

EMILY ABRAMS ANSARI

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“Vindication, Cleansing,  
Catharsis, Hope”: Interracial  
Reconciliation and the Dilemmas  
of Multiculturalism  
in Kay and Dorr’s *Jubilee* (1976)

On the night of November 23, 1976, an unusually diverse audience arrived at the City Auditorium in Jackson, Mississippi for a much-anticipated premiere. Commissioned by local black opera company Opera/South to celebrate the US Bicentennial, *Jubilee* was the work of a white librettist, Opera/South director Donald Dorr (1934–2011), and an African American composer, Ulysses Kay (1917–95). Dorr had based the opera’s narrative on a 1966 novel of the same name by Jackson author Margaret Walker (1915–98), which depicted her great-grandmother’s experience of slavery, lynching, emancipation, and Reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to previous Opera/South performances, which had involved only black soloists, *Jubilee* called for a diverse cast. The 2,460 audience members present that night watched as both black and white professional leads took the stage, as well as three choruses of students drawn from historically black Jackson State University and Utica College, and from the historically white Millsaps College.<sup>2</sup> For a city that had witnessed some of the United States’ worst race-related violence and for a nation trying to find a way to move beyond recent social, political, and economic turmoil, this operatic examination of slavery offered a much-needed demonstration of the possibilities of interracial collaboration and reconciliation.

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Although the opera is little known today, *Jubilee's* depiction of Southern life in the nineteenth century is significant and unusual in the operatic canon because it directly confronts the terrible history of slavery without succumbing to straightforward racial binaries. The opera succeeds on these terms because both its librettist and composer approached their artistic choices with great nuance and sensitivity, choosing elements from Walker's long and detailed novel that created a coherent narrative with a contemporary message. In his music, Kay employed a diverse range of historically appropriate musical forms and quotations, including church hymns, spirituals, folk tunes, and ragtime, wrought with his accessibly tonal, if chromatically inflected style.<sup>3</sup> Dorr's narrative is centered on Vry, a slave born in Georgia to John Dutton, a white plantation owner, and his black slave Sis Hetta. Each act explores a significant period of nineteenth-century history: first the final years of slavery, then the Civil War, and finally Reconstruction. Denied the right to marry Randall, a black freeman and staunch abolitionist with whom she has a child, Vry makes plans to escape with him, but is caught en route to their meeting place. At the end of the first act, she is flogged for her disobedience, while another slave, Mandy, is hanged. Randall does not return and by act 2 Vry, believing him dead, has married a politically moderate field-hand, Innis. Meanwhile as the Civil War rages, Vry's half-sister Lillian, the only surviving owner of the plantation, succumbs to madness. Act 3 depicts the now-free Vry and Innis living happily in an Alabama home of their own, where Vry is celebrated by a chorus of black and white locals for her work as the community's midwife. Into this scene arrives the long-lost Randall, angry with Vry for deserting him all those years ago and for living among whites by choice. She shows him the scars of her flogging to prove her thwarted attempt to escape, but chooses ultimately to remain with Innis to continue their peaceful new life together. (For Dorr's own synopsis, see the appendix below.)

Dorr and Kay's *Jubilee* enacted a symbolic reconciliation between black and white Americans, both on and off stage, in response to a particularly fraught period in US social history. In so doing, the work bore witness to the birth of a new political ideology, multiculturalism, which also strongly influenced the US Bicentennial celebrations for which *Jubilee* was commissioned. The social turbulence that *Jubilee* was meant to address was especially evident in Jackson, Mississippi, where Opera/South premiered the work. During the 1960s, Mississippi's long history of violent racism had drawn thousands of civil rights activists to Jackson. The Freedom Rides, sit-ins, voter registration drives, and Freedom Schools they organized frequently resulted in brutal retaliation from white supremacists.<sup>4</sup> Tensions between black and white Mississippians were further exacerbated by the 1963 shooting of civil rights activist Medgar Evers, slain on the doorstep of his Jackson home. In May 1970

the city made international news yet again when two were killed and many more injured during a police crackdown on students protesting racial intimidation at Jackson State University.<sup>5</sup>

Dorr and Kay's *Jubilee* responded to these shocking local developments, but also to a climate of crisis that beset the United States as a whole in the early to mid-1970s. In addition to widespread interracial conflict and rioting, the combined impact of the US defeat in Vietnam, a deepening economic crisis, and the shocking revelations of Watergate produced what contemporary social commentators described as "a long night of paralyzing self-doubt" in which traditional American "optimism and moral drive" was replaced with "deep-seated cynicism and disillusionment."<sup>6</sup> American citizens on both the political right and left were increasingly losing faith in their government's abilities to address their concerns, reconsidering their commitment to a shared national vision.<sup>7</sup>

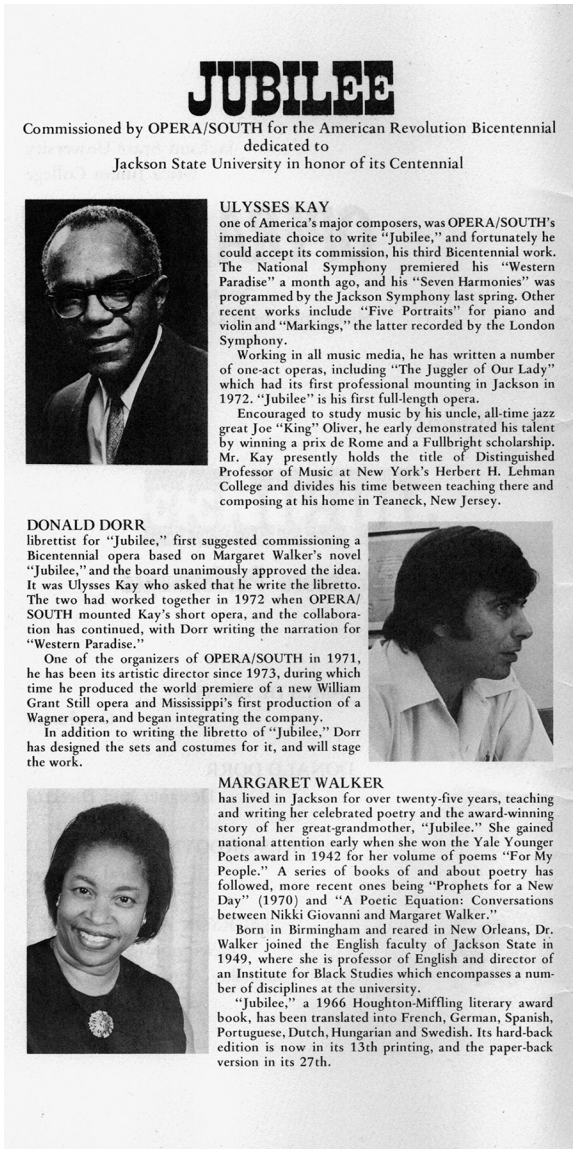
Against this background, disengaged Americans, and especially minority populations, voiced loud opposition to the conventionally nationalistic, centralized Bicentennial party initially planned for Philadelphia in 1976. For example, Representative Charles Rangel, who is African American, put it in these terms: "If the Bicentennial is some kind of self-congratulatory celebration, it is frivolous and meaningless to the black community."<sup>8</sup> Bicentennial organizers quickly realized they would have to find alternative ways to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the nation's founding if they wanted to achieve their goal of helping "to draw [Americans] together again."<sup>9</sup> To this end, in December 1973 Nixon disbanded the federal agency set up to orchestrate the Bicentennial and created a new organization, the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), which would bestow responsibility for selecting and funding projects to local Bicentennial organizations. This system allowed the ARBA to devote most of its resources to small-scale and grassroots projects focused on local history and ethnic narratives in order to bring "dissidents as well as neighbors and friends together in common purpose."<sup>10</sup> In so doing, as Christopher Capozzola has argued, organizers helped advance a new understanding of American identity that celebrated racial and cultural diversity, hoping to reduce the growing conflict between local and national identities.<sup>11</sup> It was in this context that the Mississippi American Revolution Bicentennial Committee (MARBC) approved the transfer of \$10,000 of funding from Washington to commission an opera based on Walker's *Jubilee*, a novel that dealt with Southern black history.

While the ARBA's decision to celebrate local and racial history was thus a reaction to the challenging sociopolitical environment, it also reflected the growing influence of a new ideology, increasingly promoted by white liberals and the black middle class. Multiculturalism, as this ideology would soon be known, was seen by these groups to represent the best

hope for building a peaceful and fair society against the background of the nation's long history of racial exploitation and discrimination. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which legally required a pluralistic education system, contributed significantly to the influence of multicultural ideas in the United States.<sup>12</sup> With newly integrated schools as a starting point, legislators began to imagine reconceptualizing workplaces in line with such values. This produced both the birth of affirmative action and an increased emphasis on individual racial and ethnic heritage.<sup>13</sup> In this context, multiculturalism can be defined as a philosophy that requires society to "recognize and respect, if not nurture, the diversity and integrity of racial and ethnic communities."<sup>14</sup> The term itself was not widely used in the United States until the late 1970s, but it nevertheless provides a more accurate description of this developing philosophy than similar terms that were more common at the time, including "multiethnic" and "pluralistic." Multiculturalists, unlike pluralists, were willing to criticize white Protestant culture if it enabled the full recognition and celebration of diversity at all levels of society.<sup>15</sup> *Jubilee* is analyzed here as an artistic exploration of the early stages of American multiculturalism, rather than simply civil rights values or postwar pluralism, because it embraces these new ideas.

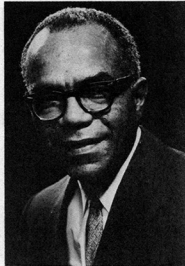
As interest in multiculturalism spread, so African American art and history began to be more widely recognized as a potential mechanism for examining national identity, rather than only racial identity. *Roots*, a novel (1976) and TV miniseries (1977) by African American author Alex Haley, has typically been understood as the most significant outcome of this development: for the 130 million viewers who tuned in to watch this epic drama about slavery, a black narrative became an American narrative. Scholars assessing the reasons for *Roots*' success argue it encouraged audiences to examine their "roots" as an alternative to exceptionalist nationalism, which was growing increasingly unfashionable.<sup>16</sup> Yet *Roots* was not responsible for creating the new interest in identity and genealogy and identity, as some at the time believed: rather its success derived from a widespread need for a new approach to issues of identity in the mid-1970s.<sup>17</sup> Defining a sense of personal identity in terms of familial, racial, and local histories helped Americans of the 1970s to build a feeling of community—both with fellow citizens of the present and with their ancestors—which had of late been sorely lacking.<sup>18</sup>

Dorr and Kay's *Jubilee*, which was completed before the publication of *Roots*, demonstrates that these new ideas were also born out in the world of high art. Like Haley's work, the opera offered a slave narrative that responded to the combined effects of the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, and widespread social instability.<sup>19</sup> In so doing, *Jubilee* provides another powerful mechanism to interrogate the nationwide reassessment of the relationship between racial and national identity



# JUBILEE

Commissioned by OPERA/SOUTH for the American Revolution Bicentennial dedicated to Jackson State University in honor of its Centennial



**ULYSSES KAY**

one of America's major composers, was OPERA/SOUTH's immediate choice to write "Jubilee," and fortunately he could accept its commission, his third Bicentennial work. The National Symphony premiered his "Western Paradise" a month ago, and his "Seven Harmonies" was programmed by the Jackson Symphony last spring. Other recent works include "Five Portraits" for piano and violin and "Markings," the latter recorded by the London Symphony.

Working in all music media, he has written a number of one-act operas, including "The Juggler of Our Lady" which had its first professional mounting in Jackson in 1972. "Jubilee" is his first full-length opera.

