Beyond Lift Every Voice and Sing
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CHAPTER THREE

THEATRICAL IMAGININGS

Cole and Johnson’s *The Shoo Fly Regiment*

IN THE SHOO FLY REGIMENT education played a role in the images on the stage of uplift. Cole and Johnson placed *The Shoo Fly Regiment* within the setting of a school that bears a striking resemblance to Booker T. Washington’s all-black industrial school, Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Washington describes the living situation of the blacks in Tuskegee as severely impoverished: families living in one-room shacks with nothing to eat except corn bread and pork fat, whole families working in the fields from sunup to sundown with little time to sit down and eat as a family. Yet these impoverished people wanted educational opportunities for their children and for themselves. They petitioned the legislature for a black school and obtained two thousand dollars for the teachers, but not for decent facilities. While Washington expressed apprehension and appeared disdainful of “such people,” he determined to “lift them up” from these adverse conditions and educate them. Modeled after Hampton Institute, the school offered an industrial education infused with “practical knowledge” such as hygiene and etiquette, with industrial skills such as housecleaning, laundering, and farming. Washington wanted the students to return to the plantation districts to educate other poor blacks in farming, morals, and religion. Washington’s attitudes toward poor, rural blacks may seem regressive and patronizing, but his dedication to educating them remained an inspiration to Cole and Johnson.

Tuskegee Institute did not exist in a vacuum. While the students at Tuskegee learned Victorian morals and industrial skills, so did the students at Hampton Institute and at Atlanta University, Bob Cole’s and James Weldon
Johnson’s alma mater. All these schools utilized the industrial educational model to educate African Americans. Cole and Johnson modeled some of the educational scenes and musical numbers in *The Shoo Fly Regiment* after their educational experiences at Atlanta University. Johnson learned mechanics, mechanical drawing, and printing as part of his practical training. He recalled receiving “practical training” at Atlanta University to prepare him “to earn my living by that trade in any city in which I obtain work.” He also received a classical education akin to the educational experience of African Americans at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

In replicating the educational atmosphere at Tuskegee Institute, Cole and Johnson placed a song within the production which mirrored these institutions’ model of education with its emphasis on “practical knowledge.” The song details the types of classes the students attended, which included spelling, sewing, cooking, farming, blacksmithing, as well as the loftier Greek, French, Italian, and pedagogy. The farming students sing, “here is the brand new farmer man, We do our farming on the chemical plan; not only do we know how to plow and hoe, But we know what makes the cotton grow.” In a similar vein, the female students who learned sewing, sing, “[w]e’ve learned to cut, and we’ve learned to sew; we know how to fit both fat and thin, And make them appear just as neat as a pin. . . .” The lyrics of this song reflect James Weldon Johnson’s and his mother’s positions as principal and assistant principal at the Stanton School. Their use of education as a tool of uplift appears as a paramount component to their agenda. In the fall of 2006 a scholar asked John Hope Franklin why he did not teach at an elite white institution early in his career and why he did not attend an elite white institution as an undergraduate instead of Fisk University. Franklin replied that the choices for African Americans remained limited given Jim Crow and U.S. racism. Similarly, the choices for uplifting African Americans remained few, which is precisely why Cole and Johnson used education to dignify African Americans.

**Notes from The Shoo Fly Regiment Company**

Cole and Johnson promoted contests within their theatrical companies as an extension of their classical educational experiences. They offered cast members contests in which they could exhibit their scholarly prowess. For example, the “Shoo Fly Notes” of March 12, 1908, and March 18, 1908, and the “Notes From Shoo Fly Regiment Company” reported that J. Rosamond Johnson and Bob Cole offered a prize of ten dollars for the best reci-
tation of Kipling’s latest poem, and that both Arthur Talbot and Theodore Pankey participated in the competition. In March 1909, while the company toured with *The Red Moon*, Cole and Johnson held a competition in which cast members competed in reciting Longfellow’s “Hiawatha.” The prize included tuition to “one of Manhattan’s best schools in dramatic arts.” Over twenty-five entrants registered to compete, “proving that a desire to advance in the profession is the foremost thought among the Red Moon Company.” As early as 1898 African American Victoria Earle Matthews taught an African American and African-centered history course at the White Rose Industrial Home for Colored Girls in New York to the female residents and the men in the community. Bob Cole, James Weldon, and J. Rosamond Johnson received a classical education before the emergence of Black Studies programs in higher education, which centered learning on the works of Africans and African Americans; therefore the choice of Kipling would conform to their educational experiences. The selection of Longfellow remains an interesting one given that the heroine in the poem’s name is Minnehaha as in *The Red Moon* (which means waterfall in Dakota); the renowned Afro-English composer S. Coleridge-Taylor’s most famous composition bore the same name as the Longfellow poem. Perhaps Cole and Johnson chose “Hiawatha” in honor of the Coleridge-Taylor composition, as their aspirations lay in writing classical music. In 1908 Coleridge-Taylor recalled that African Americans attended his concerts in large numbers in all the cities where he played, including Washington, D.C., and that “wherever I went Negroes came to hear the music.” Cole and Johnson most certainly remained familiar with Coleridge-Taylor and they quite possibly attended his concerts, which could account for their choice of Longfellow’s “Hiawatha.”

In the “Notes From Shoo Fly Regiment Company,” the author stated, “Edgar Connor and Frank DeLyons have formed a quartette. They will only sing the classics.” We can in fact look at Cole and Johnson’s musical productions as an extension of their commitment to the tenets of Atlanta University.

While Bob Cole came up with the idea to set *The Shoo Fly Regiment* in a school similar to Tuskegee Institute, James Weldon Johnson, as coauthor, also left his imprint on the production. His meeting with Booker T. Washington at Atlanta University and his commitment to education offered a model that he used for *The Shoo Fly Regiment*. James Weldon Johnson’s dedication to teaching, his tenure as principal of the Stanton School in Jacksonville, Florida in the late 1800s, and his election to the position of president of the Florida State Teachers Association in 1901 most certainly informed his writing of the show.
By placing *The Shoo Fly Regiment* within the context of a black industrial institution, Cole and Johnson accomplished several goals: they taught audiences about the importance of education to African Americans, both practical knowledge and higher education; and they instructed audiences about the accomplishments of African American heroes. In addition, the actors and the characters they portrayed became role models for black audiences.

