and the European canon. He taught them about the historic origins of the spirituals, their religious content, and their ongoing significance; he also taught them about European classical music. But in his spiritual arrangements, Dawson showed the equality and compatibility of these musical traditions. He gave his students what they needed to succeed in an American society that told them that African diasporic culture was inferior to European, and that European culture was off limits to them. His compositions showed them how to excel as classical musicians while treasuring the richness of their Black heritage. Dawson



*Photo 2. Cecile and William Dawson at the Silver Rail Bar and Grill, New York City, August 1951. William Levi Dawson Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.*

knew that few of his students would become professional musicians, but the musical education he offered equipped them with experience, knowledge, and pride that would serve them well in any life path.

### **The Person**

Dawson's nearly fifty-five-year marriage is the obvious place to look for evidence of his kindness and car-

ing. Cecile DeMae Nicholson Dawson was a successful businesswoman whose academic accomplishments rivaled her husband's. She was smart, capable, and independent. The couple adored one another. They enjoyed traveling together; when he traveled alone, he wrote long letters (helpfully preserved in the Emory University archives) and bought her presents. They often entertained company in their home and were renowned in Tuskegee and beyond for their good taste in food, decor, and fashion.<sup>22</sup> Photo 2 shows them enjoying a night out in elegant midlife, looking happy and relaxed. When his wife's declining health required her to move into a Montgomery assisted-living facility, the elderly Dawson drove forty miles from Tuskegee every day to visit her.

By contrast, in the professional realm Dawson's sweet center usually remained secure inside its crunchy shell. Nonetheless, his heart occasionally revealed itself in interactions with students. Zenobia Powell Perry, a Tuskegee piano student from 1935 to '38 who went on to an illustrious career as a composer, described how Dawson encouraged her to write down her piano "doodlings" and show them to him. He even respected her ideas about his own arrangements during choir rehearsals, responding to her critique with "Don't tell me what it oughta be," before adding, after a well-timed comedic pause, "Now, what did

you say that oughta be?"<sup>23</sup> Addie Mae Stabler Mitchell, another choir member from this period, relates that when she was struggling with hoarseness prior to an off-campus performance, Dawson invited her to ride in a faculty member's car instead of on the bus with the rest of the choir, so that she could "get some extra rest."<sup>24</sup>

The experience of Ralph Ellison is revealing. As a young man, the famed author aspired to be a compos-



er. He idolized Dawson from afar based on accounts of his greatness from a few friends who had met him. Hearing a radio broadcast of the Tuskegee Institute Choir sealed the deal, and Ellison enrolled at Tuskegee Institute in 1933. Although he was a trumpet player and never sang in the choir, he played under Dawson's direction and took classes from him. As is often the case, the real person did not match the fantasy, and Ellison was deeply disappointed that Dawson did not show him any special favor.<sup>25</sup> Finding Tuskegee equally disappointing, Ellison left after three years without completing his degree. Elements of his bitter experience were fictionalized in his famous novel *The Invisible Man*.

Ellison was an ambitious but unremarkable musician; after Tuskegee (and owing in part to his growth there) he emerged as a truly exceptional literary figure. He and Dawson reconciled and became mutual admirers. They followed one another's careers, corresponded warmly, and occasionally visited in person. It speaks well of both of them that they overcame their fraught history and developed a lasting friendship.

Over the years Ellison offered several eloquent tributes to Dawson, both in formal speeches and writings and in informal settings. He told one interviewer, "Dawson was a strict taskmaster, but he made you feel you possessed abilities and potential; but you had to work hard to bring them out."<sup>26</sup> Dawson's belief in his students' capability for excellence was a common feature of Ellison's tributes: Dawson "gave you a sense of possibility." On the occasion of Dawson's 90th birthday, Ellison wrote to him in a letter, "You took my artistic ambitions seriously.... The discipline and encouragement which you provided was far more important in my development than I am able to tell you."<sup>27</sup> His words confirm that at base, Dawson's rigorous pedagogy was rooted in profound optimism and care for his students' potential.

In the half of his career that followed his 1955 resignation from Tuskegee Institute, Dawson traveled widely, sharing his knowledge and wisdom with fellow choir directors. At the conclusion of one speech, he exhorted his listeners: "Remember we are working with young voices; we must make them express their best qualities. Think of your choir as a world and its mem-

bers as inhabitants looking to you as a leader to teach them the power and beauty of their voices."<sup>28</sup> His work with generations of students extended far beyond their singing—he showed them a world in which they were listened to, valued, and cared for.