Encouraged to study music by his uncle, all-time jazz great Joe "King" Oliver, he early demonstrated his talent by winning a prix de Rome and a Fulbright scholarship. Mr. Kay presently holds the title of Distinguished Professor of Music at New York's Herbert H. Lehman College and divides his time between teaching there and composing at his home in Teaneck, New Jersey.

**DONALD DORR**

librettist for "Jubilee," first suggested commissioning a Bicentennial opera based on Margaret Walker's novel "Jubilee," and the board unanimously approved the idea. It was Ulysses Kay who asked that he write the libretto. The two had worked together in 1972 when OPERA/SOUTH mounted Kay's short opera, and the collaboration has continued, with Dorr writing the narration for "Western Paradise."

One of the organizers of OPERA/SOUTH in 1971, he has been its artistic director since 1973, during which time he produced the world premiere of a new William Grant Still opera and Mississippi's first production of a Wagner opera, and began integrating the company.

In addition to writing the libretto of "Jubilee," Dorr has designed the sets and costumes for it, and will stage the work.



**MARGARET WALKER**

has lived in Jackson for over twenty-five years, teaching and writing her celebrated poetry and the award-winning story of her great-grandmother, "Jubilee." She gained national attention early when she won the Yale Younger Poets award in 1942 for her volume of poems "For My People." A series of books of and about poetry has followed, more recent ones being "Prophets for a New Day" (1970) and "A Poetic Equation: Conversations between Nikki Giovanni and Margaret Walker."

Born in Birmingham and reared in New Orleans, Dr. Walker joined the English faculty of Jackson State in 1949, where she is professor of English and director of an Institute for Black Studies which encompasses a number of disciplines at the university.

"Jubilee," a 1966 Houghton-Miffling literary award book, has been translated into French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Hungarian and Swedish. Its hard-back edition is now in its 13th printing, and the paper-back version in its 27th.



Figure 1. Opera/ South *Jubilee* program booklet, excerpt, 1976. Ulysses Kay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. Used with permission.

that took place in the United States during the 1970s. In the first section of this article I explore the ways in which the changing times affected the creators of *Jubilee*, considering the factors that led a self-proclaimed "black opera company" and a composer who had previously avoided racial referents in his music to create a multiculturalism-inspired opera about slavery.<sup>20</sup> I then examine in detail the dramatic and musical features

of *Jubilee* that promote multiculturalism, using previously unconsulted sources from the personal papers of its creators to assess the work's message for Jackson, Mississippi, and the United States as a whole.<sup>21</sup> Yet ultimately Dorr and Kay's operatic promotion of interracial understanding is not quite as straightforward as they likely intended. In the third section I demonstrate that *Jubilee* actually presents two conflicting models of multiculturalism, thus revealing some of the many challenges and compromises posed by this ideology. Both the opera itself and the interracial collaboration that produced it therefore serve to illuminate the complex and sometimes highly problematic ways in which nationalism, national identity, and multiculturalism interact in the United States.

### *Shifting Ideologies of Race*

The multicultural orientation of *Jubilee* represented a new direction for all those involved in its creation. Before *Jubilee*, Kay, Dorr, and the founders of Opera/South all subscribed to a similar approach to racial politics, which grew out of key tenets of racial uplift ideology. Examining how they made this journey—from an uplift-inspired universalism to a musical promotion of multiculturalism—provides a means to elucidate changing attitudes toward race during the 1970s and helps contextualize the unusual work they created together. Dating back to the early 1800s, racial uplift ideology was brought to a larger audience at the beginning of the twentieth century by Booker T. Washington. Its supporters sought to better the situation of African Americans by increasing access to education and professional opportunities traditionally reserved for white Americans. This, it was hoped, would increase the dignity, self-affirmation, and independence of African Americans and help grow the black middle class. It would also reduce racism, as white Americans witnessed African Americans achieving in fields they respected. Although such well-meaning attitudes certainly helped to create many opportunities for African Americans, they also illustrated the extent to which American racism had embedded itself in society: after all, racial uplift ideology was rooted in a Eurocentric image of respectability that effectively implied that African Americans would be best served by adapting to white norms.<sup>22</sup>

While Kay's interest in modern musical techniques distinguished him from earlier uplift-inspired artists, who tended to emphasize tradition, he did absorb an important feature of the ideology. This was the idea of universalism, often promoted by supporters of racial uplift. Historian John Higham defines American universalism as "simultaneously a civic credo, a social vision, and a definition of nationhood" that permits citizens to foreground their own unique identities under an umbrella of shared national values. Such a philosophy encourages all citizens to

claim equal rights and aspire to social mobility and personal renewal.<sup>23</sup> In the arts, as Marc Gidal has argued, universalism has typically meant emphasizing individualism rather than the similarities that specific social groups share.<sup>24</sup>

Kay expressed his universalism in several ways: by repeatedly denying the influence of race upon his music; by avoiding racial referents in title choices and stylistic decisions; and by resisting racial typecasting by accentuating his individuality as a composer. Born in Tucson, Arizona, in 1917, Kay described a childhood in which race was de-emphasized. As an interviewer reported in 1969, Kay told him that in Tucson, "racial tensions are not as great as in the South and elsewhere. [Kay] said that as a child he played with white children, with Mexicans, with Orientals. It was, he said, a different environment than that to which most blacks are exposed."<sup>25</sup> In this context, drawn to music by the success of his uncle, the jazz cornettist Joe "King" Oliver, Ulysses ultimately followed in the footsteps of his mother, an amateur pianist, and pursued classical music. When interviewers asked Kay about his decision to avoid jazz, he said only that he had never had any real feeling for improvisation.<sup>26</sup> Initially contemplating a career as a music teacher, Kay began training at the University of Arizona but soon switched to composition. As he pursued further studies at the Eastman School of Music and Columbia University, his teachers included Howard Hanson, whose "idealism" he strongly admired, and Paul Hindemith, whose notions of *gebrauchsmusik*, he said, rubbed off on him, but in a "tenuous" way.<sup>27</sup> He thought little about issues of race in music as a young composer, he said, focusing instead simply on improving his craft: "There was just so much to learn, so much music. . . . I was being formed aesthetically. . . . I was so involved with technique."<sup>28</sup> Out of these early experiences Kay created a musical style that Nicolas Slonimsky dubbed "enlightened modernism," combining a strong lyrical instinct with a sometimes highly dissonant tonal language.<sup>29</sup> His best-known works are for traditional ensembles, including orchestral pieces *Of New Horizons* (1944) and *Markings* (1966); religious and patriotic choral works such as the *Song of Jeremiah* (1945); and chamber music, notably for wind and brass. He also composed two one-act operas—*The Boor* (1955) and *The Juggler of Our Lady* (1956)—before the three-act *Jubilee*.

Kay's decision to keep race out of his music may have been influenced in part by another significant mentor: William Grant Still. Although he never taught Kay, Still met several times with him while he was a student. In these meetings, according to Kay, Still helped inspire his decision to become a composer.<sup>30</sup> Still is today best known for his *Afro American Symphony* (1930), a work that Gayle Murchison has interpreted as an expression of his profound commitment to the ideals of the Harlem Renaissance and to racial uplift.<sup>31</sup> Yet Still did not believe

African American composers should always feel obligated to reference race in their music: he consistently emphasized that he had retained “the freedom to compose within the Negro idiom when I wanted or to compose abstract music.”<sup>32</sup> Although Still utilized racial referents in his music throughout his career, in the mid- to late 1930s when Kay met Still the older composer had begun to profess his interest in seeking a more “universalism idiom” to help him express “[his] own individuality as a composer.”<sup>33</sup> Only when every citizen and group is recognized for his or her uniqueness, Still said, “will [we] have a society that is well integrated—in which all of us will be working for the common good.”<sup>34</sup>

Kay’s attitudes show many similarities with Still’s universalist declarations, although universalism influenced his music more consistently than it did that of Still. In the privacy of his diary, Kay voiced his frustration with American audiences who expected a black composer to explore race-related themes. After giving a talk for New York’s Negro History Week in 1949, he described Harlem Renaissance patron Carl Van Vechten’s surprise that he had “passed over historical aspects of the Negro in music.” Kay was irritated by the assumption that he would contextualize himself in a history of black composers, writing, “I feel that too much time and energy are wasted in rehashing past accomplishments.” He said he was more interested in present and future developments in black music, closing with a statement that echoes Still: “In spite of the ghetto-factor in this society (and that makes it *very* difficult), we must strive first for an *honest personal* statement in art; then aspire to universal statement.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, for Kay, the best way to overcome racial typecasting was not to politicize one’s music by marking it racially, but rather to strive for success by simply attempting to contribute meaningfully to one’s chosen artform. Occasionally Kay would speak publicly about his lack of interest in racialized themes and his quest for an individual voice: in one speech he described himself as “a Negro, but . . . *not* a ‘Negro composer’ in quotes. Why should I limit myself with this tag or label?” he said. “A tag or label is typical of methods and thinking in this time, and they are wrong. So I am a Negro who composes, and my ambition is to be a good composer and in that way to make my contribution.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite his efforts, though, Kay was racially typecast throughout his career and repeatedly labeled with reference to his race until he died in 1995.<sup>37</sup> Kay’s situation bears some similarities with that of nineteenth-century composers of art music born outside of Western Europe, who were caught, as Richard Taruskin has argued, in a “double bind.”<sup>38</sup> Branded musical nationalists simply because they came from places that did not have a history of canonical contributions, composers like Antonín Dvořák were pressured to reference folk tunes in their music. When they did so, however, they usually restricted themselves to the second tier, because the category of “great composer” was reserved for

those who aspired to universal communication. Gayle Murchison has also used the phrase “double bind” to describe W. E. B. Du Bois’s understanding of the longstanding conundrum faced by African American artists, who had long been obliged to choose between writing music that would be appreciated by fellow African Americans and music that would be respected by a “‘larger audience’ outside the race.”<sup>39</sup> Kay’s choice was to opt for universalism to avoid the career-limiting effects of marking his music racially but, in so doing, he gave up the increased performance opportunities that would have come from fulfilling societal expectations.

In preferring individualized expression to content with shared racialized meaning, Kay was quite typical of black classical composers of his generation, including Hale Smith (1925–2009) and George Walker (1922–), and also a number of black jazz musicians. As Ingrid Monson has pointed out in her examination of mid-century jazz, those musicians who rejected typecasting by embracing aesthetic modernism were making as much of a political statement as those who chose to engage overtly with race in their music.<sup>40</sup> Kay’s interest in modernism carries similarly political implications, yet in combination with his universalist stance it created a paradox. Certainly Kay offered an important challenge to existing stereotypes by attempting to make space for himself within a career previously restricted to whites. Yet in so doing he was unable to challenge the continued dominance of European-derived cultural traditions in the United States.<sup>41</sup> Such were the dilemmas faced by African American musicians interested in classical music in the twentieth century.

Before he wrote *Jubilee* in his late fifties, Kay composed only two works that might be seen to engage with the politics of race. The first was a score to the 1948 documentary *The Quiet One*, which examined the life of a neglected African American child.<sup>42</sup> Yet despite the protagonist’s racial identity, director Sidney Meyers and narration writer James Agee made no reference to race in the film, presenting their work as a critique of urban poverty. Kay similarly chose not to employ musical references to African American musical traditions in his score.<sup>43</sup> The second case is one of Kay’s best-known works: *Markings* (1966). This was a “symphonic essay” inspired by the writings of Dag Hammarskjöld, a Swedish diplomat and United Nations Secretary General from 1953 to 1961. Hammarskjöld died in a plane crash under mysterious circumstances en route to the Congo in 1961, where a crisis was escalating. He was widely admired for his contributions to decolonization, suggesting a possible political reason for Kay’s interest. Yet once again, Kay’s description of the piece and the man that inspired it do not speak overtly to decolonization or black liberation but rather dwell on personality: “Mr. Hammarskjöld always impressed me as a man of conscience; supremely knowledgeable, cultured and sensitive.”<sup>44</sup> In both these cases Kay engaged with material

that was charged with the politics of race but chose not to emphasize this aspect of the work's content, either verbally or musically.

