“TO CHANT MY LAST REFRAIN:”

A CONTEXTUALIZATION OF H. LAWRENCE FREEMAN’S BIOGRAPHY AND HIS OPERAS *THE MARTYR* AND *VOODOO*

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Master of Arts

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APPROVAL PAGE

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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AND HIS OPERAS *VOODOO* AND *THE MARTYR*

presented by Benjamin M. Worley,

a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATIONS

I also must thank the following: David Morgens-Sanchez, for helping me navigate the New York Public Library; the Black Studies department at the University of Missouri for awarding me the Rollins Endowment to travel to New York City; my parents, Mark and Sheryl Worley, for their unconditional support and teaching me to fight for what is right and not what is easy; and Pax Baker, my partner, for helping me scan documents, proof this work, and unendingly cultivate my endeavors.

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ABSTRACT

The grand operas by Harlem Renaissance composer H. Lawrence Freeman (1869-1954)—large productions in the theater and broadcast on the radio—represent milestones in the advancement of African-American artistic expression in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century. Like a number of his Black contemporaries, Freeman was dedicated to the advancement of his race through music yet his operas are notoriously missing from the annals of regularly performed works and from musicological scholarship. This study aims to highlight Freeman's biography, which is currently convoluted with misinformation in many contemporary writings, and to analyze two of Freeman's operas: *The Martyr* (1893), his second complete endeavor in the artform, and *Voodoo* (1924, revised 1927), which earned him considerable attention from the press at its premiere in 1928. This project also considers his reception throughout his lifetime from the perspective of the mainstream and African-American media as well as correspondence from the gatekeepers of contemporary opera: venue directors, publishers, audience members, and scholars. The majority of primary sources used to conduct this research were found in the H. Lawrence Freeman Papers in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University, the only archive known to house Freeman's works.

Dedicated to those who were not allowed a voice.

You were silenced unjustly.

May you be heard.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The grand operas created by African-American composer Harry Lawrence Freeman (1869–1954) proved to be landmarks in melding the well-established Western European genre of opera with the local culture of his own community.[1] His synthesis of the language of European Romanticism with the details of African-American spirituals, and more generally, the sound ideal, melody, harmony, and rhythm of the African-American tradition represented the energy, commitment, and idealism of a pioneering spirit. As a result of his efforts a viable new sub-genre was created. Freeman referred to his innovation as "Negro grand opera." In spirit, his approach can be compared to that of late nineteenth-century European nationalists who introduced aspects of ethnic folklore as well as local color and history into the opera tradition. Composers such as Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), and Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) come quickly to mind. In retrospect, Freeman's work can be understood as logical and, indeed, inevitable.

What must be stressed in any appreciation of Freeman's trailblazing achievements is this. It is well known that during his sojourn in the "New World" beginning in 1892, Dvořák encouraged American composers to create their own identifiably American fine-

[1] Although not incorrect, this version of Freeman's name is rare. At the same time, references to him by name have been treated inconsistently even by those who have studied him. He signed every document and musical work as "H. Lawrence Freeman," the form always referenced by Valdo Freeman, his son and business manager. His name has been given as both "Henry" and "Harry," the former being the common nickname for the latter in the English-speaking world. His middle name is spelled as either "Laurence" or "Lawrence." For the purposes of this document, I will be referring to the composer as "H. Lawrence Freeman."

art music by turning to indigenous, non-European resources: the musical traditions of African Americans.[2] It is doubtful, however, that Freeman, considering his circumstances as a self-taught fledging composer in Denver at the time, was aware of the advice of the famous Czech nationalist. In fact, his early opera *The Martyr* was completed in 1893, shortly after Dvořák's arrival in New York.

Although Freeman's works are not widely known today, contemporaneous criticism pointed to similarities in terms of their grandeur to the theatrical compositions of Richard Wagner (1813–1883), whose example, in fact, greatly influenced the prolific American. Such commonalities earned Freeman the telling nickname from one critic (in the racist fashion of the day) of "The Colored Wagner."[3] The composer wore this characterization as a badge of honor.[4] Through self-promotion, long-lasting perseverance, and cultivated artistry Freeman was able to pierce the walls of racist oppression and elitism to witness the performance of several of his operatic works in venues either severely circumscribed for African-American artists or socially off-limits to them entirely. Among these breakthroughs were a broadcast on mainstream radio, collaborations with orchestras, and the participation of interracial casts. Fully aware of the lack of opportunity for African-American musicians, Freeman devoted considerable energy to creating parallel

[2] [James Creelman], "Real Value of Negro Melodies," *New York Herald* (21 May 1893).