**Shoo Fly Regiment: The Operetta**

I contend that Cole and Johnson’s *The Shoo Fly Regiment* broke the norm for black musical theater during their historical period. African American composer Noble Sissle supports this contention in his essay “The Highlights of the Negro Contributions in the Development of Music and Theatre in the American Scene,” that Cole and Johnson and their contemporaries presented black operettas with plotlines “similar in construction to white operettas of the “Blue Danube School.” In the 1942 *Theatre Arts Magazine*, Edith J.R. Isaacs gave credence to Sissle’s contention and writes that the team wrote “the first true Negro operetta”. Cole and Johnson moved past their contemporaries in African American musical theater by discarding blackface and presenting a plotline infused with the uplift ideology that remained fully connected to the music. The 1906 theatrical season gave audiences blackface comedians Bert Williams and George Walker in *Abyssinia* (1906) and *Bannanna Land* (1907); blackface comedian Ernest Hogan in the tour of *Rufus and Rastus* (1905) and *The Oyster Man* (1907), in which Hogan sang coon songs; and blackface performers Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles who appeared in numerous shows at the Pekin Theatre in Chicago, including *The Man From Bam* (1906), *The Mayor of Dixie* (1907), *The Husband* (1907), and the U.S. tour of *The Colored Aristocrats* (1908). African American baritone Theodore Drury’s Grand Opera Company performed George Bizet’s *Carmen* during the week of May 28, 1906 at the 14th Street Theatre in New York, and the African American opera diva Sissieretta Jones’s Black Patti’s Troubadours appeared in *Captain Jasper* (1907), *A Trip to Africa* (1908, 1910, 1911), and *A Royal Coon* (1909). In addition, the African American vaudeville team The Whitman Sisters performed at the Waldorf Astoria on April 1906, as well as at Grace Chapel in Mount Vernon, Union Baptist Church, and Bethel A.M.E. Church under the direction of Will Marion Cook. While these musical forms advanced African American musical theater, Williams and Walker, Ernest Hogan, and Miller and Lyles adhered to blackface minstrelsy, Black Patti’s Troubadours presented what was almost a revue format,
and the Whitman Sisters performed in vaudeville. The accomplishments of these artists remained laudatory; nonetheless Cole and Johnson came closest to Washington’s ideology of educational uplift in their musicals.

Cole and Johnson, like most of the black community during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, idolized Booker T. Washington and his accomplishments. Roscoe Conkling Simmons of the *New York Age* reported that Cole and Johnson prominently displayed a picture of Washington of the “Association of Genius” in their study.\(^{19}\) *The Toledo Blade* newspaper informed its readers that both Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson “are best friends of Booker T. Washington” and that the trio so respected Washington’s work with industrial education that they “have written much about it in their play *The Shoo Fly Regiment.* Before being presented to the public the manuscript was sent to Mr. Washington and he edited it and put in several speeches himself.”\(^{20}\) Cole and Johnson’s reverence for Booker T. Washington found its way onto the stage with the character of Professor Maxwell, the principal of Lincolnville Institute, played by Arthur Talbot. Washington quite possibly acted as the model for this character.

**Female Characters**

In a similar vein, Cole and Johnson quite possibly modeled the female characters within the production after women at Tuskegee University, Atlanta University, and the women in their lives. From the inception of the institute in 1881, Booker T. Washington included African American women as students, teachers, and principals so as to educate the newly freed slaves.\(^{21}\) From 1882 until her death in 1884, Washington’s wife, Fannie N. Smith, worked with him to include the students and teachers in their home life.\(^{22}\) Beginning in 1881, Washington worked with Miss Olivia A. Davidson, a graduate of Massachusetts State Normal School, as a co-teacher and fundraiser for the school. They married in 1885 and worked toward improving Tuskegee Institute until her death in 1889.\(^{23}\) Washington subsequently hired and then married Fisk University graduate Margaret James Murray in about 1890. Murray worked as a “lady principal” at Tuskegee Institute.\(^{24}\) Cole and Johnson’s use of the lady principal in *The Shoo Fly Regiment* mirrored Washington’s use of black women within his uplift agenda. Anna Cook portrayed Martha Jones, the Lady Principal of Lincolnville Institute, and most certainly represented one of Washington’s wives.\(^{25}\)

Anna Cook was described as the prima donna of *The Shoo Fly Regiment* and was an alumna of Bert Williams and George Walker’s *In Dahomey*
Figure 13. "The Senior Normal Class in Atlanta University—A Winter Scene."
The Women’s class of 1894. The Bulletin of Atlanta University. 1894. Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center
Theatrical imaginings

(1903), *Ernest Hogan and His Memphis Students* (1905), and Ernest Hogan's *Rufas and Rastus* (1906). In *The Shoo Fly Regiment* Cook sang “I’ll Always Love Old Dixie,” which she sang with the “girls,” and “Southland,” which she performed with Ned (J. Rosamond Johnson) and the male chorus. Although Cole and Johnson moved away from many of the minstrel norms, some of the remnants of minstrelsy made their way into the production as the titles of these two songs suggest. One could surmise that Cole and Johnson included these songs as homage to their southern homeland. Cook’s performance of the songs proved noteworthy. Sylvester Russell of the *Indianapolis Freeman* described Cook’s voice as “a soprano voice of good quality and rendered in a pleasant manner.” A review in *The New York Age* dated March 17, 1906, intimated that audience members recognized and remembered Cook from previous shows, while a review from the same paper dated June 1906 stated that she was “very good” and had a “sweet soprano voice.”

As a performer Cook did not fit the popular mold of the “beautiful” light-skinned female performer of the 1900s. A photograph from *The New York Age* dated 1908 shows Cook as a gorgeous dark-skinned, full figured woman. She appears reserved and placid, as she looks directly at the camera, conveying aplomb. Cook wears large white earrings, with her hair up and covered with a white lace band. She wears a white form-fitting lace dress with long sleeves and a high neckline. She folds her hands gently in front of her body, maintaining a commanding presence. Cook embodies the classic Lady Principal, thoughtful, authoritative, and stunning. Cook’s strong gaze exudes confidence and pride. By casting the dark-skinned Anna Cook, Cole and Johnson abandoned the color-caste code of the African American elite class and the theater community. This challenges the commonly held belief that Cole and Johnson remained unremittingly color conscious. By the time Cook appeared in *The Red Moon* (1908), she had married fellow actor Theodore Pankey.