As a self-described black opera company, Opera/South put far more emphasis on race than did Kay. Yet the attitudes of the company's founders were also strongly influenced by both uplift ideology and universalism, seeking to bring the perceived benefits of high art to African American performers and audiences. Opera/South came into being in 1971, the brainchild of one of the most important white organizers of black opera, Sister Mary Elise (1898–1982). As a young woman, Sister Elise had abandoned her burgeoning career as an opera singer to enlist with the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, a religious institute that focuses its efforts on the religious education of black and Native American peoples while seeking to “challenge the deeply rooted injustice in the world today.”<sup>45</sup>

Sister Elise's retirement took her to Jackson, Mississippi, and in 1970 she approached three historically black Mississippi higher education institutions—Tougaloo College, Utica Junior College, and Jackson State University—with the idea of mounting a joint production of Verdi's *Aida* that would feature student and professional African American singers.<sup>46</sup> Her community-centered company was chartered as Opera/South in 1971. According to former Opera/South Director Ben Bailey, Sister Elise hoped the company would help demonstrate that the American South was not a cultural backwater, as some believed, but in fact was bursting with musical talent, specifically black operatic talent.<sup>47</sup> Sister Elise went on to found several other major black opera companies, including Opera Ebony in New York in 1974 and Opera North in Philadelphia in 1984.<sup>48</sup> All were established to grant African Americans access to artistic experiences previously denied them. Her overarching goal, as Sister Elise herself put it in uplift-inspired language, was to bring “the beauty of music to blacks.”<sup>49</sup>

The appointment of Donald Dorr to Opera/South precipitated a change in direction for the company, beginning the move away from Sister Elise's uplift philosophy. Sister Elise recruited Dorr in 1971 from New Orleans Opera to direct *Aida*. His wife, Dolores Ardoyno (1921–2012), who had been publicity officer for the same company, was hired to advise on marketing.<sup>50</sup> Both Dorr and Ardoyno stayed with the company, helping it gain its charter and then staging *Turandot* the following year. Meanwhile Opera/South decided to extend its promotion of African American musicians to include composers. In November 1972 the company staged two one-act operas: William Grant Still's *Highway 1, U.S.A.* (1942) and Ulysses Kay's *Juggler of Our Lady* (1956). Kay and Dorr met for the first time at the *Juggler* performance and, according to Dorr, there was “a spark right away.”<sup>51</sup> Ardoyno recalls that one of the many things the two men had in common was “catholic” tastes in music.<sup>52</sup>

During the following year a conflict arose between Dorr, Ardoyno, and Sister Elise over accounting methods. When the company's other board members—representatives of the three participating colleges—refused to oust Dorr and Ardoyno, Sister Elise resigned.<sup>53</sup> In 1973 the board promoted Dorr to the position of artistic director and Ardoyno to the role of general manager, making them the most important figures in the company's day-to-day operations.

As they began to imagine a major event for the Bicentennial, Dorr, Ardoyno, and the Opera/South board talked of the need for a narrative with "real meaning for our area, and particularly for black Americans."<sup>54</sup> Yet Dorr did not wish to create a "black opera" as the genre had typically been construed: indeed, he found most works in this category highly problematic.<sup>55</sup> What was needed, Dorr believed, was a work that did two important things. First, it should celebrate black history and culture authentically, in a context that recognized the complexity of the African American past while avoiding the kinds of stereotypes that had beset "black operas" like Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935).<sup>56</sup> His concerns are apparent in letters to Kay from 1974 and 1975: "At least we're writing *out of* the South, and not *about* it. . . . I think that makes a difference. But I guess the people who think *Porgy* would be so 'right' for Opera/South will never understand why it's so wrong."<sup>57</sup> Second, the opera should not consider black history and culture separately from white culture but rather alongside it. Dorr's goal, he said, was to create not a "black opera" but rather an "American opera."<sup>58</sup>

Dorr's vision required Opera/South to break with its conventions as a "black opera company" and employ a cast made up of both black and white singers. As he told me in an interview, the story of *Jubilee* is not just a story about and for African Americans, but rather a "part of all our experience as Americans." Its narrative is important for the nation as a whole, he said, because "we have all experienced racism": that is, Americans share a need to confront and grieve the history of black suffering.<sup>59</sup> Dorr's descriptions of the goals of *Jubilee* and the reorientation of Opera/South that the work required illustrate a shift in white liberal attitudes toward black history and its place in US historical narratives. In his conception, African Americans are best served not simply by being granted opportunities to participate in traditionally white cultural activities, but by a much more deliberate incorporation of their history and culture into the national culture.

A more detailed understanding of the company's new philosophy can be obtained from descriptions of *Jubilee* used for publicity and funding applications. These documents, written by Dolores Ardoyno, echo and expand upon Dorr's stated intentions for the opera. For example, in a letter to the National Committee of the Bicentennial Era to explain the opera's potential contribution to the Bicentennial, Ardoyno wrote that in

retelling and rethinking American history [for the Bicentennial] and the ideas and people that have made this a great nation, we need to tell the vital part of that story played by Black Americans. They came to this country for the most part against their will and in bondage, but even so, they brought with them their distinctive cultural heritage, their deep spirituality, and the considerable gift of their labor, one of the bases of America's early growth and strength.<sup>60</sup>

Here *Jubilee* is presented as a much-needed examination of black contributions to US culture and history. In the same letter, Ardoyno argues that opera represents a particularly useful vehicle for this kind of effort. Of course, she writes, jazz is the art form that

comes to mind most readily . . . but jazz is only one part of [African Americans'] music, and music is only one part of their culture. Black Americans also brought their own dance patterns, their own poetic rhythms, their own store of fables and their own folklore. And they lived their own history. Each of these offers a valid way to tell their story. The one form that combines them all—their songs, their voices, their bodies, their poetry, their beliefs, and their actual history—is opera. Of course, no such opera existed.<sup>61</sup>

Yet celebrating black culture was only one element of *Jubilee*. Although the work was centered on the life of the slave-heroine Vyry, Ardoyno's publicity materials explained that it also offered a sympathetic portrayal of Vyry's white half-sister, Lillian. In one press release, Ardoyno wrote that Lillian "provides a poignant and compassionate contrast in the impact war and reconstruction makes on blacks and whites."<sup>62</sup> By emphasizing the suffering and humanity of one of the opera's white characters, Dorr and Ardoyno make clear both their commitment to avoiding an oversimplification of the moral complexities of the Civil War period and their desire to make *Jubilee* an American opera that transcended racial stereotypes.

Dorr's ambitious goals for *Jubilee* meshed well with those of Bicentennial organizers. In early 1975 the Mississippi American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (MARBC) approved a grant of \$10,000 for Opera/South.<sup>63</sup> With the motto "Honor the Past and Mold the Future," which already implied that the organization was interested in using the celebrations to present new social models, the MARBC determined in its first meeting in 1972 that its goal would be "to make every effort to secure the involvement of all Mississippians in the Bicentennial."<sup>64</sup> By the middle of 1975 such efforts were given further urgency when a directive was sent down from Washington to give "special consideration . . . to projects relevant to or including participation by youth, minority and ethnic groups to ensure their participation [in the Bicentennial],"

with additional funding offered to those states that could demonstrate they had put emphasis on these populations.<sup>65</sup> The MARBC responded with a detailed list that included ten “black-related Bicentennial projects,” ranging from a festival for Phyllis Wheatley, “the first black poet in America,” to a University of Mississippi symposium on slavery, to the creation of new parks in black neighborhoods. Opera/South’s *Jubilee* is also on the list and described as “one of the largest grants made by the Mississippi Commission.”<sup>66</sup> In a self-conscious reaction to their state’s history in the realm of race relations, Mississippi organizers were thus especially keen to emphasize their commitment to African American-oriented projects, as part of a nationwide emphasis on the history of racial minorities during the Bicentennial year.

Given his longstanding aversion to race-related themes in his music, it initially seems surprising that Ulysses Kay chose to accept Opera/South’s commission, especially given that Walker’s novel repeatedly referenced black music styles, which he must have realized would need to be referenced musically in the opera. According to Kay, however, his perspective on race and music had begun to change during the decade before *Jubilee*. As early as 1968 Kay was describing a change in his self-conception, saying in an interview, “Not until five years ago or so . . . did I ever think of myself as a Negro.”<sup>67</sup> Kay later asserted that *Jubilee* further precipitated this change in self-conception. Responding to questions after a lecture at Harvard in 1988 he did not repeat his mantra about his racial origins being irrelevant to his musical style but instead replied, “All is not lost as far as Uly Kay and the ethnic side, because out of opera has come rebirth.”<sup>68</sup>

Two major factors were likely at play in this shift. The first, of course, was the civil rights movement, which had a significant effect on all African Americans during the 1960s—the decade in which Kay said he began much more overtly to self-identify in terms of race. Kay was more aware than most of the intricacies of the movement because his wife was deeply involved in it. After living quietly into her mid-thirties as a middle-class daughter, wife, and mother, Barbara Kay was profoundly moved by press coverage of the burning of buses carrying Freedom Riders in 1961. So great was its impact that she felt compelled to leave her young family in the care of her husband and parents and go south. Over the course of the next five summers she joined the Selma and Meredith marches, participated in Freedom Rides, organized protests, and gave interviews and lectures. Coincidentally, given the location of *Jubilee*’s premiere fifteen years later, her first freedom ride took her from Montgomery, Alabama, to Jackson, Mississippi. She was arrested upon arrival in Jackson and spent over six weeks in various Mississippi jails, including forty-one days in the infamous Parchman Penitentiary. Back home in New Jersey Kay organized what she believed was the North’s first sit-in, responding

to de facto segregation within the local school system. Kay and other protesters spent the night of February 1, 1962, in Englewood City Hall, leading to her arrest and two weeks incarceration. After her release she organized and ran a “freedom school” in various neighbors’ basements, enabling local African American children, including her own, to boycott their schools.<sup>69</sup> During this period the Kay family was monitored and occasionally visited by the FBI: the bureau’s file on Kay describes her as both “dangerous” and “an anarchist.”<sup>70</sup> Barbara had quickly become a significant figure in the movement—one of the many unsung women who toiled behind the scenes to bring about its many remarkable victories. Her actions and experiences no doubt affected her husband’s attitude toward racial politics.

Yet although Ulysses supported his wife’s work emotionally and financially, he did not himself have any interest in becoming a civil rights activist, nor did he support the Black Power movement of the 1970s. In this context, a second and possibly more significant reason for his “rebirth” suggests itself—a change that made it possible for a universalist composer to imagine engaging with racial politics in an overt way for the first time. This was the rising interest in multiculturalism among the black and white middle classes who made up his friendship circle, his audiences, and his colleagues and students at Lehman



Figure 2. Barbara Kay, Freedom Rider mugshot, July 2, 1961. Archives and Records Division, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Used with permission.

College, New York, where he taught from 1968 to 1988. For Kay, these new attitudes must have been hugely liberating. Multiculturalism's "politics of equal recognition" offered him the chance to escape his "double bind" because it allowed him to explore his racial heritage when he wished to without being typecast as a "black" or "negro" composer.<sup>71</sup> A piece that engaged with black music or history, in this new context, could be understood to contribute to American culture, rather than only African American culture. As Dorr wrote to Kay, an opera by an African American composer that explored black history might now be received as an "American opera" rather than merely an exotic, stereotype-reinforcing "black opera."