[3] "The Colored Wagner," *Cleveland Press* (25 March 1898), located in H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 59 [1898-1929].

[4] H. Lawrence Freeman, "African Grand Opera: Harry L. Freeman Determined to Develop It," *The Washington Post* (15 May 1898), 25. The article was printed by *The Washington Post* at the request of The Associated News. Freeman is quoted in this article as saying that he was proud of this designation.

institutions to address such limitations, notably music schools, opera companies, and organizations of patrons.

Despite his varied career that encompassed numerous administrative activities designed to benefit African-American fine-art music and performers, Freeman devoted a significant portion of his time to composition. But rather than attempting the daunting task of proving Freeman's worthiness as a composer, I am taking a fact-based approach to his music in this study. I investigate the reasons for the historical lack of attention paid to his stage works and bring an open-minded curiosity to two of his compositions: the operas *The Martyr* (1893) and *Voodoo* (1914, revised 1927). While Freeman contributed to other genres (*e.g.*, arrangements of spirituals, newly-composed minstrel songs, orchestral music, and ballet), it was his passion for opera that led him to a new dialect of music for the stage. To this end, he blended the extravagance of French grand opera with the power of Wagnerian music drama, the extended tonality and chromatic harmony of the late Romantics, and the spiritually uplifting aspects of African-American culture found in its spirituals and gospel music. Freeman's theatrical output is considerable, *e.g.*, there is evidence of more than twenty operas.[5] He also bears the distinction of being the first American composer in history to witness (on 20 May 1928) his own grand opera broadcast in complete form on the radio.[6]

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[5] The number of Freeman's operas is addressed later in this chapter. See Table 1.1 and the commentary that follows.

[6] "[Met Performance] CID:46150," archives.Metoperafamily.org. The first broadcast of operatic music—Act II and III of *Tosca*—occurred on 12 January 1910 at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. The first full work broadcast was held the next day, 13 January 1910, also at the Met. It was a verismo double bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) and *I Pagliacci* (1892) by Leoncavallo with tenor Enrico Caruso as Canio. Both performances were early experiments in radio broadcasting by Lee de Forest. The trial was set to run for a full week but was

Not surprisingly, performances of his operas enjoyed particular success among African-American audiences. Assessments were reported by both the mainstream and Black press from predictably contrasting points of view. With the degree of attention Freeman received in his own time and the esteem with which he was held in the African-American community, not to mention his record of creativity and number of performances of his works, why did his operas not achieve a place in the canon of American music? Given that Freeman collaborated in some way with several of the most prominent African-American composers of his time, notably Harry T. Burleigh (1866–1949), Scott Joplin (1868–1917), Will Marion Cook (1869–1944), and William Grant Still (1895–1978), and that he was considered by contemporaries as "The Most Gifted Music Scholar"[7] and "The Father of Opera,"[8] how is it possible that his music is relatively unknown with few performances today?

In terms of Freeman's acceptance and legacy, I argue that the racial bias of the mainstream media was likely the primary culprit responsible for his poor initial reception outside the African-American community. With the obvious level of prejudice in America, many critics seemed predisposed to dismiss his work. As a matter of course, the mainstream media published reviews of music written by white men dedicated to purely European musical virtues. Furthermore, opera during Freeman's lifetime was an elitist

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scrapped after the 13 January broadcast because de Forest was transmitting on the same frequency as a telegraph station.

[7] Edgar T. Rouzzau, "The Most Gifted Music Scholar," *Star Dust* (date unknown), located in H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 59 [1898-1929].

[8] Nora Holt, "The Father of Opera," *New York Amsterdam News* (11 November 1944), located in H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 59 [1898-1929]. Presumably, she meant the "Father of American Opera."

art form directed to members of America's upper class and aspiring middle class, neither of which counted a significant African-American population among its members. The predominantly white patronage of both the opera house and the media represented a dynamic obstacle to the acceptance and dissemination of Freeman's innovations. Therefore, his efforts were met with doubt and suspicion, along with outright contempt. Due to the lack of recordings, it is now impossible to recapture what the critics heard, but I suspect that some reviewers were predetermined to disregard Freeman's fresh themes before the first note was heard. Printed news sources were not the only outlets for media communication, however. For compositions to be spread throughout the country, they must be distributed by a reputable publisher and listed in their catalogues as well as be championed by influential figures. Neither was accessible to Freeman.