A photograph of the women’s class of 1894 in the *Bulletin of Atlanta University* offers insight into Cole and Johnson’s agenda of glorifying African American women (figure 13). Above the photograph is an illustration of a slave woman whose penetrating, yet placid gaze captures the viewer’s attention, with the legend, “Behold in this calm face the modern Sphinx with such thoughtful mien.” She looks regal in her headscarf, shawl, and earrings. She looks as if she is about to speak, and tellingly a poem surrounds the scene. “No longer here the crude and unformed features of a savage face; / But in those pleading eyes a kindred race / Asks for the highway out of servitude.”

The photograph that accompanies this illustration includes thirteen well-dressed African American women of every hue —“The Senior Normal Class
in Atlanta University—a Winter Scene.” Dressed as sophisticates with hats, topcoats, long dresses, bustles, fur scarves, mufflers, and heavy slips, these women exude confidence and dignity. Several of the women gaze pensively past the camera as if contemplating their future. One looks off into the distance, exhibiting serenity, while several look directly into the camera with self-assurance and security. They all look as if they are contemplating their destiny. The photograph reminds us that these women looked to a hopeful and bright future, while at the same time the entire page reminds the viewer that these self-possessed women were only one generation removed from a slave past. The poem that accompanied the photograph conceivably embodied for these women the move away from a slave past to upward mobility through education. It ends,

Study the problem well,  
For in this Sphinx a message somewhere lies;  
A nation’s glory or its shame may rise.  
From out the reading what these features tell.  
—A.T. Worden, in “Judge.”

The character of Rose Maxwell, like her real-life counterparts, reflected the departure from a slave past to a future in which education held the key for the children and grandchildren of the slave. As the daughter of the principal of Lincolnville, this character also mirrored Booker T. Washington’s own children. One scene from the production offers us a window through which we can view how Cole and Johnson envisioned the black female student. In this scene the female chorus appears in caps and gowns discussing their love for soldiers. This scene evinces the playwrights’ strategy to aggrandize African American women and encompassed the importance of education for black women and the great significance of romance and marriage in black relations. The inclusion of educated black women within the production reflected Cole and Johnson’s commitment to exalting African American women. Similarly, the photograph of the class of 1894 and the illustration and poem offer us a window into one of the ways in which the team learned to respect the varying experiences of African American women, perusing the “calm face[,] the modern Sphinx,” from an enslaved past to the Atlanta University sophisticate. The photograph of the Class of 1894 elucidates Cole and Johnson’s deference to African American womanhood.

Both Fanny Wise and Inez Clough played Rose Maxwell, the Professor’s Daughter. Of Wise’s turn at the part, the Indianapolis Freeman stated that “Miss Wise is a singer, a delightful soprano, of high range and as sweet as
silver bells." The New York Age noted that she “scored an unusually big hit singing ‘Wont You Be My Little Brown Bear?’” A review from 1907 states that she sang well and that she handled her role credibly. She appeared in both The Shoo Fly Regiment and The Red Moon.

Inez Clough also played the part in 1906. Born and educated in Worcester, Massachusetts, Clough trained in voice and piano. She began her professional career singing operatic music in the 1890s in Isham’s Oriental America, one of the many incarnations of the Creole shows. She also trained vocally in London and Austria, and appeared in Williams and Walker’s Bandanna Land (1907) and Mr. Lode of Koal (1910). She went on to become a renowned actress with the Lafayette Players.

Because the dominant society watched and judged African Americans, the black elite endeavored to present themselves as middle-class and estimable. This Victorian ideology presented an additional burden for black women, who found themselves forced to negotiate or conform to the hegemonic norms of femininity, middle class propriety, and repressive racial ideologies.

Historically the relegation of black women to the position of the “low other,” reviled while simultaneously desired, excluded them from political and social power within the dominant society. In theatrical representation black women were barred from dignified parts and fantasy representations, and for the most part they found themselves consigned to roles such as the asexual mammy happy to be in slavery, the oversexed Jezebel, the hyperfrenetic wild child Pickaninny, and the Tragic Mulatto who, due to her one drop of black blood, remains tragic. Beginning in 1798 and continuing into the twenty-first century, these representations gained tremendous popularity in the media in books, advertisements, magazines, the minstrel show, and theatrical and film representations. Hazel Carby notes that in all of these stereotypes, be it the Jezebel, Mammy, or Tragic Mulatto, “Black women repeatedly failed the test of true womanhood because she survived her institutionalized rape, whereas the true heroine (white women) would rather die than be sexually abused.”

These stereotypes emerged out of the most revolting conditions. Due to their subjugated position within the labor market as chattel slaves, black women suffered the ravages of slavery physically, psychologically, and socially, through rape, “an instrument of political terror,” forced procreation, murder, forced separations from families, and severe inhumane beatings. The Afro-English composer S. Coleridge-Taylor documents another level of abuse that African American women experienced. ”No black girl was safe with a white man about. Who fathered thousands nay, millions of mulattoes and
quadroons that one meets on every side in the States.” In this sarcastic treatise Taylor underscores the blatant sexual abuse of women and girls during slavery and upbraids the white male by mordantly asking “[g]ranted that the black race is inferior, then why did the males of the superior race buy countless colored girls some scarcely in their teens—not to work but to become their paramours?” Coleridge-Taylor also reveals the hypocrisy of the white male who through inversion created the black male as sexual brute while he raped African American women and girls. The use of inversion to create the stereotypes of black women as Jezebels and asexual mammys worked to justify their enslavement and rape, and these stereotypes soon became central to theatrical representation.

African American women in theatrical productions, most specifically the Creole shows (large burlesque productions of the nineteenth century) became the gazed-upon “other,” reduced to “objects” of desire and revulsion. The very act of these women performing on stage reduced them to the “other” because of the social stigma attached to women in the theater during this period. While the hegemony of the dominant white culture and even certain segments of the black community rejected the links between black women, the stage, and respectability, Cole and Johnson ennobled African American women and placed them at the axis of propriety.

Lester A. Walton writes that many of the white reviewers discounted Cole and Johnson’s productions because cast members’ “voices nearly all had the correct English accent and intonation,” because some of the members of the cast were light-skinned, and “[o]nly two or three stuck to the tradition of the real Negro. Well what is the real Negro from a white man’s standpoint?” While Cole and Johnson subscribed to some forms of color-based casting, and while many of the women in the shows were alumnae of the Creole shows, they also cast performers who did not fit the light-skinned mold, such as Anna Cook and Ada Overton Walker.