Growing interest in multiculturalism not only influenced the way Kay thought of himself, his aesthetic, and his artistic contribution. It also had an impact on the approach to US history that he and Dorr adopted, as they contemplated an opera about slavery. According to historian Joyce Appleby, multiculturalists face many challenges in dealing with history. For them, she argues, history "is not a succession of dissolving texts [as it is for postmodernists], but a tense tangle of past actions that have reshaped the landscape, distributed the nation's wealth, established boundaries, engendered prejudices, and unleashed energies."<sup>72</sup> The conception of history and nation that Appleby articulates here—anti-exceptionalist and respectful of the moral complexity of the varied experiences of different groups of citizens—matches precisely the way in which Kay, Dorr, and Opera/South understood their own goals and those of the Bicentennial opera they would create together.



Figure 3. Ulysses Kay, 1979, credited to Mary Gail Walker. Ulysses Kay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. Used with permission.

### *A New Multicultural Nationalism*

As an early multicultural text, *Jubilee* engaged in an active conversation about race and nationalism at the time of the US Bicentennial. Almost every major decision made by Dorr and Kay reveals their commitment to creating an opera that promoted racial tolerance, challenged stereotypes, and confronted past injustices honestly, ultimately depicting an ideal vision of a United States in which all citizens are able to live peacefully and respectfully alongside one another. Such efforts began at the level of character development, where Dorr selected and modified from Walker's novel both empathetic and morally repellent characters of both races. The compassionate presentation of Lillian, described above, is a major part of this effort, permitting a strong emphasis on the shared suffering and humanity of the two female leads. As Dorr told journalists, the ways in which the half-sisters Lillian and Vyry "attempt to work out their individual freedom is the nexus in the dream of and for America that we all share."<sup>73</sup> Lillian's fiancé, Kevin, is also a sympathetic white character, showing that Dorr and Kay were unwilling to engage in a history of slavery that vilified all Southern whites. In act 1 the tenor Kevin expresses his concerns about the Confederate attitudes that were fast making war an inevitability: "I know no man who is my enemy. I desire no man's life . . . They [the Confederate armies] believe they are fighting for God. I don't believe! It's property they fight for." Although Kevin does not articulate an opposition to slavery, by questioning the Confederacy's position—a courageous act for a white living in the antebellum South—he demonstrates that not everyone within the planter class believed it appropriate to fight to uphold Southern institutions. Kay orchestrates Kevin's questioning of Confederate values with urgent, chromatic eighth notes doubled in the bassoons and low strings—a setting that helps emphasize his perspective (see ex. 1).

John Dutton stands at the other end of the morality scale from Lillian and Kevin, embodying the deeply embedded racism of most plantation owners. In the opening scene, John gives a Christmas speech to his family, workers, and slaves, thanking them for performing their "yearly tasks . . . both well and faithfully." The score's performance instructions suggest a "laborious" presentation of this recitative to make clear that the words are "obviously Lillian's prepared verse"—that is, a speech that the more caring Lillian has written for her father to give. Kay's music encourages the listener to distrust the slave owner's motivations, accompanying his words with just a pedal tone in the double basses and two rumbling timpani (see ex. 2). This ominous orchestration recurs whenever John or another white character expresses racist attitudes or persecutes the slaves, marking it as a signifier for racism. Other examples occur later in the same scene, when white planters sing of the arrogance of "free niggers," and in

Example 1. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, act 1, scene 1, 4 measures before reh. 60 (all *Jubilee* examples come from the Carl Fischer score and are used with permission).

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line for Kevin (treble clef) and the orchestral accompaniment for Bsn. (bass clef), Vcl. (bass clef), and Cb. (bass clef). The vocal line includes the lyrics "I know no man who is my" and features a triplet of eighth notes. The second system shows the vocal line for Kevin (treble clef) and the orchestral accompaniment for Cb. (bass clef). The vocal line includes the lyrics "en - e - my; I de - sire no man's life..." and features a triplet of eighth notes. A rehearsal mark [60] is placed at the end of the second system.

act 1, scene 3, when a white preacher proclaims that Mandy, a slave who has allegedly tried to poison Dutton, will be put to death.

Yet even John Dutton is not consistently portrayed in a negative light. After his opening speech, he agrees to the marriage of Lillian and Kevin, "welcoming" Kevin "to his daughter's hand." After he sings to them "may the heaven's bless you!" the orchestra responds with a warm and assertive fanfare cadence, expressing his love in sound (see ex. 3). By using John and Kevin to demonstrate that wealthy Southern whites could be as capable of familial love and pacifist attitudes as murderous racism, Dorr and Kay make clear their refusal to typecast slave owners as evil.

Just as the white characters possess both laudable and despicable traits, the black characters also command varying degrees of sympathy from the audience. There are three black leads: Vvry; Randall, who is a free man and Vvry's lover; and Innis, a slave who becomes Vvry's husband when Randall fails to return. Each responds very differently to the situations she or he faces. Vvry, the heroine of the tale, is the most rounded character. The opera provides an intimate examination of the range of emotions elicited by her experiences, first as a suffering slave and later as a liberated free woman. Randall's character is also multifaceted, encouraging the audience to experience a mixture of feelings toward him. His passionate love for Vvry in the first scene is appealing, while his response to her enslavement denotes an attitude that audience members would have associated—either positively or negatively—with the contemporary Black Power movement.

Example 2. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, act 1, scene 1, 3 measures before reh. 38.

*Meno mosso* (♩ = 80)

John

It sound-ed like the an - gels was out - side \_\_\_ and we in the Big House came

Orchestra

*Timp.*  
*p*

*Vcl.*  
*p*

*poco accel.*  
*poco f*

Mandy

Be - tide! \_\_\_ A - ha! \_\_\_

John

right a - long \_ to see what did be - tide! \_\_\_ Your

Orchestra

*Sus. Cymb.*  
*p*

*Sn. Drm.*  
*mp*

John

year - ly tasks you have all per - formed both well and faith - ful - ly;

Orchestra

*Timp.*

*Tri.*  
*p*

In a secret church meeting in scene 2, Randall incites the slaves to violence, singing, “Arise, arise and arm yourselves—fight the devil with his fire—God will be true, though every man a liar!” He repeatedly urges Vyry to run away with him, even as she tells him that doing so would require her to abandon their son, who would be too slow to run, while also putting her own life in grave danger. In the last act, discovering Vyry living in a peaceful Reconstruction community of whites and blacks, Randall expresses his horror that Vyry would choose to live alongside “white folks, nigger lords.” In ultimately rejecting Randall’s violent, separatist attitudes—despite her profound love for him—Vyry chooses a peaceful multiculturalism over black nationalism. Vyry’s response to Randall’s criticisms further clarifies

Example 3. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, act 1, scene 1, 4 measures before reh. 48.

John

Lil-li-an, may the heav-ens bless you!

Orchestra

Vlns.

Bsn.

Trb.

Tamb. (shake)

Vla.

Vcl. & Cb.

Hrn. & Trpt.

*poco f*

*mp*

*p*

*f*

*damp*

*molto*

48

her nuanced perspective on race: white children cry just like black children, she tells him, and “hell ain’t gwine to have jus’ white folks in it.”

Meanwhile, Kay’s musical choices reveal that his commitment to promoting multiculturalism through *Jubilee* was as strong as Dorr’s, even though he wrote almost nothing about it in their correspondence. Kay’s approach to setting the choruses is particularly revelatory, placing a strong emphasis on the similarities between black and white Americans. While Walker’s novel opened with a grueling and detailed description of John Dutton’s long-term sexual abuse of Vvry’s mother, the opera begins at Christmas time, “the happiest time of year” on the plantation, according to the corresponding chapter in Walker’s novel.<sup>74</sup> Following a four-bar orchestral introduction we hear two carols back to back, the first sung by the white landowners and the second by the slaves.

“Where Run Siloa’s Water’s Cool” is a Christmas carol for the Dutton family and their guests, newly composed by Kay to imitate the style of hymns heard in European American Christian churches. The words describe the journey of the shepherds on Christmas Eve.<sup>75</sup> According to the stage directions, while the carol fades away we hear from offstage “a clear tenor leading a spiritual in the slave quarters.” The slaves then sing the well-known spiritual “Rise Up Shepherds an’ Foller.”<sup>76</sup> Dorr suggested that Kay use these racially differentiated opening numbers to “immediately define” the “social gulf” between the two groups, perhaps by contrasting a “whiney, thin sound” in the white chorus with a “strong tenor from the [slave] ‘quarters.’”<sup>77</sup> Yet Kay employs a very different approach. His setting of “Siloa” is far from “whiney” and “thin.”

Instead it carries the full resonance of a Bach chorale, employing homophonic choral writing decorated with lyrical pastoral countermelodies in the woodwinds (see ex. 4). The spiritual that follows begins with a syncopated call and response pattern, immediately marking the song as African American. Significantly, Kay ties the two hymns together with a three-note motif of a falling and rising third. This motif is employed for the final words of “Rise up Shepherds” and the first words of the spiritual, and recurs throughout both hymns (see ex. 5).

By beginning with a pair of hymns that are both about the journey of the shepherds to Christ’s birth and by unifying them musically, Kay makes the audience immediately aware that these two racial groups share religious beliefs, respectability, and a commitment to their own community—similarities on which a better relationship might potentially be built. At the same time, however, by setting the juxtaposed hymns in styles authentic to these two peoples, Kay celebrates the uniqueness of each culture. Through such musical decisions, Kay shows his desire to advance a new understanding of American history through *Jubilee*, and a new vision for the future.

Kay’s use of the chorus to both interrogate and celebrate black and white traditions reaches its apex in the lynching scene; act 1, scene 3. Here, crowds gather to celebrate the Fourth of July and to watch the beating of the runaway Vvry and the hanging of the slave Mandy—her punishment for allegedly attempting to poison the master. This scene

Example 4. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, act 1, scene 1, m. 4.

The musical score for Example 4 is divided into two main sections: Chorus and Orchestra. The Chorus part is at the top, featuring a vocal line with lyrics and a bass line. The lyrics are: "Where run si-lo-a's wa-ters cool — Where Ke-dar's des - erts frown,". The tempo is marked "Allegretto" with a quarter note equal to ca. 92. The time signature is 4/4. The Orchestra part is below, including Flutes and Oboes (Fls. & Obs.), Clarinet (Clar.), Bass Clarinet and Bassoon (B. Clar. & Bsn.), and Horns (Hrns.). The dynamic marking for the woodwinds is *mf* (mezzo-forte), and for the Horns, it is *p* (piano). The score shows the first four measures of the piece, with a first ending bracket over the first measure of the Chorus part.

Example 5. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, act 1, scene 1, 3 measures before reh. 4.

Tenor Solo  
Dere's a

Chorus  
Up - on the hills of Is-ra-el!

Orchestra  
Fls. & Clar.  
Obs.  
B. Clar. & Bsn.  
Solo Vlns. & Vla.  
Solo Vel. & Cb.  
Solo Clar.  
Hrns.  
Sn. Dr.

*f*  
*mf*  
*ppp*

Moderato (♩ = ca. 80)

Tenor Solo  
star in the Eas' on Chris' mas - morn

Chorus  
Rise up shep-herd an' fol - ler.

Orchestra  
Solo Ob.  
Vlns. & Vla.  
Solo Clar.