Literature Survey

Although information regarding Freeman's operas is not entirely absent from the musicological record, its extent is greatly restricted in relation to that awarded to comparable historical figures of his prominence. No book-length study of his life has been published. Existing biographical accounts are marked with superficiality and misinformation. The majority of biographical facts are echoed from author to author seemingly as a matter of convenience and, in some cases, reflecting distinct racial bias rather than true scholarship. Because of these circumstances, the published studies of Freeman's accomplishments and his devotion to music education lack depth and objectivity. Freeman's activities, nonetheless, have been referenced by scholars in a number of recent books addressing facets of African-American music in the early decades of the twentieth

century, notably those concerned with Black musical entertainment and the careers of his associates.[9] Despite such mention, Freeman's works, although initially accepted in the African-American community, have not entered the canon of well-known or often-performed music such as, for instance, that of his colleague and fellow traveler Scott Joplin.

In general, the authors who reference Freeman do not provide detailed coverage of his life, career, or art. A few valuable resources do exist, however: Edward Hipsher's commentary in *American Opera and Its Composers* (1927);[10] Benjamin Brawley's article, "A Composer of Fourteen Operas" in *The Southern Workman* (1933);[11] Celia Davidson's doctoral dissertation *Operas by Afro-American Composers* (1980);[12] Antoinette

[9] See, for example, Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *The Harlem Renaissance in the American West: The New Negro's Western Experience,* ed. Bruce A. Glasrud and Cary D. Wintz (New York: Routledge, 2012); and Harry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows,* 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2014).

[10] Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1927).

[11] Benjamin Brawley, "A Composer of Fourteen Operas," *The Southern Workman* LXII (1933), 311-15.

[12] Celia Davidson, *Operas by Afro-American Composers* (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University, 1980).

Handy's biographical entry in *American National Biography* (1999);[13] Elise Kirk's *American Opera* (2001),[14] and most recently, musicologist David Gutkin's article, "The Modernities of H. Lawrence Freeman," in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society.*[15]

Gutkin applied a broad perspective to Freeman's operas and inserted them among those of the modernist composers, namely Richard Strauss (1864-1949), Igor Stravinsky (1982-1971), and Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951). With over one-hundred pages devoted to Freeman and his works, Davidson's study contains the most extensive biography and works list in print in addition to quotations from the composer's son Valdo Freeman, a professional singer himself (baritone), who was frequently featured in leading roles in his father's operas.

Davidson's dissertation is the single most authoritative source for Freeman's life and career, and yet, it too poses problems. Her bibliography cites mainly the primary sources from the Freeman Scrapbook (now known as the H. Lawrence Freeman Papers) housed at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML) at Columbia University in New York City. Davidson also reproduced the *Cleveland Press* article that deemed Freeman "The Colored Wagner." Unfortunately, she did not provide, or possibly never knew,

[13] Antoinette Handy, "Freeman, Harry Lawrence," *American National Biography Online,* ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (1999) (www.anb.org/view/10.1093).

[14] Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

[15] David Gutkin, "The Modernities of H. Lawrence Freeman," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* LXXII/3 (2019), 719-79.

the exact date of publication for further examination of this source. Her citation is limited to "Cleveland (Ohio) Press, 1898,"[16] and in her text she suggested that the article could date from either 1897 or 1898.[17] The true date was noted in the oldest of the Freeman scrapbooks as 25 March 1898.[18]

In the process of gathering and confirming data for this thesis, I compared the details Davidson supplied to those evident in primary documents consulted at the RBML and discovered that some of the information covered in her dissertation did not align with the sources. For instance, she stated that Freeman started the Salem School of Music in Harlem in 1920, yet in the scrapbooks Freeman himself wrote in an undated letter that he taught at the Salem School in 1910 and 1913.[19] Such seemingly minor incorrect citations and misinformation led me to mistrust Davidson's work as factual evidence in terms of his biography. Her commentary on Freeman's music, however, did prove to be a valuable reference for identifying aspects for further analysis (*e.g.,* his realization of the *leitmotif*). Despite its faults, all publications reviewed on Freeman that were written after 1980 reference Davidson's work. Among those are two frequently consulted resources

[16] Celia Davidson, *Operas by Afro-American Composers*, 518.