In 1890, as the first large black company to present burlesque entertainment and the first to feature beautiful, lavishly costumed black women in leading roles, the Creole show represented a departure in characterization for black women. The shows elevated black women’s status and afforded them new chances for employment. James Weldon Johnson describes the Creole shows as productions to “Glorify the colored girl.” Several of these shows toured the United States, offering viewers extremely light-skinned performers who fueled the white obsession with black skin color. White reviewers described these women with such exotic names as “white octoroons” and quadroons, and described them as light as Spanish or French women, and
lighter than Italians. Reviewers of this historical milieu considered these to be “high-born colored people” due to their complexion.

While the stage allowed African American women to raise their status through this form of burlesque, the social stigma of women on stage remained prevalent in some circles in the black community. For example, James Reese Europe, the musical conductor of The Shoo Fly Regiment, maintained a long-term affair with a chorus woman named Bessie Simms, whom he met while they both worked on The Red Moon. Reid Badger writes that because of his class status and his mother’s objections to her theatrical career, and the stain cast on women on the stage, Europe found it difficult to legally legitimize his relationship with Bessie Simms, so they never married. Nonetheless Simms and Europe continued their affair after Europe married Willie Angrom, even until his death in 1919.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White’s concept of the low other and its relationship to low culture helps us understand burlesque during the early 1900s. The creation of low culture such as burlesque for the lower working classes and the invention of “high culture” for the middle and upper classes created a deliberate dichotomy between the working class and the bourgeoisie manufactured by those who held positions of power. Robert Allen maintains that “the creation of the bourgeois self was predicated on the exclusion of the popular as that which was not respectable, tasteful, or clean.” Thus women performers in burlesque were considered repulsive, yet enthralling, horrible in their prettiness, the “low other,” reviled while simultaneously desired. Because of the perception that women of the theater like those who performed in burlesque remained irreparably despoiled and kin to the prostitute, some in the African American community considered women such as Bessie Simms as disgraceful and unworthy of marriage or repute. Others felt that the stage gave African American females the opportunity to raise their rank.

African American actor Leigh Whipper, a contemporary of Cole and Johnson, firmly asserted that the black women who appeared in the Creole shows such as Sam T. Jack’s Oriental America and John Isham’s Octoroons “were not like the white women who were featured in the ‘strip-tease act’ in burlesque, [t]he women of color were sensational in spangled costumes with skirts split at the side,” and fleshtone tights. He maintained that unlike the white burlesque shows, the police commissioner never closed a black show. Whipper implies that the black shows offered a higher-caliber production than the white shows and symbolized dignity and venerated black women who appeared in them. Whipper also suggested that the black shows catered to a better class of people then the white shows. Will Marion Cook also
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attested to the high quality of the Creole shows and asserted that Sam T. Jack’s Creoles “was the most classy and best singing Negro show on [the] road,” while Oriental America appeared later as a “classier and more expensive show.” Part of Cole and Johnson’s strategy for aggrandizing African American women included generating an aura around the women, which conveyed their politesse, refinement, and decency. They revered African American women and presented them as role models to the audiences. In effect Cole and Johnson’s black musical theater attempted to raise theater from “low culture” to “high culture.” Through a concerted effort, which included newspaper articles in the New York Age, Cole and Johnson and the actresses in the production changed the image of the black female subject. For example, “The Notes from The Shoo Fly Regiment” reported that Miss Oriena Howard, while quiet, practices the piano, and that Miss Ethel James attends dramatic performances and “cries when the villain steals the child, or the wife is deserted at the altar.” The article reports that Miss James aspires to become a dramatic actress.

Dr. Jewel Plummer Cobb contended that the theater represented respectability and an allure for her family that did not reflect the hegemonic discourse about stage life: “[Bob Cole and the Johnson Brothers] had several philosophical points that they wanted to make. They wanted to make sure that black women were shown on stage in a very dignified manner and a typical manner for that time period. That was very important to them.” Cobb indicates that Cole and Johnson moved away from demeaning images and depictions of African American women common on the stage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and opted for the quintessential African American women through a more humanistic portrayal. Cobb suggested that her mother so admired her brother Bob Cole and the stage that in 1910 she appeared on stage with her sisters as mechanical dolls for the Upsilon Sigma Club for the benefit of the Hope Nursery and embarked on a career as a dance instructor. Her mother also wrote Cole’s biography, and the play titled “What’s in a Song,” about Cole’s life. Cobb gave no indication that her mother or her family felt that the stage degraded black women.

My mother had also been a schoolteacher. She had been to Sargents, which was a physical education school in Boston, and then became involved at Harvard way back then. She went to Washington D.C. to teach physical education and dance. [She taught] classes in dance, this was called interpretive dancing, the precursor of modern dance.
Carriebel Plummer remained so enamored with the stage that she encouraged her daughter in all aspects of performance, including dance and music. Cobb took piano lessons with the famous African American composer and performer Margaret Bonds as a young girl in Chicago. She intimated that her mother’s “idol was Isadora Duncan [the renowned white modern dancer and choreographer], so she decided when I was born that my middle name should be Isadora so that’s what happened.”

In “What’s in a Song” Plummer created a character named Ada Kingston, who wins a lead role in a Broadway production. Sensing some distress from the mother concerning her daughter’s choice of careers, Mr. Kingston informs Mrs. Kingston that “she is not going as a cheap chorus girl. She is a star on Broadway. The first Bronze girl to do so.”

The mother dismisses the thought that her anxiety comes from her daughter’s career choice and tells her husband that she remains troubled that the producers of the show plan on using Cole’s music without permission.

While Cobb and her mother viewed stage life as a laudable profession, these lines from Plummer’s play expose a hierarchy concerning the theatrical roles that remained acceptable within the African American community. While the mother dismisses the suggestion that she is upset about the thought of her daughter as a chorus girl, these lines reveal the caste system that existed concerning African American theater women. Cobb and her mother’s experience with theatrical endeavors allows us to understand that viewpoints concerning stage life were not monolithic among African Americans, that they differed along class lines and within social sets. Cobb and her mother’s encounters with stage life dispel the perception of the African American theatrical woman as degraded. As Leigh Whipper, James Weldon Johnson, and Will Marion Cook noted, many African Americans’ attitudes toward female stage performers diverged from white negative perceptions of stage performers, which indicates that the African American middle class mindset remained multifaceted.