*mf*  
*poco f*  
*p*  
*ppp*

serves as a dramatic apotheosis that forces the audience to confront directly the cruelest and ugliest sides of antebellum society. Dorr's bold decision to stage a lynching in *Jubilee* was motivated by his intentions for the work's message. As he wrote to Kay in 1974, he hoped the scene would serve "not as an unmasking of hypocrisy (by definition maybe unconscious and thereby amenable to moral enlightenment) but descriptive of a human condition that needs redemption bitterly."<sup>78</sup> In other words, he hoped to use the scene to draw the audience's attention to the humanity of all involved, including slaves, poor whites, and white planters, and show their desperate need for healing, which they shared with Americans of the 1970s. In conceptualizing this scene, which was intended to force the audience to examine their values, Kay told Dorr he would seek a "Verdian eloquence."<sup>79</sup>

Several months later, Dorr suggested they might use the *auto-da-fé* in Verdi's *Don Carlo* as a source of inspiration.<sup>80</sup> Like the lynching in *Jubilee*, Verdi's execution scene marks the opera's climax, featuring a chorus whose members justify capital punishment by invoking nationalism and religion with a "grandiose self-righteousness," Dorr said. He told Kay he was profoundly inspired by Verdi's ability to make his audience susceptible to the crowd's emotional power: "the anthems of the mob are big in memory but not the song the prisoners sang—so easily seduced! So human! So poor! So—damned."<sup>81</sup> Dorr must have hoped that the execution scene in *Jubilee* would, like that in *Don Carlo*, encourage audiences to think hard about how easily they too might be incited to violence with encouragement from their community. Dorr and Kay frequently referred to Verdi as a source of inspiration for *Jubilee*, perhaps because of his ability to present historical narratives that resonated with contemporary events and societal challenges.<sup>82</sup>

Utilizing a yet more complex structure than Verdi's *auto-da-fé*, the lynching scene in *Jubilee* presents three separate groups in parallel, offering a multicultural reading of American history. These racially separated choruses—two white and one black—each represent a distinct nineteenth-century Southern subculture, thereby creating powerful visual and musical juxtapositions. The first group to enter, the white planters, is followed by a group of poor whites, and finally the black slaves. Singing against a backdrop of "patriotic paraphernalia" for the Fourth of July, the three choruses help the audience understand both the tragic outcomes of specific belief systems and the ways in which very different social and racial groups have contributed to shaping American national identity.<sup>83</sup>

The scene begins with a patriotic song, "Awake Columbia, Arise!" sung by the chorus of white planters. The song of the social elite is a rousing anthem—homophonic with straightforward harmonies and rhythms. Kay's orchestral accompaniment emphasizes the song's triumphalism,

using wind instruments to double the vocal lines and a string accompaniment built on commanding arpeggios and repeated sixteenth notes (see ex. 6). This setting echoes the style and effect of the nationalistic choral anthem that begins the *auto-da-fé* in *Don Carlo*. In the text of Kay's hymn, Columbia, who traditionally personifies the United States, is urged to "put on thy strength anew" in order to defend liberty and defeat evil. These words have many layers of meaning in this context: they speak to white Southerners' desires to defend themselves in their imminent war against the Yankees; they provide a patriotic justification for the death penalty about to be inflicted; and, at the same time, they resonate ironically with the slaves' quest for liberty.

While the planters continue their anthem, the poor whites arrive to sing a second song in a very different mood, titled "Goober Peas." The text reminds the listener that the white poor were also exploited, thereby complicating any attempts to divide persecutors and victims on the basis of race. Marked with the performance instruction "darkly and sinister," the song of the poor whites describes the immense challenges this population faced during the nineteenth century and their profound resentment of the planter class: "Big man got his darky slave to keep him at his ease; Buckra got his living made eating goober peas." "Goober peas," or boiled peanuts, were a staple for poor Southerners, becoming for many their sole food source during the Civil War. The traditional Southern folksong "Goober Peas" was clearly the inspiration for Kay's newly composed chorus, which wryly describes the recurring threat of starvation endured by the white poor in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>84</sup> Kay's composition

Example 6. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, act 1, scene 3, reh. 101.

The musical score for Example 6, rehearsal 101, is presented in three systems. The first system is for the Chorus (Planters), featuring a vocal line with the lyrics "A - wake Co - lum - bia, a - rise! put \_ on thy strength a - new!" and a bass line. The second system is for the Orchestra, including parts for Oboe (Obs.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Flute and Clarinet (Fls. & Clar.), and Violins and Violas (Vlms. & Vln.). The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *p*, and performance instructions like *leggiero* and *pizz.* The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and the time signature is 4/4.

shares the 6/8 meter of the original folksong and, although his melody mostly differs from the folk tune, he imitates it in his setting of the three words both songs share, “eating goober peas” (see exs. 7a–b). In referencing white suffering in these ways, this song adds another layer of moral complexity to the scene’s depiction of nineteenth-century Southern life.

Finally the slaves enter and bring a third song to the multicultural mix: the popular traditional hymn “Flee as a Bird to the Mountain.” Inspired by Psalm 11 and likely chosen by Dorr because Margaret Walker cited it as a chapter epigraph in her novel, this hymn articulates the call for redemption that Dorr said was key to this scene, urging those who are “weary of sin” to go the “fountain” that is Christ’s forgiveness for cleansing and protection. On the surface, the song encourages Mandy and Vvry to seek salvation and a release from their suffering in Christ. According to Dorr, the hymn’s music can be traced back to a Mennonite hymnbook used during the “religious turmoil” of the sixteenth century. “How the transposition [to the United States of the nineteenth century] came about we may never know,” Dorr told a journalist, “but certainly the sentiment links all humanity and all ages that stand under persecution.”<sup>85</sup> In terms of the opera’s narrative, the song might also be understood as a veiled reminder from the slaves to the Christians perpetrating the lynching that they will ultimately require divine forgiveness for this lynching, through a hymn that was also popular in white churches during this period.<sup>86</sup>

Kay avoids granting particular prominence to any one of the three choruses now singing simultaneously, using the orchestra simply to double the various vocal lines and thereby ensure their equal representation within the sonic palette. The choruses remain on stage to witness what follows, serving as a constant reminder that such punishments would not have come about without widespread support. As the hymns come to a close the white preacher lists Vvry’s and Mandy’s crimes, speaking

Example 7a. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, act 1, scene 3, reh. 102, m. 15.

Chorus

goo-ber, goo-ber, goo-ber, eat-in' goo-ber peas!

accel.

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a chorus. It consists of two staves, a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 6/8. The melody is written in the treble clef. The lyrics are: 'goo-ber, goo-ber, goo-ber, eat-in' goo-ber peas!'. There are some performance markings, including a fermata over the final note and the word 'accel.' above the staff.

Example 7b. “Goober Peas,” in J. Silverman (arr.), *Songs of the Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), final four measures.

Chorus

Good-ness how de-li-cious, Eat-ing goo-ber peas!

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a chorus. It consists of a single treble clef staff. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 6/8. The melody is written in the treble clef. The lyrics are: 'Good-ness how de-li-cious, Eat-ing goo-ber peas!'. There are some performance markings, including a fermata over the final note.

his judgment rather than singing it. While he urges the two women to repent, the white chorus members imitate his abandonment of song, angrily shouting, "Kill the black bitches! Hurry and kill—that's what we came here for!" At this moment, Vvry sees a vision of Randall, who urges her to open the "golden door" to freedom. The planter chorus once more interjects with "Awake Columbia, Arise!," reemphasizing the nationalistic spirit in which these two punishments are taking place and forcing the audience to consider the problematic origins of conventional American nationalism. The same abhorrent juxtaposition is at play when sounds associated with the Fourth of July—according to the score's instructions, a "peal of bells, firecrackers and huzzas"—are added to the sound palette just as the trap falls and Mandy is hanged. Opera/South manager Dolores Ardoyno told me she had never forgotten the shock that rippled through the Jackson audience as the bottom fell out from under the scaffold on the night of the premiere.<sup>87</sup> The moment of Mandy's death is accompanied only by the orchestra in a *feroce* confusion of recurring melodic fragments, woodwind trills, a fast rising scale in the strings, *sforzando* brass chords, and tremolo cymbals (see ex. 8). At the same time, according to the staging instructions, "a door appears to open to Vvry, bathing her in golden light." Briefly, she sings of her hope that this is the "golden door to freedom" about which the vision of Randall has just sung. When a man with a whip steps through this door and begins to beat her as the curtain begins to fall, therefore, Vvry's dreams of freedom are both literally and symbolically destroyed.

In this brutal scene Dorr and Kay honestly commemorate the darkest chapter of Southern history, creating a moment of dramatic catharsis in which a nation's grief is laid bare. The moment recalls Ralph Ellison's description of the blues—a style, he says, that expresses "an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it."<sup>88</sup> Dorr and Kay "fingered" the "jagged grain" of slavery without flinching, while making space for marginalized American voices from both sides of the color line to be brought into the national narrative.

### *The Contradictions and Compromises of Multiculturalism*

Dorr and Kay hoped that their nonstereotyped, nonsimplified exploration of collective memories of the Jim Crow South would demonstrate that American national identity could be reconceptualized. By creating a work that celebrated the United States for its diversity and difference while refusing triumphalist and exceptionalist narratives, they mirrored the goals of Bicentennial organizers. Yet Dorr and Kay were not simply writing to suit the needs of their funders. Their willingness to depict



the most terrible outcomes of slavery, and thus encourage interracial reconciliation through painful and difficult catharsis, demonstrates that they were willing to take risks in presenting their challenging message.<sup>89</sup> As Benedict Anderson has argued, most nations subscribe to a mythic understanding of their origins that involves selective remembering.<sup>90</sup> *Jubilee* challenges this kind of nationalism, refusing to “downgrade” slavery, as Dorr put it, yet also refusing to demonize white Americans. Paraphrasing Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, Dorr said the opera would show “malice towards none, with compassion for all.”<sup>91</sup> The use of music to encourage this kind of engagement with a shared past has long been a feature of African American culture, where, as Samuel Floyd puts it, “the ‘memory’ drives the music and the music drives memory.”<sup>92</sup> Dorr and Kay acknowledge and utilize this African American tradition in *Jubilee*, adapting it to help their audience explore American history with the nuance, humanity, and respect that defines multiculturalism.

Nevertheless, multiculturalism was then and remains today a social ideal fraught with contradictions, especially in the United States. In the final scene of *Jubilee*, Dorr and Kay, likely unintentionally, made some of these complexities particularly apparent. On the surface, the scene offers a culminating celebration of multiculturalism. Vvry is living freely and peacefully among both black and white neighbors, illustrating the (unfortunately short-lived) promise of Reconstruction for African Americans. In a move that recalls the combining of previously racially separated choruses in William Grant Still’s 1940 cantata *And They Lynched Him on a Tree*, the three choruses are now fused into one to represent Vvry’s community members, who greet each other across racial lines using respectful titles such as “Missis” and “Miz.” Following this, Vvry rejects Randall’s expressions of anger toward whites: as Opera/South publicity materials put it, “even in a hostile time and place [Vvry] refuses to hate . . . , [turning] her skills, her love, and her faith toward becoming an asset to her community.”<sup>93</sup> Although she allows her son to leave with Randall in search of an education, Vvry herself chooses peace-loving Innis and their multicultural community over Randall, her first great love. The opera ends with a tranquil domestic scene, set to pastoral wind solos that resolve to a long E major chord in the strings (see ex. 9). Dorr believed this ending offered redemption for the characters and for the United States at large, which the audience had thirsted for throughout:

So now Act III. Vindication, cleansing, catharsis, hope. . . . And *Jubilee*—little people, in a little southern town, but with such a dream! Such sins, but what a thirst for grace! To end, finally, at Evensong.<sup>94</sup>

Thus the opera’s conclusion, and Dorr’s reading of it, presents a vision of an ideal multicultural community where diverse peoples live together respectfully, at peace with their past and hopeful about what lies ahead.

Example 9. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, final 9 measures.

Vryr croons: "Come biddy, biddy, biddy, biddy  
Come chick, chick, chick, chick, chick..."