[17] *Ibid*., 141.

[18] "The Colored Wagner," *Cleveland Press* (25 March 1898), located in H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 59 [1898-1929].

[19] H. Lawrence Freeman, Autobiographical Memorandum [undated], located in H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 59 [1898-1929]. This document takes the form of an unsent typewritten letter, with handwritten annotations, to an anonymous recipient. Also in the H. Lawrence Freeman Papers is a flyer dated 1912 for the Salem School of Music that advertised Freeman as a teacher of piano, voice, harmony, composition, and orchestration.

prepared by Eileen Southern: her entry on Freeman in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*[20] and the revised edition of her iconic *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (1983), where she cited Freeman in her list of African-American nationalist composers.[21]

Aside from these three principal references (Hipsher, Brawley, and Davidson), the majority of my information was located in primary sources found in the H. Lawrence Freeman Papers at Columbia University.[22] It is the only library in the world with a cache of Freeman materials in its holdings: music in manuscript and published formats, personal correspondence, photographs, paintings, press clippings, and business records from his opera companies. Of particular note are the manuscript copies of *The Martyr* and *Voodoo* in piano-vocal versions with personal annotations and stage directions. These scores were essential to my analysis of Freeman's style as neither opera has been published.[23] The conductor's scores, nevertheless, are meticulously written, reflecting the composer's superior penmanship, and present no problems in interpretation. His handwriting is unambiguously legible, and the musical symbols for notes, dynamics, time signatures, tempo indications, and other articulations are entered with precision to ensure proper reading during performances. According to Barrington L. Robinson, the baritone

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[20] Eileen Southern, "Freeman, Lawrence," *Grove Music Online* (http://www.oxford-musiconline.com).

[21] Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans,* 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), 274-76.

[22] With the assistance of Pax Baker, I collected approximately five hundred documents in September 2016 and May 2018. All materials from the archive are reproduced with permission of the RBML and the executor of the Freeman estate.

[23] Musical examples were engraved by the author via MuseScore and reproduced with permission from the RBML and the executor of the Freeman estate.

who sang the role of Fojo in the 2015 concert version of *Voodoo* in New York City, a performance edition of the score was transcribed with engraving software but remains under strict copyright and was to be used only for the 2015 concert.[24]

Special attention was paid to the taped interviews from 1971 that were conducted with Valdo Freeman by musicologist Vivian Perlis and are now housed with archivists at Yale University.[25] The transcripts of those conducted at Yale have been digitized and were consulted for an "insider's view" of Freeman's music and of the Negro Grand Opera Company, for which Valdo Freeman served as business director.

As previously noted, many of the secondary sources concerning the composer's life and works convey misinformation. A passage of text published in the 2006 edition of *African-American Music* by Josephine R. B. Wright can serve as an example:

> Henry L. Freeman, Will Marion Cook, J. Rosamond Johnson, and Shirley Graham made pioneering incursions into the musical theater during the opening decades of the twentieth century. Freeman first attracted attention in 1892-1893 with his opera *Epthelia,* and he composed 24 additional operas between 1897 and 1947.[26]

Wright referred to Harry L. Freeman as Henry L. Freeman, adopting the more formal English version of Harry. *Epthelia* (1893) was reportedly Freeman's first endeavor into

[24] Benjamin Worley, Interview with Barrington L. Robinson, baritone (New York City, September 2016).

[25] Vivian Perlis, "Interview with Valdo Freeman" [Taped interview with transcript], *Yale University Oral History Collection: American Music Series,* Vol. 7 A–B (New York City, 28 December 1971).

[26] Josephine R. B. Wright, "Art/Classical Music: Chronological Overview," *African American Music: An Introduction,* ed. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 219.

opera, but it was *The Martyr* that first brought him to a broader public attention. The author also reported that her information was taken from Davidson, yet I have been unable to confirm the existence of this material in the text cited. The brevity of Wright's statement of introduction, reprinted above, is notable as it represents the extent of her commentary on Freeman with no mention of his awards, breakthroughs, or innovations. Almost every other composer addressed in her chapter is assigned a full paragraph or more dedicated to the subject's accolades. What makes this omission so crucial to Freeman's legacy is that this particular book has been adopted as a classroom text in colleges and universities across the nation to educate students in African-American music.