**Stereotypes**

Some of the characters within the production bear similarities to the actual teachers at Tuskegee Institute. Although no description of the character Randoled the Farmer exists, this character quite possibly evoked associations with George Washington Carver. Yet several comedic and stereotypical characters also appeared in the production, including Bode Edjicashun, Ophelia the Village Pride, and the Pickaninnies. These characters represented stereotypical models and mirrored black minstrel forms.
The show featured “Pickaninnies”—a common vaudeville construct of the time. The Pickaninnies personified a stereotypical image of black women, girls, and boys during the 1900s. The portrayal of the Pickaninny in advertisements, movies, and theatrical productions included that of out-of-control, wild animal-like children, presented as humorous. Usually presented in “comedic” settings, the Pickaninnies always found themselves facing danger, being chased by wild animals such as tigers or lions, in the mouths of alligators, catapulted in the air, or as in Birth of A Nation falling out of carriages. All these images were supposed to be funny, and they worked to justify the slavery and abuse of African American children. The stark reality of the Pickaninny included the fact that, like Frederick Douglass, children were sold away from their mothers at young ages; they worked as slave laborers from sunup to sundown, and they died young. In 1991, when builders “discovered” the African Burial Ground (1625) in the Wall Street area of New York, archeologists and anthropologists found that children made up the majority of the four hundred bodies buried there. Upon analyzing the bones they determined that a vast number of these children suffered from developmental defects caused by hard labor. One six-year old child suffered such ailments.

Orbits of eyes show pitting, characteristic of active anemia . . . lesions in the outer layer of bone caused by infection . . . growth areas of the skull have closed . . . early in development . . . Lesions at the arm attachments where the brachial muscles [were] strained . . . first and second cervical vertebrae are partially fused due to force or heavy load, trauma to the top of the head.65

This was the reality of the Pickaninny. The stage representation of the Pickaninny conveniently omitted the violence inflicted on the children’s bodies and psyches. Both Brenda Dixon-Gottschild and Nadine George-Graves describe stage “Picks” as very talented black children who performed as singers and dancers in white vaudeville in finales and backup numbers. Both Dixon-Gottschild and George-Graves define “Picks” as a shortened version of the word “Pickanniny.”66 The Pickaninnies acted as a guaranteed hit for theater owners and performers because these children virtually never failed.67 George-Graves maintains that Picks usually performed with white female singers such as Sophie Tucker or Nora Bayes, or in the case of Mabel Whitman, with black female singers.68 The performance style of the Picks consisted of extremely fast-paced movements, which required a mastery of rhythm and speed. White audiences expected speed from black performers.69
Margo Webb remembered performing as a Pick in vaudeville in the 1930s in New Jersey. She recalled that the dancers wore bandannas and short skimpy costumes, and that the dance movements included rocking back and forth “like idiots” in plantation scenes, and performing fast-paced dance movements such as Russian and time step movements. These depictions of Picks offer a view into possible types of dances and performance styles that appeared in *The Shoo Fly Regiment*. Daisy Brown, Marion Potter, Marguerite Ward, Edgar Connor, and Emmett Anthony portrayed the Pickaninnies in the production. It appears that Cole and Johnson adhered to this popular minstrel form through their use of the Pickaninny chorus perhaps to guarantee the success of the production both financially and artistically; perhaps the representation remained so commonplace that they saw nothing wrong with the representation, and maybe they incorporated theatrical conventions Cole learned in his previous performance experiences. The team also followed minstrel norms by including the “The Bode Edjicasun.”

Booker T. Washington recalled meeting several older black gentlemen in Tuskegee who played an instrumental role in the establishment of the institute by writing and requesting the founding of the school. These older black men facilitated Washington’s hiring as the principal of the school. Cole and Johnson conceivably patterned “The Bode Edjicasun” played by Wesley Jenkins and Sam Lucas after these older black men. Sam Lucas was born in 1841 and began his career singing with his family for the Anti-Slavery Society in New York. A veteran minstrel comedian, Lucas appeared in minstrel shows for the Boston Stock Company and Callander’s Minstrels and with the Hyer Sisters. He also appeared in *A Trip to Coontown*. According to the reviews, “The Bode Edjicasun” offered audiences comic relief. Given Lucas’s theatrical background, we can surmise that these characters reproduced minstrel traditions by presenting audiences with stereotypical forms of performance.

Cole and Johnson incorporated seemingly stereotypical representation when they wrote the character Ophelia the Village Pride played by Andrew Tribble. According to James Hatch and Errol Hill, Tribble was the best of all the female impersonators. He was born in 1879, attended school in Richmond, Kentucky, and began his career as a Pickaninny in African American theatrical productions beginning with *In Kentucky*. He also appeared at the Pekin Theater in Chicago. Tribble graduated from Pickaninny roles to female interpretations. According to George Walker, “[o]ne night in an afterpiece he slipped on a dress and the audience screamed at his action in dresses, which caused him to develop the dress-wearing idea, and found it so effective that he has been working in skirts ever since.” Tribble credited
Cole and Johnson with “discovering” him and ensuring his theatrical success.

One night I was doing my best, not dreaming of anyone watching me, but the manager. I was surprised to learn that among the few in the audience were Cole and Johnson. I was also told that they liked my work. They sent for me and gave me plenty of encouraging talk and pictured a beautiful future for me.71

This encounter led to Cole and Johnson contracting Andrew Tribble for *The Shoo Fly Regiment*. Tribble appeared as Ophelia in *The Shoo Fly Regiment*, Miss Lilly White in *The Red Moon*; and in female roles in *His Honor the Barber* (1909) and *Ophelia Snow from Baltimore* (1928), which appears as a homage to his portrayal of Ophelia in *The Shoo Fly Regiment*.74

Female impersonators made their way onto the stage at a time when only men performed on stage. Black minstrelsy adopted this form or representation, but it was not central to the genre.75 Nadine George-Graves identifies cross-dressing as part of black theatrical performance, most specifically vaudeville.76 Female impersonators popularized two major characters, the Prima Donna or “Wench” role and the low comedy or “Funny Old Gal” character. The Prima Donna/Wench character appeared in white minstrelsy as early as the 1830s with white female impersonator Dan Gardner’s portrayal of the role in the 1830s and George Christy’s characterization in the 1840s. After the Civil War the Prima Donna gained popularity with white performers and some African American performers, including African American female impersonator Thomas Dilward or Japanese Tommy, who performed with the Hague Minstrels. The Prima Donna character first appeared on the minstrel stage in the guise of “pretty yellow plantation girls,” but eventually transformed into an elegantly dressed coquette. The Prima Donna embodied the ultimate Victorian beauty with her diminutive hands, petite feet, and small waist.77 In the white minstrel show African woman could not fit snuggly into representations of beauty, because of the perception that African women remained unequivocally ugly and undesirable. So the African American Prima Donna embodied the exotic, not really African, but rather “yellow” as in both the plantation girl and Japanese Tommy. With this in mind, the *only* role that African women could fully embody in white minstrelsy was that of the popular low comedy/Funny Old Gal role.