Ob. Solo

Fls.  
Clar. *mp*  
Bsn. *mp*  
B. Clar. *mp*  
Vlns. *p*  
Clar. Solo *mf*  
B. Clar. Solo *mp*

72 Adagio (♩ = ca. 60) CURTAIN

Hrn. (sord.)  
Clar. *dim. sempre*  
B. Clar. *dim. sempre*  
Marimba Solo *dim. sempre*  
Vln. I *mf*  
Vln. II *mf*  
Vla. *dim. sempre*  
Vcl. *mf*  
Timp. *pp*  
Cb. *mf* *pp*

Yet the model of multiculturalism presented here differs significantly from that promoted elsewhere in the opera. The nature of the contradiction is clarified by examining one important musical choice: the decision to employ ragtime music in this final scene. Dorr described the opera's ending not only as the moment where catharsis is at last obtained, but also as the culmination of a specifically musical journey:

The whole opera sort of capsulizes American music—from the black musicians playing the parlor music of the opening up through the splendors of the spiritual at its maturity and on into the incipient

rag of the final act. Not that it's a "History of American Music", but—the fact is that music *did* change and this can justifiably be a part of *Jubilee's* subliminal plot outline.<sup>95</sup>

This "capsulation" of American music serves to symbolize the African American journey to freedom. Thus the first scene features a black fiddler playing European folk music—a slave obliged to perform in the musical language of his owners—but also spirituals sung by the black choruses. These spirituals, used throughout the opera, serve as a constant reminder of African American efforts to retain their cultural uniqueness, making them musical sites of resistance to white oppression. Finally, according to Dorr's narrative, the evolution of black music ultimately brings us to ragtime. Described in the stage directions as "the beginnings of a new music," early ragtime is referenced at the moment when black and white neighbors greet each other in the syncopated melody of the chorus and accompanying offbeats in the orchestra. The solo on-stage fiddler from the first scene is also incorporated into the final scene's evocation of this nascent style (see ex. 10).

So did Dorr and Kay reference ragtime here merely to provide music-historical authenticity, since the beginnings of ragtime coincided with the Reconstruction era? Or did its presence at the moment when the black and white choruses combine for the first time carry a message? During the period in which Dorr and Kay wrote *Jubilee*, ragtime was undergoing a revival in popularity. Its promoters during the 1970s saw it as "a fully American phenomenon," as Jeffrey Magee puts it, because of its amalgamation of European forms and African rhythms.<sup>96</sup> The style featured heavily in Bicentennial diversity promotions, with Scott Joplin receiving a special posthumous Bicentennial Pulitzer Prize for his contributions to American music.<sup>97</sup> Kay was likely especially familiar with ragtime: his uncle "King" Oliver had bound all Joplin's sheet music for himself long before the revival.<sup>98</sup> Widely understood as a symbol of an American identity that fused the best of both black and white traditions, ragtime would have seemed ideal for a scene in which black and white communities combine.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the style's symbolic associations are somewhat fraught, as Susan Curtis reminds us in her biography of Joplin, evoking ideas of racial fusion, but also a history of white appropriation of black culture.<sup>100</sup> This latter aspect of the style might be understood to undermine the optimism of the opera's final scene.

Most significantly, ragtime's history as a symbol of racial hybridity makes this closing scene particularly problematic because everything heard previously in the opera celebrates cultural uniqueness and difference. What we are witnessing here is a conflict between two different models of multiculturalism, which are described in detail by social theorists Christian Joppke and Steven Lukes. The first seeks a kind of

Example 10. Ulysses Kay, *Jubilee*, Act 3, reh. 17.

17 Allegretto (♩ = 112)  
(severely)

*mf* How do, to you! —

*mf* Miss-is Med - ford, Miz Mac-key —

*mf* How do to you! —

*mf* Miss-is Med - ford, Miz Mac-key —

Violin I (Solo)

Orchestra

Ob. 1  
Clar. 1  
Hrn. & Trb.  
Bs. Clar.  
Bsn., Vcl., & Cb.

How do

How do

Morn - in', morn - in', Miss-is Brown —

How do to you!

Violin I (Solo)

Orchestra

Clar.  
Fl. & Ob.

“mongrelization,” encouraging a fusion of cultures.<sup>101</sup> The ending of *Jubilee*, with its fused chorus and its references to ragtime, seems to promote this model. In so doing, however, the scene contradicts the second model of multiculturalism, which dominates the rest of the opera, an ideology that encourages individual cultures to retain their own distinct characteristics. Dorr and Kay promote the second model particularly overtly in the many chorus numbers heard before the final scene: the white choruses consistently sing hymns, folksongs, and patriotic pieces from the European and European American traditions while the black choruses sing spirituals and religious music associated with the black church. The respectful aural coexistence and even celebration of these varied traditions throughout the opera is very different from the visual and aural fusion of cultures that we experience in the closing scene.

Of these two models of multiculturalism, it was the “mongrelized” type celebrated in this final scene that began to dominate the American political conversation during the mid-1970s, the result of a series of difficult compromises. According to Gary Peller, US multiculturalism was the creation of “a loose coalition of ‘moderate’ African Americans [and] liberal and progressive whites” who, despite having much in common ideologically, were increasingly divided by black nationalists’ efforts to promote self-determination. Their compromise, Peller argues, came in the form of an unspoken agreement to present black nationalism as the moral equivalent of white nationalism. This meant that the many black nationalists who sought to use race consciousness to build national solidarity were ignored or downplayed, so that all racial nationalists could be branded dangerous and violent. By marginalizing those who believed the United States would benefit most from a nationalism that celebrated difference, Americans were able to reduce interracial violence, but the establishment of this ideology has required painful concessions, mostly on the part of minority populations. In a society that promotes a public engagement with national identity but a private engagement with racial or ethnic identity, African Americans and other minority populations are effectively obliged to subscribe to a monocultural national identity largely defined by white Americans.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, although the ending of *Jubilee* seems to offer a peaceful resolution to the opera’s racial oppositions, it also reveals the internal conflict that American liberals faced in seeking a way to celebrate racial difference while opposing racial nationalism. A colorblind model of multiculturalism is supposed to help create a society with less interracial conflict. Yet where cultural difference is deemphasized, minority populations and their important role in American history and culture are easily marginalized. Such choices have proven particularly egregious when it comes to black culture and history, given the United States’ urgent need to confront honestly the terrible history of slavery. Meanwhile, other minority groups

such as the Native American peoples have also suffered from the late twentieth-century tendency to gloss over the most unattractive chapters of US history in order to perpetuate a celebratory national narrative. Like many American multiculturalists of the last half-century, Dorr and Kay endeavor in *Jubilee* to confront the United States' history of black oppression while celebrating the uniqueness of African American culture *and* the shared features of American culture. What the opera reveals, however, is that past and present contexts make these goals almost impossible to accomplish simultaneously.

### *Conclusion: "A Symbol of Healing"*

While it evokes the immense challenges posed by American multiculturalism, *Jubilee* nevertheless stands as an ambitious and unusual operatic attempt to encourage interracial reconciliation. Metaphors that evoked this widely felt need for reconciliation, particularly references to healing, pervaded the social conversation during the 1970s. Choosing a title for his autobiography in the early 1980s, Gerald Ford described his 1974–77 presidency as *A Time to Heal*. Looking back on the Bicentennial celebrations in their final report, organizers described the many social divisions that needing healing: "We entered the Bicentennial year having survived some of the bitterest times in our history. We cried out for something to draw us together again."<sup>103</sup> The idea of healing and reuniting also pervaded media responses to Bicentennial events, as Christopher Capozzola has noted.<sup>104</sup> He cites as an example this evocative prose from the *Birmingham News*: "America turned the corner Sunday on a self-induced illness of the spirit and stretched its psyche in a burst of national joy and celebration."<sup>105</sup> For contemporary social commentators, therefore, Bicentennial programming helped the United States to begin to recover from its many ailments.

*Jubilee* continues the black tradition of using music, as celebrated civil rights musician Bernice Johnson Reagon has written, to "nurture and heal ourselves."<sup>106</sup> Healing also underlay Dorr and Kay's collaboration, challenging both race-related oppositions and what Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr. refers to as the dialectic of the "urban North" and the "agrarian South" by bringing together an Arizona-born black living in New Jersey and a white Chicago-born Mississippian to create an opera for supposedly "uncultured" Mississippi.<sup>107</sup> Dorr's dramatic choices for *Jubilee*, especially the combining of black and white choruses in the final act, similarly showed audiences that even in Mississippi, black and white Americans could work together to explore their shared past honestly and create a uniquely American cultural experience. Musically, too, the work attempted healing by bringing racially separated musical traditions into conversation with one another and, at the end of the opera, into a kind of fusion. In so doing Kay differentiated himself from white composers like Ives, Ravel, and Cop-

land, who, as Lawrence Kramer has argued, imbued the sounds of black music “with an aura of distance,” thereby essentially “enclos[ing]” it.<sup>108</sup> Kay refused to hold either black or white musical traditions at a distance when juxtaposing their diverse modes of expression.

Beyond dramatic and musical choices, Dorr believed that the act of performing *Jubilee* would have an immensely positive effect on his fractured community, simply by bringing black and white Mississippians together as audience members to explore their shared past. As he wrote to Kay in an evocative letter just months before the premiere,

Do you realize—stupid question!—the incredible spectacle of whites and blacks coming together to celebrate—celebrate as did the Greeks a common grief, a catharsis, through the power of your music? Orpheus! Consider that during the holy season of their plays all Greeks laid by their animosities and met as brothers—and in this created a glory that outlasts any of their warring cities.<sup>109</sup>

Dorr was correct in anticipating that the performance of *Jubilee* would constitute a “cathartic” moment for Jackson. Indeed, many critics in attendance found themselves quite captivated by the powerful sight of an integrated Southern audience enthralled by an opera about slavery. An unnamed critic for the *New York Times* described precisely the outcome that Dorr had intended:

#### A Symbol of Healing

The event was obviously more than an artistic success—which it was. It was a social gathering of Mississippians of different groups in a way unthinkable here just a few short years ago. More important, perhaps, the operatic vehicle was in a way a final release for the blame and acrimony, the cause and effect, of the event more than 100 years ago—the Civil War—that has been a burden on the lives of three generations of black and white Mississippians.<sup>110</sup>

Like the *Times* reporter, critics from local newspapers similarly understood that “the social consequences of the event were perhaps as important as the cultural benefits,” as the *Jackson Reporter* put it. That paper’s review extolled the presence of “blacks and whites in almost equal numbers” in the audience, dubbing *Jubilee* “the crowning achievement of Opera/South in its quest to fill a cultural void in our area while also raising a biracial social consciousness in the pursuit of the arts.”<sup>111</sup> *The Tennessean* meanwhile waxed poetic on the boldness of the opera’s ambitions and the breadth of its achievements:

That what was so recently submerged in the great American subconscious should be the subject of opera, and that that opera should premiere in the heart of a region where men once died to preserve the institution of slavery, says something about the distance blacks

and whites have come, and about the transformational powers of time and art.<sup>112</sup>

For critics at the premiere, therefore, *Jubilee* was not simply a narrative of black history. Rather it explored a difficult chapter in Southern history that was of national importance, thereby serving an important social role in the time and place of its first performance.