Methodology

The tumultuous time in American history during which Freeman lived—from Reconstruction, to the Harlem Renaissance, to the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement—make his accomplishments all the more significant to the complete story of African-American success in the arts. Despite the adversity facing him, he sought to work and express his own ambitions in the unwelcoming world of the American musical establishment. As a point of departure for my study, I provide a substantial revised biography of Freeman's life, newly researched and fully documented. In order to situate his biography in its cultural context, I also offer information about the contemporaneous American political and musical environment he had to confront in order to advance his career.

The heart of my work, however, takes the form of a descriptive analysis of aspects of two of Freeman's mature operas: *The Martyr* and *Voodoo.* These were chosen because of their date of composition and their performance history (see Table 1.1 later in this chapter). According to his own accounting, Freeman completed *The Martyr* less than one year after composing his first piece of music.[27] He also wrote his own libretto for this work, a practice he continued throughout his career. Freeman was able to experience performances of his African-American grand opera in four different cities over the next fifty-four years.[28] While *The Martyr* gave Freeman his first taste of success, it was *Voodoo* that should have solidified his place in American music history. In May of 1928 The Negro Grand Opera Company, owned and operated by the Freeman family, performed a concert version of *Voodoo* in New York City on radio station WGBS. This was the first performance on the radio of a grand opera by an American composer.[29]

With regard to Freeman's music, I focus on his compositional style through the lens of a singer of opera and a musicologist and begin with the question: What would a singer, conductor, or stage director need to know to stage these operas successfully? To answer this, as well as questions concerning Freeman's singular compositional voice, I investigate both operas according to certain aspects of musical content: notably the character list and plot; analysis in terms of determining the characters' *fächer,* the specific

[27] H. Lawrence Freeman, "African Grand Opera," 25. Freeman's first known composition was an untitled piece he referred to as a "wordless song." He wrote two hundred of these wordless songs before setting them to his own poetry.

[28] See Chapter Two for a more complete discussion of the productions of *The Martyr*.

[29] H. Lawrence Freeman, Autobiographical Memorandum. This performance did not include a full orchestra but was accompanied instead by Freeman at the piano.

voice type best suited to the role; and an analysis of form and harmonic bases in selected scenes. I also discuss Freeman's appreciation of the African-American sound ideal and associated melody and rhythm as well as of Wagnerian techniques, namely the *leitmotif,* the requirements he implemented for grand opera along with my own interpretations of his plots, characters, and style rather than the modernist perspective Gutkin advocated.[30] The composer did not divide the opera in clear-cut scenes, another trait shared with Wagner. For ease of discussion, I have imposed structural divisions based on the traditional criteria used in other staged works: a character enters or leaves, the setting is changed, or the orchestra is assigned an interlude.

I will concentrate my investigation on selected passages from each opera. From *The Martyr,* I have chosen three scenes based on their impact on the plot: the Act I aria, "Oh God, to Thee I Cry," sung by Platonus, whose themes are heard throughout the work; "O, Holy Isis," the Act II prayer by Shirah, Platonus's betrothed and the *prima donna*; and the climactic Act II quintet involving the principal characters (Platonus, Shirah, Pharaoh, Meriamum, and High Priest Rei). From *Voodoo* I have selected three scenes for analysis: the overture for Freeman's reference to pre-existing African-American music, specifically the spiritual "Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen"; his adoption of ragtime and the cakewalk in Act II, scene 1; and the Voodoo Queen Lolo's aria in Act III, scene 1.

After these considerations, I discuss the reception of these works. As a point of departure, I investigate the social climate of the time and the resultant hardships encountered by an African-American opera composer seeking performances and publication.

[30] See David Gutkin, "Modernities of H. Lawrence Freeman."

While the dominant media were clearly biased against Freeman's works, the African-American media were ready to declare the success of his creations. Contrasting view-points are examined in detail in order to reach a balanced evaluation of the reception of Freeman's operas in his own time.

In the final chapter of this study I explore the largely unrecognized legacy that Freeman left as an early African-American composer of opera, a maverick within the constraints of the European tradition, and a pioneer of one facet of the American sound. When Antonín Dvořák came to America, he famously suggested that local composers should avoid attempting to create an authentic American style on the basis of the Euro-pean model but instead should turn to African-American sources as the true foundation for a national music. Dvořák aimed to be honest, not politically correct for the time. Freeman was already on a path to fulfilling Dvořák's command, however, with African-American opera that utilized both European and African-American musical ideas in a beneficial synergy. Although Freeman may not have lived to see the implications of his efforts, I posit that his dedication and perseverance to the art of opera, while perhaps not influencing them directly, paved the way for numerous like-minded composers, notably Scott Joplin, William Grant Still, Charlie Smalls (1943-1987), Brenda Russell (b. 1949), Stephen Bray (b. 1956), and Terrance Blanchard (b. 1962).