The low comedy/Funny Old Gal, who appeared on stage as mannish and crude, gained popularity in white minstrelsy. To mark this character as truly unfeminine, a big brawny male played the role dressed in unmatched cloth-
ing and displaying huge feet in big shoes. This character might also show up dressed in a ball gown, but to mark her as not fully womanly, she wore men’s shoes with her gown. The low comedy/Funny Old Gal role in effect was used to degrade and ridicule African American women and to assert that these women remained undeserving of womanhood rights given their masculine tendencies and unattractiveness. This characterization gained incredible popularity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and still remains prominent in twenty-first century representations of African American women by African American and white men. African American performers Martin Lawrence and Eddie Murphy adopted this character and portrayed her in movies such as *Big Mama’s House* (2000), *Big Mama’s House 2* (2006), *The Nutty Professor I* (1996), *The Nutty Professor II: The Klumps* (2000), and *Norbit* (2007). In African American theater neither the Prima Donna/Wench nor the low comedy/Funny Old Gal character of female impersonation gained the type of popularity that they garnered in the white minstrel shows.

Several reasons exist as to why these images did not become common, including the fact that African American producers placed “beautiful” African American women on the stage and the black audience preferred to view the real thing as opposed to the illusion. The historical period may have also dictated why these characters and female impersonation did not become popular in African American theater. With the push for racial uplift and the protection of African American women, male performers such as Cole and Johnson chose not to deride black women. Thus the female impersonation in African American theater looked quite different from that created by white performers. Andrew Tribble asserted that “I never go on the stage unless I try to do my best. That somehow has always been my motto, and I have been well paid for sticking to it.” I contend that Bob Cole, the Johnson Brothers, and Andrew Tribble utilized stereotypes in the characterization of Ophelia Snow to actually reconfigure female impersonation to make it more palatable for the African American audience.

Tribble’s characterization of Ophelia Snow in *The Shoo Fly Regiment* fit neither the model of the Prima Donna nor that of the Funny Old Gal. At 5 feet 4 inches, Tribble remained slight in stature and in physicality. A 1908 photograph of Tribble portrays him looking more like a teenage waif than a Prima Donna or the Funny Old Gal. He actually resembles a female Pickaninny, albeit a well-dressed Pickaninny, a reminder of Tribble’s childhood career. The photograph pictures Tribble with a large black ribbon prominently placed at the center of his neatly combed hair. He wears Mary Jane shoes, a white dress, and holds a large hat that matches his dress. His finger points coyly at his mouth as he gazes downward at his pigeon-toed feet.
York Age reported that Tribble’s interpretation of Ophelia proved an “instantaneous hit,” and that he “plays a part very much like Topsy. He does not have to do anything to get applause. The audience goes wild every time he appears. He acts well, is a great dancer and sings well.” From the reviews we can surmise that Tribble relied on his comedic expertise in his pickanninyesque portrayal of a tough yet kindly Ophelia Snow who, although homely, longed for romance just like her prettier sisters. Ann Marie Bean argues that Tribble’s female interpretation fit the mold of Flip Wilson’s 1970s television persona Geraldine with a characterization that was about “us”—African American men and women and their relationships—not about “them.” What I would like to suggest is that Wilson’s Geraldine, like Tribble’s Ophelia, while stereotypical, reinscribed stereotypes by offering an insider’s perspective molded for an African American audience. Toni Morrison argued that while Wilson’s Geraldine remained controversial to some in the African American community, Wilson actually inverted stereotypes.

A shift in semantics and we find the accuracy; for defensive read survivalist; for cunning read clever; for sexy read a natural unembarrassed acceptance of her sexuality; for egocentric read keen awareness of individuality; for transvestite (man in woman’s dress) read a masculine strength beneath the glamour.

By creating Geraldine as a clever, individualistic survivor, with a touch of glamour and strength, Wilson affirmed African American women. Like Ophelia Pride who married Hunter Wilson in The Shoo Fly Regiment, Geraldine loved and remained faithful to her boyfriend Killer. Geraldine allowed Flip Wilson to discuss political and social issues concerning African American life that he as a black man could not fully articulate out of drag due to societal constrictions on black men in the 1960s and the 1970s. As Wilson noted, “Geraldine doesn’t have to bite her tongue, Flip Wilson might have to hold back on something, but Geraldine will jump down your throat. To hell with you . . . Geraldine is in complete control of every situation.” Geraldine and Ophelia Pride allowed Flip Wilson, Andrew Tribble, Bob Cole, and the Johnson brothers to unveil their opinions concerning African Americans freely. By rejecting the Prima Donna and the low comedy role and by creating Ophelia Pride, Tribble’s female impersonations remained a truly African American invention.

One can draw parallels between the black cowboy westerns of the 1930s, which starred Herb Jefferies, and The Shoo Fly Regiment. While Jefferies portrayed the heroic romantic lead in movies such as Bronze Buckaroo
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(1938) and *Harlem Rides The Range* (1939), his sidekick, the African American composer Spencer Williams, portrayed the stereotypical black male character reminiscent of the Sambo. The presence of Jefferies as the romantic lead worked to dilute the inclusion of Spencer Williams’s stereotypical character. *The Shoo Fly Regiment* reflected this softening of stereotypical representations. With the inclusion of the nonstereotypical characters of Ned Jackson, the hero of the Spanish American war and a Tuskegee graduate; Rose Maxwell, a graduate of Lincolnville Institute; Professor Maxwell, the president of Lincolnville Institute; Martha Jones, the Lady Principal of Lincolnville Institute; and the chorus of soldiers and students, *The Shoo Fly Regiment* contested the minstrel forms of representation common for the time and present even within their own production.