Opera/South's approach to its second performance of *Jubilee* in 1977 was also a very deliberate attempt to promote healing through multiculturalism. On this occasion the company opted for a colorblind approach to race by casting a white singer for the part of Vyry and a black singer for the part of Lillian. Dorr said this choice was significant "in what we meant as Opera/South—in the sense of our commitment to people of all textures, if you will, and races. It was a noble, noble experiment, and I think that given the travails of Jackson State University—and of Jackson at that time—it was: it brought us a sense of concord and beauty."<sup>113</sup>

With its examination of both the history of slavery and the challenges of multiculturalism, *Jubilee* has the potential to resonate as much with contemporary American audiences as it did with Mississippians of the 1970s. Unfortunately, however, the opera has not been staged since its two performances by Opera/South in 1976 and 1977. At least in part its neglect owes to novelist Margaret Walker's decision to withdraw her support for the opera in 1978.<sup>114</sup> That year Opera/South had begun to plan a televised production with Mississippi Educational Television. Letters to the television company indicate Walker threatened to litigate if filming went ahead, deterring the other opera companies that had expressed an interest in staging *Jubilee*, even though Kay and Dorr were convinced that they alone held the performance rights.<sup>115</sup>

In all likelihood, however, there are other significant factors that have contributed to the marginalization of both *Jubilee* and its composer. As multicultural ideology has moved into the mainstream over the past decades, the optimistic vision of its possibilities presented by Kay and Dorr has not come to fruition. Unlike several other nations with a history of racial persecution, the United States has not undertaken a deliberate national effort to confront past wrongdoing, which countries like South Africa and Canada have pursued in the hopes of building a truly egalitarian society out of the ashes of a fundamentally unequal one. Indeed, American multiculturalism has suffered from the very contradictions that *Jubilee* evokes, superficially celebrating cultural difference while demanding that racial identity always remain secondary to national identity. In this context, although American citizens still urgently need artistic products that can help them confront their nation's past honestly, American opera-goers are much more likely to see a work like *Porgy and Bess* on their opera stages than one that offers a realistic, and thus more painful, engagement with black history. Mean-

while the music of universalist black composers like Kay, Hale Smith, and George Walker is largely ignored by symphony orchestras in favor of works like Still's *Afro-American Symphony*, which fulfills the expectations of primarily white audiences members regarding the music of "black composers," utilizing "exotic" references to black music styles within the familiar stylistic packaging of the Western art music tradition. One wonders whether Kay's refusal to subscribe to such stereotypes has contributed to his music's neglect. Certainly his Bicentennial opera leaves behind many important questions. Do multiculturalism's benefits in terms of social cohesion require that minority cultures de-emphasize their uniqueness in order to create more unifying, hybrid identities? Does multiculturalism, despite its purported promotion of diversity, ultimately favor the majority culture? *Jubilee* cannot answer these questions, but it does encourage us to contemplate them, while offering a space to confront, grieve, and celebrate the diverse experiences and cultures that created the United States.

### Appendix

Donald Dorr's Synopsis of *Jubilee*, from the Program for the Premiere

#### Act 1

Christmas Eve, 1859: Guests gathering to celebrate at John Dutton's Georgia plantation are delighted to learn of his daughter Lillian's engagement to young school teacher Kevin MacDougall. Another marriage has been prohibited; Vyry Dutton, John's daughter by his slave mistress, may not lawfully marry Randall Ware, a freeman of color to whom she has borne a son. While Christmas cheer—and war talk—fill the air, Randall surreptitiously pleads with Vyry to escape north with him, but she rejects any plan which would leave her son, Jim, behind. Alone, Vyry vows that her freedom must begin with her son's.

July 1860: Vyry has at last agreed to flight. Randall, waiting for her at a clandestine church meeting, urges the assembled slaves to insurrection. Discovered, the meeting is bloodily put down. Randall escapes, believing Vyry has failed in her promise to him, unaware that, on her way to him, she has been captured. In a concluding Fourth of July tableau, featuring the public hanging of a slave accused of poisoning her master, Vyry is viciously flogged as a runaway.

#### Act 2

Spring 1865: War sweeps across the South. Kevin has been killed in battle; Lillian and Vyry alone remain of the Duttons. The plantation is overrun by federal troops, who proclaim freedom—the year of Jubilee—to the few remaining slaves, among whom is Innis Brown, a fieldhand who has put aside thoughts of leaving to offer Vyry his protection. Lillian, reduced to destitution and savagely attacked by a looter, grows mentally disordered. With Jim also dependent on her, and having no trace of Randall Ware, Vyry consents to become Innis's wife.

#### Act 3

Summer 1870: At their new Alabama homestead, the hard search for independence in the backwash of war has created hostility between Jim and Innis, a great anxiety for Vyry. All seems peaceful, however, as neighbors arrive to fete

Vyry as their midwife and nurse—until Randall Ware bursts on the scene and demands his son. Vyry pleads for love and understanding, impetuously baring the scars of her flogging. At this evidence of long-borne suffering, reconciliation is effected. Jim leaves with his father for promised schooling; Vyry and Innis rely on maturing love to face an unknown but hopeful future.

## NOTES

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In May 2010, Donald Dorr and Dolores Ardoyno generously permitted me to view papers in their possession from their time at Opera/South and spoke to me at length about *Jubilee* and the company. Sadly Mr. Dorr passed away in 2011 and Ms. Ardoyno in 2012. Equally vital for this project were Virginia and Melinda Kay, who invited me to stay in their home for the purposes of examining their father's papers while they were still in their possession. Together we organized them for donation to Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Virginia Kay also provided intelligent and thoughtful feedback on the article as it evolved, found suitable photographs for me to use here, and answered many of my questions. Thanks also to Mildred Matthews for her assistance in Special Collections at Jackson State University. Marc Gidal, Glenda Goodman, and Carol Oja generously provided feedback on drafts of the paper and Alayna Jay and William Ashley Vaughan contributed invaluable research assistance.

1. From 1949 to 1979 Walker was a literature professor at Jackson State University (previously Jackson State College). *Jubilee* was her first novel, published in 1966 by Houghton Mifflin. Aside from *Jubilee*, which won her significant critical acclaim, Walker was also praised for her poetry, including the 1937 poem "For My People," an exploration of everyday black life that in 1941 was anthologized in Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis, and Ulysses Lee, eds., *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1966). Yolanda Williams Page, *Encyclopedia of African American Women Writers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 593.

2. Numbers of those present drawn from "Black Saga a Hit as Southern Opera," *Star News*, November 22, 1976, Ulysses Kay Papers (hereafter Kay Papers). I consulted Kay's papers when they were still the property of his family and therefore uncatalogued. In 2010 the Kay family donated these papers to Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library where they were recently made accessible to the public. The references below do not contain the box and folder numbers used in the Columbia collection. Opera/South had very occasionally used white singers, usually to boost chorus numbers. When they staged Verdi's *Otello* in 1974, a white singer was briefly brought in to sing Otello when Karl Gipson, the black tenor singing the role, fell ill. This created the unusual sight of a white Otello opposite a black Desdemona. Dolores Ardoyno, "Only Black Opera Company," *Sepia* 23 (November 1974): 64.

3. A handwritten score for *Jubilee* can be obtained from Carl Fischer, Inc. It is not available in any US libraries. There is no commercial recording available. A poor-quality tape recording of Opera/South performing the first scene, which was likely made during rehearsals for the first performance, can be found in Special Collections at Jackson State University. A play had been recorded over the remainder of the recording.

4. For more on this history see John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

5. See Tim Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1988).

6. "Bicentennial: Oh What a Lovely Party!" July 19, 1976, *Time*, quoted in John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 227. John B. Oakes, "Conscience of the

Nation," *New York Times*, November 11, 1975, quoted in David R. Farber, "The Torch Had Fallen," in *America in the Seventies*, ed. Beth L. Bailey and David R. Farber (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 11.

7. Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), xiv–xv. Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 206.

8. Rep. Charles Rangel, quoted in Christopher Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country": Celebrating the Bicentennial in An Age of Limits," in *America in the Seventies*, ed. Beth L. Bailey and David R. Farber (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 34–35.

9. American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA), *The Bicentennial of the United States of America*, 1:4, quoted in Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 228.

10. ARBA, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: A Final Report to the People* (Washington, DC: ARBA, 1977), 1:9, quoted in Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country," 32.

11. Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country," 38.

12. Daryl Michael Scott, "Postwar Pluralism, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Origins of Multicultural Education," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June 2004): 69–82.

13. Schulman, *The Seventies*, 68; David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 33.

14. Gary Peller, *Critical Race Consciousness: Reconsidering American Ideologies of Racial Justice* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), 100.

15. A. Gutmann, "Multiculturalism and Identity Politics: Cultural Concerns," *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Science*, <http://dx.doi.org.proxy2.lib.uwo.ca/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/04622-2>. Scott, "Postwar Pluralism," 82.

16. Stephanie Athey, "Poisonous Roots and the New World Blues: Rereading Seventies Narration and Nation in Alex Haley and Gayl Jones," *Narrative* 7, no. 2 (1999): 171; Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 184, 191.

17. Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country," 39.

18. Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 298–300.

19. Indeed, Margaret Walker thought the two novels so similar that she unsuccessfully sued Alex Haley for plagiarism in 1977. The judgment is available at [http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/people/tfisher/IP/1978\\_Alexander.pdf](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/people/tfisher/IP/1978_Alexander.pdf).

20. Opera/South publicity frequently used the descriptor "black opera company." See, for example, the rationale for *Jubilee* that accompanied a request for funding sent to Gary Knisely, a Bicentennial organizer. Dolores Ardoyno to Gary Knisely, July 28, 1975, Box 11, Folder "Bicentennial, 1975," Opera/South Collection (hereafter O/S Collection), Special Collections, Jackson State University, Jackson, MS.

21. Donald Dorr and Dolores Ardoyno's papers pertaining to their time at Opera/South are in the possession of Dolores Ardoyno. See n. 2 for information on Ulysses Kay's papers.

22. Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xiv, 3, 76.

23. John Higham, "Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique," *American Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1993): 195–219.

24. Marc Gidal, "Contemporary 'Latin American' Composers of Art Music in the United States: Cosmopolitans Navigating Multiculturalism and Universalism," *Latin American Music Review* 31, no. 1 (2010): 40–78.

25. Donald Delany, "Fame Elusive, Kay Tells Kids," *Sunday Times Advertiser*, Trenton, NJ, March 16, 1969, Kay Papers.

26. Ulysses Kay, "Ulysses Kay," recording of discussion from Harvard University Learning with Performers series, Quincy JCR, Harvard University, March 10, 1988, Lamont Morse Music and Media Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

27. Theodore Price, "A Very Personal Art," *People* (Rochester, NY), October 19, 1971; "A Song, A Singer, and Harps," *The Record* (Bergen, NJ), January 5, 1979, Kay Papers.

28. Kay, "Ulysses Kay."

29. Nicolas Slonimsky, "Ulysses Kay," *Bulletin of the American Composers Alliance* 7, no. 1 (1957): 3.

30. Musicologist Eileen Southern writes that Still "both inspired [Kay] and encouraged him to become a composer." Eileen Southern, *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 226. Kay describes in detail Still's influence upon him in "Ulysses Kay." In his letters to Still, Kay expressed his gratitude to the senior composer for his faith in his abilities. Ulysses Kay to William Grant Still, May 30, 1944, William Grant Still and Verna Arvey Papers, Box 27, Special Collections, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR (hereafter Still-Arvey Papers).

31. Gayle Murchison, "'Dean of Afro-American Composers' or 'Harlem Renaissance Man,'" *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 69.

32. William Grant Still, quoted in Charles Weisenberg, "In Serious Music Negro Impact Minimal," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1966, D11.

33. William Grant Still, "My Arkansas Boyhood," in *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in American Music*, 1st ed., ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1972), 81. Still's universalism is analyzed in Murchison, "Dean of Afro-American Composers."

34. William Grant Still to Richard Bardolph, October 15, 1955, Still-Arvey Papers, quoted in Murchison, "Dean of Afro-American Composers," 71.