The Covid-19 lockdown of 2020-21 created an unprecedented situation for educators. Few faced a greater challenge in adapting to online teaching than choir directors, for whom the shared rehearsal space and bodily immersion in communal sound are so fundamental. It was often necessary in those days to prioritize care, flexibility, and student engagement over anything else we might ordinarily have centered, including rigor and depth. Many of us are still in the process of recalibrating our approaches. Surmounting the challenges of his time and place to create a choral program for the ages at Tuskegee, William L. Dawson offers an exceptional role model as we strive for the right balance of rigor and supportiveness, firmness and flexibility, professionalism and care. ©

*Author's Note:* I acknowledge with gratitude the many people who have contributed to my understanding of the topics in this article. I am especially indebted to Eugene Thamon Simpson, whose consistent encouragement, generosity, and frankness were indispensable to my research and writing on his friend "Bill." I treasure his memory. I also thank Joe Williams for his perceptive feedback on this article.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Dawson disliked the term "spirituals," greatly preferring to call them folk songs (or, more specifically, "religious folk-songs of the American Negro"). In this article I use "spirituals" for clarity and convenience, meaning no disrespect to Mr. Dawson's preference. See Mark Hugh Malone, *William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023), 80–1.

<sup>2</sup> Clyde Owen Jackson, "Weaver of the Arts: The William Levi Dawson Interdisciplinary Method for Teaching Musically Illiterate Young Adult Students," lecture presented at Tuskegee University, September 21, 2001. Tuskegee University Archives.

- <sup>3</sup> David Lee Johnson, "The Contributions of William L. Dawson to the School of Music at Tuskegee Institute and to Choral Music" (EdD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana, Champaign, 1987), 136–66.
- <sup>4</sup> See Gwynne Kuhner Brown, "Whatever Happened to William Dawson's Negro Folk Symphony?" *Journal of the Society for American Music* 6, no. 4 (November 2012), 433–44.
- <sup>5</sup> Bertha L. Gilbert, "Tuskegee Choir Opens Her Eyes to Negro Music," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 25, 1934. Note: I have corrected "pianissimo" and "undescribably," found in the original.
- <sup>6</sup> See Eugene Thamon Simpson, *Hall Johnson: His Life, His Spirit, and His Music* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 5–25.
- <sup>7</sup> H.H., "Music," *New York Times*, February 10, 1933.
- <sup>8</sup> "Tuskegee Choir: Negro Group Gives Concert for Forum in Academy of Music," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, February 10, 1933.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas B. Sherman, "Classical Records: Mozart Magic," *St. Louis (Missouri) Post-Dispatch*, December 5, 1955.
- <sup>10</sup> For more on this topic, see Gwynne Kuhner Brown, "Gender in the Life and Legacy of William Levi Dawson," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 73, no. 3 (Fall 2020), 754–63.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Tuskegee Institute Choir Sings Spirituals*, Westminster Recording Co., WM 18080, 1955. The album can be heard on YouTube. Vernon Huff writes perceptively about "There Is a Balm in Gilead" in *Choral Journal* 59, no. 10 (2019), 23–4.
- <sup>12</sup> Elinor Hastings Foster and Arthur Shaw, quoted in Johnson, 137 and 139.
- <sup>13</sup> Foster, quoted in Johnson, "The Contributions of William L. Dawson," 137.
- <sup>14</sup> William L. Dawson, handwritten biographical notes ca. 1973, William Levi Dawson Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.
- <sup>15</sup> Huff illuminates Dawson's originality by comparing four of his spiritual arrangements to earlier printed versions in "William Levi Dawson (1899–1990): Reexamination of a Legacy," *Choral Journal* 59, no. 10 (May 2019), 20–32.
- <sup>16</sup> William L. Dawson, "Interpretation of the Religious Folk-Songs of the American Negro," *Etude* (March 1955), 61.
- <sup>17</sup> The concept was first theorized by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- <sup>18</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012), 212.
- <sup>19</sup> Marti Newland Slaten provides thoughtful consideration of the ongoing relevance of respectability politics for HBCU choirs in "Sounding 'Black': An Ethnography of Racialized Vocality at Fisk University" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014).
- <sup>20</sup> Mark Hugh Malone provides a detailed, succinct overview of encoded messages in spirituals in *William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023), 84–8.
- <sup>21</sup> Dawson, "Interpretation of the Religious Folk-Songs of the American Negro," 61.
- <sup>22</sup> Cecile was named among the country's "best dressed women" in *Ebony's* May 1963 issue.
- <sup>23</sup> Jeannie Gayle Pool, *American Composer Zenobia Powell Perry: Race and Gender in the 20th Century* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 93.
- <sup>24</sup> Quoted in Johnson, "The Contributions of William L. Dawson," 151.
- <sup>25</sup> Caroline Gebhard, "Ghosts of Tuskegee," in *Ralph Ellison in Context*, ed. Paul Devlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 25–8.
- <sup>26</sup> Quoted in Johnson, "The Contributions of William L. Dawson," 143.
- <sup>27</sup> Malone, *William Levi Dawson: American Music Educator*, 151.
- <sup>28</sup> Undated speech, William Levi Dawson Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Quoted in Vernon Huff, "William Levi Dawson: An Examination of Selected Letters, Speeches, and Writings" (DMA thesis, Arizona State University, 2013), 36. Huff transcribes the full handwritten speech as Appendix A, 59–67.