As an umbrella philosophy for this study, I have considered the model of Critical Race Theory, which examines society and culture, specifically American culture, through the lens of race, law, and power.[31] It contains three main themes: racism is ordinary in

[31] William F. Tate, IV, "Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications," *Review of Research in Education* XXII (1997), 195-247.

American society, White supremacy assists both economic and sociological purposes for White people, and race is a social construct not based on biological or genetic factors.[32] The perspective of Critical Race Theory coincides with W. E. B. Du Bois's *double consciousness*, the possession of a dual cultural identity of allegiance.[33] According to Du Bois, the African-American has always existed in

> a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. . . . He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.[34]

Consequently, Du Bois would have viewed Freeman's operas as both ideological and political, regardless of their content or the composer's intentions, because he wrote them as a Black man living in the United States. Using Critical Race Theory, I aim to acknowledge what is distinctively and positively African American in Freeman's work but also to reflect on his use of Western musical forms and tonal systems. As a social construct, American culture, like any culture, is inevitably flawed. The nature of Freeman's efforts, contributions, and hardships as an African American stand as evidence of the harsh discrimination with which he had to contend, making the use of this lens of duality an exceptionally appropriate one.

The General Nature and Number of Freeman's Operas

[32] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*: *An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 7-8.

[33] Olly Wilson, "Interpreting Classical Music," *African American Music: An Introduction*, 230.

[34] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1979), 3.

Freeman classified both *The Martyr* and *Voodoo* as "grand opera." The common definition for this term is "a serious opera without spoken dialogue."[35] Musicologists typically refer to a more strictly defined sub-genre of nineteenth-century opera called "French grand opera" when considering this designation. These dramatic works usually had five acts, many characters, large choruses, hefty orchestras, and, as per French tradition, ballet, continuing the practice of the Baroque divertissement.[36] The musical content displayed the broadest of forms and idioms to underscore the intense emotions. Instead of the typical plot line of earlier dramatic works that glorified the upper class or the gods in tales from mythology or history as with *L'Orfeo* (1607) by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), *Phaëton* (1683) by Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), or *Giulio Cesare* (1724) by George Frederic Handel (1685-1759), grand opera often featured lower- or middle-class heroes in sensational circumstances.[37] The works frequently revolved around themes of rebellion against the status quo in terms of religious intolerance or political opposition.[38]

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[35] John Warwick and Tim Ashley, "Grand Opera," *The Oxford Companion to Music* [online], ed. Alison Latham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[36] Marian Smith, "Dance and Dancers," *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 93-130. During the nineteenth century every French opera that had four or five acts featured at least one ballet. While no rules regarding length or placement within the opera existed, the dancing arose as part of the narrative of the plot (*e.g.*, a masked ball) and was perceived as dancing by other characters rather than natural movement.

[37] For a recent collection of essays by a number of authorities, see *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charleton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[38] Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 125. The controversial plots often drew the unwanted attention of political censors, particularly after the French Revolution, who would often shut down the productions. Meyerbeer's librettist Eugène Scribe had to have political censors approve his work before Meyerbeer could compose the music.

Les Huguenots [1836] and *L'Africaine* [1855] by Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864) are fine examples.[39]

Many of the sources pertaining to Freeman's operas claim different numbers of dramatic works. Eileen Southern echoed Brawley's article, for example, by reporting fourteen,[40] while Vivian Perlis claimed over twenty[41] in their respective *Grove Music Online* entries. My Table 1.1 is the most extensive list to date with twenty-two titles. These works, with the exception of *Epthelia,* which is believed to have been lost shortly after its premiere, can be found in the H. Lawrence Freeman Papers at Columbia University.