I advance this polemic not to dismiss the use of stereotypes, but to point to the fact that Cole and Johnson remained products of their times and incorporated stereotypical forms of representations as well as humane portrayals of African Americans. Because of these characters within their productions, they remained innovators in the realm of musical theater. Through their depictions of actual events in African American history and their placement of African American men and women on stage as educated heroes and heroines, Cole and Johnson made radical changes in black representation that by all accounts would not be replicated until almost two decades after their last show—with Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle’s *Shuffle Along* (1921). Sterling Brown aptly notes that “[m]en like Bob Cole and Bert Williams were intelligent enough to know that the comic students they performed were stereotyped. Nevertheless it is inaccurate to magnify the ‘chagrin and tears.’ They were showmen functioning in the American popular theatre.”

As showmen and products of the historical period, Cole and Johnson both conformed to and contested stereotypical representations of African Americans within *The Shoo Fly Regiment*. The show reflected the changes in the black image that haunted the black elite in this era, changes that resonated with contradictions about class and color.

**Audience Response to Shoo Fly Regiment**

How did audiences and the press respond to the new forms of representations presented on stage by Cole and the Johnson brothers? How can we understand the impact the new forms of representations as well as the stereotypes had on audience members? While Theodore Roosevelt attempted to rewrite history by omitting the contributions of Native Americans and Afri-
can American Soldiers in the Spanish-American War, Cole and Johnson’s use of the war as a site for African American heroism emphasizes the importance of popular culture in reappropriating African American history.89

With ticket prices at twenty-five cents, fifty cents, seventy-five cents and one dollar, Cole and Johnson made it affordable for all people to attend their show.90 Because of the reasonably priced tickets black audiences and the black press enjoyed the new depictions of African Americans and the narrative, while the white press expressed mixed opinions. The black press and audiences radiated with pride at seeing black men as courageous, and they enjoyed the new representative images of black men and women dressed immaculately and smartly. Some in the white press responded favorably to *The Shoo Fly Regiment* while others appeared baffled. Still others responded antagonistically. Black theatrical critic Lester A. Walton summed up both the black and white responses to the show in a review of Cole and Johnson’s *The Red Moon*.

*The Red Moon* brings to light one thing Cole and Johnson have at least learned, that is they must give the public what it wants and not what they think the public should have. They will be far more successful financially in their new show than in *The Shoo Fly Regiment*. Not because *The Red Moon* is the better for it is not. *The Shoo Fly Regiment* told a much better story than *The Red Moon*, but it did not cater to the tastes of the theatre-goers. Most of the colored people liked *The Shoo Fly Regiment*, but many whites did not care for it being prejudiced against seeing Negro soldiers, but when a show is put out to make money it must produce plays that will be liked by all classes. That is what Cole and Johnson are doing this season.91

Underlying Walton’s critique of the shows lay the reality that Cole and Johnson incorporated more stereotypes and racially charged words in *The Red Moon* than they did in *The Shoo Fly Regiment* in an attempt to cater to white audiences. *The Shoo Fly Regiment* threatened and challenged hegemony with images of African American soldiers who conjured up the African victors of the Haitian Revolution and the threat of African American insurrection in the white mind. Their message of uplift remained an overt component of *The Shoo Fly Regiment* with its critique of U.S. racism and hegemony for all to see, while *The Red Moon*’s uplift agenda appeared more covert. One of the possible reasons for the financial failure of *The Shoo Fly Regiment* lay in the certainty that whites rejected the production. As Walton pointed out, the racism of white audiences prevented them from appreciating the presence of black soldiers on stage and made them uncomfortable. White
audience members found it difficult to wrap their minds around the new portrayals of African Americans and, in some cases, they missed the messages of black emancipation through education and war that were embedded in the show. For example while a review in the *Indianapolis Star* praised the production, the author wrote that “[t]he play has a plot which is well carried to logical conclusion—colored logic that is often told in musical numbers. Cole & Johnson certainly have a fine show.” While the author enjoyed the show, the messages of black patriotism, education, and even the threat of insurrection were dismissed as “colored logic.” The reviewer’s unwillingness to acknowledge the messages infused in the production of self-determination through the emancipatory rhetoric of war and education, and his denoting African Americans as simple-minded reveals his racism. Consequently, he refuses to see Cole and Johnson as clever or intelligent. Correspondingly, *Theater Magazine* of September 1907 rejected the production completely and deemed it amateurish, lacking in originality, and not worthy of criticism. The critic for the magazine also failed to see the innovations of the show and missed its social and political critiques.

It appears that black audiences enjoyed the production and remained cognizant of the messages that Cole and Johnson relayed. Cole and Johnson included a review in their advertisement of the production from the March 2, 1907, *Indianapolis Freeman* that complimented them on the show and announced that *The Shoo Fly Regiment* “came and conquered.” The reviewer heralded the success of the show and noted that it worked as an educational tool in teaching “most useful lessons concerning American Negro life.” The team’s educational agenda was not lost on black audiences or black critics. *The New York Age* announced that the show was “a decided hit: it is well laid out, costumed in becoming and elaborate style and with its well-trained company should stay as long as it may desire.” This reviewer’s glowing account welcomed the new forms of representations and pointed out that “Theodore Pankey, as Lieutenant Dixon Company G. Fifty-fourth U.S.V. makes a capital officer and his soldiers are very well drilled.”

We can always look back and find fault in what came before us, but it remains imperative to note the accomplishments together with the faults. Walton, in retrospect, felt that *The Shoo Fly Regiment* proved a far superior show than *The Red Moon*. With the rejection of the former by some in the white community, however, he lamented that Cole and Johnson returned to hegemonic notions of blackness within *The Red Moon*. But did they? *The Red Moon* embodied a politicized message of African American and Native American solidarity for viewers and the importance of education, and it incorporated a move to change representative images of African American
women, Native Americans, and African American men. In writing and presenting *The Red Moon*, Cole and Johnson simply instituted a different and more covert strategy.

Their production of the play represented a victory in itself. Because of the nature of structural racism, blacks systematically faced obstacles when it came to wealth accumulation. Although Cole and Johnson distinguished themselves as property owners in New York and Florida, they did not own a viable space in which they could write and perform their own productions. The dearth of performance spaces in New York still left the group dependent on theater owners.

Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro argue that historically blacks experience constant obstacles and difficulties in their efforts to own property and accumulate wealth. With abolition democracy in the South and Sherman’s Order Fifteen, which redistributed land to former slaves, some African Americans achieved wealth accumulation for a time, but it was a definitively short time. The promise to blacks of land redistribution and forty acres occurred with the confiscation of plantation land, but with the eventual rescinding of Order Fifteen the government systematically seized lands owned by blacks. By 1866, the United States government adjusted the Homestead Act to include African Americans. The Homestead Act set aside forty-six million acres of public land, but again, this act did not work to include freed slaves in the distribution of the land. Given the dire situation surrounding African American wealth accumulation and property ownership, it remains surprising that between 1900 and 1910, black ownership of theaters remained at a high point and black syndicates emerged during this time. But racism blocked the growth of black theater due to the absence of sponsorship, the high cost of transportation, and second-class bookings, which all marked the demise of these black-owned theaters.

**Shoo Fly Regiment and Vaudeville**

*The Shoo Fly Regiment* ran for approximately two theatrical seasons and proved popular among audiences, marking an artistic success; but the show closed in 1908 due to financial losses. It toured the United States for seven months, closing in Philadelphia on May 7, 1908. According to James Weldon Johnson, the loss in revenue occurred because, as he states, “not yet had the fight for Colored companies to play first class houses been won.”100 At the beginning of the tour the show received favorable bookings, but as they continued to tour Cole and Johnson found the show booked for one-night
stands at popularly priced, third-rate theaters. They lost money and found it difficult to cover the expenses that a large company accrued. The team eventually used their own money to keep the show going and to bring the company back to New York.¹⁰¹

Cole and Johnson began plans for a new show with the closing of *The Shoo Fly Regiment*; in the interim period Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson performed for six weeks in vaudeville on the Williams Circuit. Their act included eight cast members: Bessie Tribble, Edgar Connors, Fannie Wise, Mamie Butler, Lula Coleman, Daisy Brown, and Leona Marshall.¹⁰² Lester A. Walton stated that Cole and Johnson’s musicals and vaudeville act dispensed with plantation scenes, buck dancing, and the “old time Negro Songs.”¹⁰³ Instead their vaudeville act included scenes and songs from *The Shoo Fly Regiment*, which depicted Rosamond as a soldier and a hero while the women in the vaudeville act portrayed college students.¹⁰⁴ Cole and Johnson’s vaudeville act also included dialogue and musical selections played by J. Rosamond Johnson on the piano. The finale of the act was the singing of “The Old Flag Never Touched the Ground” accompanied by the cast members.¹⁰⁵ The sophistication of their vaudeville act proved a novelty for the time and Walton lamented that theater owners and booking agents showed resistance to an act that moved away from plantation scenes. He noted that Cole and Johnson “bore the reputation of having the most refined colored acts on the variety stage.”¹⁰⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois laid the blame for the failure of Cole and Johnson’s productions firmly at the feet of whites. He charged: “In later days Cole and Johnson and Williams and Walker lifted minstrelsy by sheer force of genius into the beginning of a new drama. White people refused to support the finest of their new conceptions like the *Red Moon* and the cycle apparently stopped.”¹⁰⁷

Lester A. Walton hoped that theater-booking agents would cast off their prejudices against civilized portrayals of African Americans as opposed to stereotypes and book Cole and Johnson’s vaudeville act. They performed their vaudeville act from May 21 to June 11, 1908. They appeared at the Orpheum Theater in Brooklyn the week of May 21, 1908, the Alhambra Theater on May 28, and the Fifth Avenue Theater on June 4 to June 11, 1908. Walton noted that Cole and Johnson made changes to the act with each performance.¹⁰⁸ It appears that they refined the act while performing, a habit that continued with the touring company of *The Red Moon*. They began rehearsals for *The Red Moon* around July 30, 1908 at the Majestic Theater in Brooklyn, and performed in the “Frolics” for the Frogs, a black theatrical organization, on August 17, 1908 at the Manhattan Casino in the Bronx.¹⁰⁹
Cole and Johnson planned to begin the tour in August and to play at the best second-class theaters in the United States, which proved a step up from the third-rate houses to which *The Shoo Fly Regiment* had been consigned. They did not control the booking of their shows, and their productions remained blocked from playing first-rate theaters. Their options were few. Ultimately, the success or failure of the production lay in the hands of white booking agents. Walton suggested that the booking of Cole and Johnson’s new musical at second-class theaters proved highly encouraging because *The Shoo Fly Regiment* suffered financially since it had played in third-rate houses. Although the booking agent William Morris initially planned on opening *The Red Moon* in New York City, the production opened in Wilmington, Delaware, on August 31, 1908, and then moved to Jersey City, New Jersey. Advertisements for the production reveal that the ticket prices remained the same as for *The Shoo Fly Regiment*.

**Conclusion**

In the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, which included the loss of revenues, Cole and Johnson included a forward-thinking program in which they used uplift and education in changing the theatrical and social landscape for African Americans. They took an unstinting and unapologetic stand and changed the representative images of African American men and women in *The Shoo Fly Regiment*. They rejected stereotypical images of African American women and drew upon their personal history, their romantic relationships, and their life experiences to break the love scene taboo; they created female characters patterned after the women in their families and the female students that they met at Atlanta University.

While Cole and Johnson made progressive changes in the portrayal of African Americans, they also included caricatures—including a chorus of Pickaninnies and the Bode Edjicashun that reproduced some incredibly degrading stereotypes, which reverberate into the twenty-first century. They likewise included female impersonation in the guise of Ophelia the Village Pride, who, it can be shown, did not really conform to common stereotypes. She plainly broke with the low comedy/Funny Old Gal and Prima Donna representation popularized in blackface minstrel shows performed by whites. Cole and Johnson made a conscientious effort not to deride African American women with this portrayal. We cannot deny that the team conformed to minstrel norms to guarantee the success of the show with white and black audiences, but because they included fully human characters within the musi-
cal, and advanced the rendering of the doughty African American male, the educated African American woman, and black romantic love, they tempered these stereotypes and made revolutionary changes in the renderings of African Americans on stage. By aggrandizing African American men and women, and reclaiming African American history through musical theater by setting *The Shoo Fly Regiment* within an educational institution similar to Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute, Cole and Johnson committed the ultimate subversive act by brazenly and unrepentantly claiming black power.
Figure 14. *The Red Moon* sheet music. James Weldon Johnson Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library