35. Ulysses Kay, "Ulysses Kay Diary" (contains entries from 1949 to 1963), Kay Papers.

36. Ulysses Kay, notes for a speech, untitled and undated, Kay Papers.

37. As an example, compare this 1947 descriptor of Kay and one of his white colleagues: "Ulysses Kay, Negro student at Columbia University, and Earl George, a student at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, N.Y." "2 Students Share \$1,000 Music Prize: Ulysses Kay and Earl George Named Winners of 3d Annual Gershwin Memorial Contest," *New York Times*, January 29, 1947. A similar designation can be found in the various editions of the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. In the 1954 fifth edition of *Groves Dictionary*, Kay is listed as "American (Negro) Composer;" in the first edition of the *New Grove Dictionary* of 1980, Kay became a "black American composer;" and it is not until the second edition of the *New Grove* in 2001 that Kay received the nonracial descriptor "American composer."

38. Richard Taruskin, "Nationalism," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, <http://grovemusic.com>.

39. Murchison, "Dean of Afro-American Composers, 52."

40. Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19.

41. Lawrence Schenbeck has explored this paradox as it relates to uplift in general. Lawrence Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878–1943* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 6.

42. Distributed by Mayer and Burstyn. Available for viewing at [http://www.archive.org/details/the\\_quiet\\_one](http://www.archive.org/details/the_quiet_one). Kay created a suite based on the score that same year.

43. I have not located any interviews with Kay about the film. In his diary, he says only that he found it "a very beautiful and touching film." Kay, *Ulysses Kay Diary*.

44. Ulysses Kay, program notes for *Markings*, Kay Papers.

45. "Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament," [http://www.katharinedrexel.org/Sisters\\_of\\_the\\_Blessed\\_Sacrament.html](http://www.katharinedrexel.org/Sisters_of_the_Blessed_Sacrament.html).

46. Ben E. Bailey, "Opera/South: A Brief History," *Black Perspective in Music* 13, no. 1 (1985): 49. Hamilton Bims, "An All-Black Opera Raises Its Voice," *Ebony* 28, no. 4 (February 1973): 55–60.

47. Bailey, "Opera/South," 49. Opera/South was certainly not the first black opera company—that title goes to the Colored American Opera Troupe founded in 1872, and

others briefly flowered in the intervening years—but during the early 1970s it was the only such company in existence in the United States. See Eric Ledell Smith, *Blacks in Opera: An Encyclopedia of People and Companies, 1873–1993* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995), 7–9.

48. For details on these companies see Smith, *Blacks in Opera*. On Sister Elise’s philosophy see Ruth M. Gover, “Opera Ebony’s Artistic Landmarks: Their Contribution to History,” *Opera Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1984): 59.

49. “Sister Elise Steamrolled Her Dream,” *New Orleans, The States Item*, February 12, 1972.

50. Bailey, “Opera/South,” 47.

51. Donald Dorr and Dolores Ardoyno, interview by author, digital recording, May 8, 2010 (hereafter Dorr and Ardoyno, interview by author).

52. Dolores Ardoyno, interview by author, digital recording, May 6, 2010.

53. Bailey, “Opera/South,” 58.

54. Dolores Ardoyno to Anderson Clark, Affiliate Artists, Inc., July 24, 1974, Box 11, Folder “Bicentennial, 1974,” O/S Collection.

55. In a historiographical analysis of scholarship on black composers and jazz musicians published in 1995 entitled “Essays of Bias,” Dorr scorned writers who promoted “the theory (itself arbitrary, perverse and cunning) that ‘black composers’ must incessantly and inevitably and *sui generis* be saying something about ‘black music.’ Where, and this is the genius of the thing, does it stop? When all is said and done, how black is black *enough*?” Donald Dorr, “Essays of Bias: Blesh, Mellers and ‘Black Music,’” in *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in American Music*, 2nd ed., ed. Judith Anne Still, Celeste Anne Headlee, Lisa M. Headlee-Huffman, and Robert Bartlett Haas (Flagstaff, AZ: Master-Player Library, 1995), 92. He also wrote critically of previous efforts to explore the black experience. Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha*, for example, although written by a black composer, was also inadequate in Dorr’s eyes because it was “not representative of black music.” White America had embraced *Treemonisha*, he argued, simply because they sought a “black avatar” that “easily assimilated to [their] preconceptions.” Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, March 22, 1991, Dorr-Kay Correspondence, Dorr-Ardoyno Papers, private collection.

56. Dorr described *Porgy and Bess* as a work that “has going against it everything Langston Hughes and Hall Johnson said twenty—thirty—years ago”—that is, it primarily appeals to stereotypes. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, March 19, 1990, Dorr-Kay Correspondence.

57. Donald Dorr to Ulysses and Barbara Kay, June 6, 1975, in *ibid*.

58. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, November 27, 1974, in *ibid*.

59. Dorr and Ardoyno, interview with author.

60. Dolores Ardoyno to Gary Knisely, executive director, National Committee of the Bicentennial Era, July 18, 1975, Box 11, Folder “Bicentennial, 1975,” O/S Collection (hereafter Ardoyno to Knisely, July 18, 1975). A very similar point is made in Dolores Ardoyno to John D. Rockefeller III, January 13, 1975, Box 11, Folder “Bicentennial, 1975,” O/S Collection.

61. Ardoyno to Knisely, July 18, 1975.

62. Opera/South Press Release, August 15, 1974, Box 11, Folder “Bicentennial, 1974,” O/S Collection.

63. Perry A. Synder to George A. Owens, February 4, 1975, Series 1365, Box 5292, “MARBC Bicentennial Grant Files,” Folder “Bicentennial Grant #M75–08–200 Opera South 1976,” State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS (hereafter MDAH).

64. Mississippi American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, annual report (no date), MDAH Series 1358, Box 5261, Folder “Correspondence June 4, 1975–June 30, 1975.”

65. John W. Walker, ARBA Washington, to Hon. William L. Waller, governor of Mississippi, July 31, 1975, MDAH Series 1352, Box 5238 “ARBA Administrative Files,” Folder “ARBA General Correspondence 1975–1977.”

66. “Black-Related Bicentennial Projects/Programs/Events in Mississippi,” MDAH

Series 1352, Box 5238 "ARBA Administrative Files," Folder "ARBA General Correspondence 1975–1977."

67. John Adam Moreau, "Ulysses Kay Says He Is Not a 'Negro' Composer," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 5, 1968, Ulysses Kay Papers.

68. Kay, "Ulysses Kay."

69. Barbara Kay's motivations and the history of her involvement with the civil rights movement are described in detail in "The Reminiscences of Barbara Kay," Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York, 1980. See 23–26, 106–24, 133–39.

70. *Ibid.*, 59. See Barbara Kay file, HQ 100–465285, Federal Bureau of Investigation, obtained through FOIA request.

71. Multiculturalism is described as "a politics of equal recognition" in Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. A. Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 27, quoted in Gidal, "Contemporary 'Latin American' Composers of Art Music," 44.

72. Joyce Appleby, "Recovering America's Historic Diversity: Beyond Exceptionalism," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (September 1992): 430–31.

73. "Work on Opera/South Jubilee Score," *Jackson Daily News*, September 20, 1974.

74. Margaret Walker, *Jubilee* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), 137.

75. The words of this carol are by Dorr, based on early nineteenth-century verse. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, January 11, 1974, Dorr-Kay Correspondence.

76. Note the words of this spiritual are quoted as an epigraph in the chapter of Walker's book on which this Christmas scene is based.

77. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, May 3, 1974, Dorr-Kay Correspondence.

78. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, June 17, 1974, in *ibid.*

79. Ulysses Kay to Donald Dorr, January 29, 1974, in *ibid.*

80. *Don Carlo* was premiered in 1867 and revised in 1884. The *auto-da-fé* is act 3, scene 2 in the original five-act version.

81. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, June 17, 1974, Dorr-Kay Correspondence.

82. Dorr told a reporter that Kay's first response upon reading the libretto was "You need Verdi!" "Work on Opera/South Jubilee Score," *Jackson Daily News*, September 20, 1974, Ulysses Kay Papers. In their correspondence, Dorr also suggested to Kay that another work by Verdi, the "Kyrie Eleison" from his Requiem, might serve as a source of inspiration for setting Brother Zeke's speech at the slave's secret church meeting. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, August 21, 1975, Dorr-Kay Correspondence.

83. The reference to "patriotic paraphernalia" is included in the score's staging instructions.

84. According to MARBC Director Perry Snyder, folksinger Burl Ives sang the original folksong version of "Goober Peas" at another Jackson Bicentennial concert in 1976; <http://theadvocate.com/columnists/5035097-55/smiley-anders-for-feb-1>.

85. "Work on Opera/South Jubilee Score," *Jackson Daily News*, September 20, 1974.

86. For a list of hymnals in which the hymn appears see [http://www.hymnary.org/text/flee\\_as\\_a\\_bird\\_to\\_your\\_mountain?tab=instances](http://www.hymnary.org/text/flee_as_a_bird_to_your_mountain?tab=instances).

87. Dolores Ardoyno, interview by author.

88. Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," *Antioch Review* 57, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 264.

89. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, December 29, 1974, Dorr-Kay Correspondence.

90. See Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

91. Dorr to Kay, December 29, 1974.

92. Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.

93. Ardoyno to Knisely, July 18, 1975.

94. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, June 16, 1975, Dorr-Kay Correspondence.
95. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, May 3, 1974, in *ibid.*
96. Jeffrey Magee, "Ragtime and Early Jazz," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 390.
97. Edward A Berlin, *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 249, 252.
98. *Ibid.*, 242.
99. Magee, "Ragtime and Early Jazz," 390.
100. Susan Curtis, *Dancing to a Black Man's Tune: A Life of Scott Joplin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 162.
101. Christian Joppke and Steven Lukes, "Introduction: Multicultural Questions," in *Multicultural Questions*, ed. Joppke and Lukes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.
102. Peller, *Critical Race Consciousness*, xiv, xiii, 52–53; David Theo Goldberg, "Introduction: Multicultural Conditions," in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Goldberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 6.
103. ARBA, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America*, 1:4, quoted in Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 228.
104. Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country," 44.
105. Quoted in ARBA, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America*, quoted in Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country," 44.
106. Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Pioneering African American Gospel Composers," in *"We'll Understand It Better By and By": Pioneering African American Gospel Composers*, ed. Reagon (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 18, quoted in Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 201.
107. Ramsey, *Race Music*, 47.
108. Lawrence Kramer, "Powers of Blackness: Jazz and the Blues in Modern Concert Music," in *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 198.
109. Donald Dorr to Ulysses Kay, May 20, 1976, Dorr-Kay Correspondence.
110. "Opera/South Presents 'Jubilee' by Ulysses Kay in Jackson, Miss.," November 24, 1976, *New York Times*, Dorr-Ardoyno Papers, Opera/South Scrapbook, Dorr-Ardoyno Papers.
111. Wilson F. Minor, "'Jubilee' Premiere Is Artistic, Cultural Success," November 25, 1976, *Reporter* (Jackson, MS), Opera/South Scrapbook.
112. Natilee Duning, "Opera's 'Jubilee,'" November 28, 1976, *The Tennessean*, Opera/South Scrapbook.
113. Dorr and Ardoyno, interview by author.
114. I have not been able to discover Walker's motivations for this decision. Ardoyno and Dorr believe she was hoping someone would create a movie or a musical based on the novel, which might have had greater financial potential than the opera. Dorr and Ardoyno, interview by author.
115. Ed Van Cleef to Donald Dorr, October 18, 1978, Dorr-Kay Correspondence. A 1975 federal grant application indicated that negotiations were in progress with four other companies to stage the work. Opera/South application for Federal Assistance, January 29, 1975, MDAH Series 1365, Box 5292, MARBC Bicentennial Grant Files, Folder Bicentennial Grant #M 75-08-200 Opera South 1976. In an interview, Dorr told me that Houston Grand Opera had called Margaret Walker to ask permission to stage *Jubilee* and she threatened "a series of lawsuits." Dorr and Ardoyno, interview by author.