Table 1.1. Freeman's Operas with Date of Completion and Date of First Performance.[42]

Title	Date Composed	First Performance[43]

[39] Wagner's earlier works, particularly *Rienzi* (1835) and *Tannhäuser* (1845), demonstrated most of the aspects of this style. See Corinne Schneider, "Wagner and the Paris Opera in Ten Landmark Events," *Octave Magazine* (http://operadeparis.fr). This publication is the online organ of the Opéra National de Paris. The ballet from *Tannhäuser*—the Venusberg orgy—lives in infamy from the failed premiere in Paris in 1861. The Jockey Club, a group of French nobleman, were outraged with the placement of the ballet within the opera. The Parisian audience had grown accustomed to the ballets occurring at the beginning of Act II and often arrived late to their seats just as the dancers took the stage. In *Tannhäuser*, however, Wagner placed the dance at the end of Act I, thereby causing the Jockey Club to miss their favorite part of the performance. The Club kindled major disruptions during the opera, leading Wagner to remove his work from the stage after only three performances.

[40] Eileen Southern, "Freeman, (Harry) Lawrence," *Grove Music Online* (www.oxford musiconline.com).

[41] Vivian Perlis, "Freeman, (Harry) Lawrence (Opera)" *Grove Music Online* (www.oxford-musiconline.com).

[42] Celia Davidson, *Operas by Afro-American Composers*, 132-44; and H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, 1870-1982 [Bulk Dates: 1890-1954], Series I: Musical Scores, 1894-1950, undated, Columbia University Rarebook and Manuscript Library [online] (https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_6381639/dsc/1/).

[43] Works without performance dates have either not been premiered or lack available evidence of a premiere.

Epthelia	Dec. 1892-Jan. 1893	9 Feb. 1893, Denver, CO
The Martyr	1893	Aug. 1893, Denver, CO
Valdo	1895; Revised: 1936	1896? Cleveland, OH
Zuluki (Nada)	1897-1898	1901, Cleveland, OH
African Kraal	1902-1903 Revised: 1937	1902, Wilberforce, OH
The Octaroon	Piano-Vocal: 1902-1904 Full Score; 1908	
The Tryst	1909 or 1911	1930, New York, NY
The Prophecy	1910 or 1911	
Voodoo	1914 (Revised 1927)	1928, New York, NY
Vendetta	Act I – 1911 Act II & III – 1934	1934, New York, NY
The Plantation	1906-1915	
Athalia	1915-1923	1923, New York, NY
American Romance	1924-1929	
The Flapper	1929	
Leah Kleschna	1930	
Uzziah	1931-1933	
Zululand (A Tetralogy)	1941-1949	
I. *Chaka*	Piano-Vocal: 1941 Full score: 1949	
II. *The Ghost Wolves*	1941	
III. *The Stone Witch*	1941-1942	
IV. *Umslopagaas and Nada*	1942-1943	
Allah	1947	

While Freeman implied a relationship with French grand opera through his selection of genre, his works do not meet its criteria. One can plausibly speculate, in fact, that he was not familiar with the canon of these works, especially the operas of Meyerbeer; therefore, he would not have been familiar with the traditional elements of the genre. On the other hand, Freeman may have known exactly what a grand opera entailed and purposely changed some of the criteria to fit his compositional aims. Whatever the explanation, his works were conceived on the same grand scale as Meyerbeer's and should be considered a new type of grand opera with new requirements. Freeman therefore began the African-American grand opera, a sub-genre by, for, and typically about African-American life.

Freeman's African-American grand operas have several primary characters, large choruses, and colorful orchestrations. Unlike the French version, however, he often divided his dramas into only two or three continuous acts. He also modified the orchestra to produce a certain sound ideal that seemed culturally appropriate to the subject matter of his opera or took advantage of relatively new instruments that had not been accepted into the standard ensemble. In *The Martyr* and *Voodoo*, for example, Freeman added two saxophones to the woodwind section. As *Voodoo* was set on a plantation near New Orleans, he called for a banjo and the bones to be included in the mix. One of his most conspicuous departures from tradition is found in the dance component. In *Voodoo* the ballet is replaced by a dance created by African Americans: the cakewalk.[44] I suspect in Freeman's mind his operas were lavishly grand and could be expected to draw the same size crowds that flocked to the dramatic works of Meyerbeer and Wagner.

Like many pioneers, Freeman redefined the standard notion of what artistic expression, in his case as it relates to American opera, should entail. The result may not have earned him a long-standing legacy as was awarded his German idol Richard Wagner, but his considerable success—especially in the 1890s and 1920s—and his tenacious commitment to changing the climate surrounding opera warrants a close examination of Freeman's life, work, and reception.

[44] A more detailed discussion of the cakewalk and other dances can be found in Chapter Four.