The Early Life and Career of the “Black Patti”: The Odyssey of an African American Singer in the Late Nineteenth Century

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For almost three decades, Matilda Sissieretta Jones achieved international fame as the “Black Patti,” her musical talents reviewed in every major newspaper in the United States. And yet her death on 24 June 1933, some eighteen years after her last public performance, went mostly unnoticed, even in the black press.1 During her years as a prima donna, Jones had received numerous accolades from a wide range of critics, from her audiences, and from the many royal personages and American politicians who showered her with expensive tokens of their appreciation. According to the reviews, her voice was well schooled and exceptionally even throughout its large range. Her sobriquet, the Black Patti, by which she was known to all her admirers, was coined to compare her voice favorably with that of the most famous soprano of the last half of the nineteenth century, Adelina Patti (1843–1919).2 Jones’s life was one of enormous achievement, particularly for an African American woman in the latter part of the nineteenth century. But

I am deeply indebted to my friend and former student Hodge Daly, of Montserrat, W.I., for locating and providing me with the many reviews and items pertaining to the Black Patti’s two tours to the West Indies and South America. Without his generous help, I would not have been able to document so thoroughly these two very important episodes in Jones’s early career. My work on the Black Patti’s life and career was greatly helped by a Rockefeller Fellowship at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, in 1987. A portion of this article was presented at the Sixtieth Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Minneapolis, October 1994.

1. While the New York Age has a forty-six-line notice on page 1, the New York Amsterdam News has only a six-line notice buried on page 6. Virtually none of the white papers recorded her death; no obituary, for example, appears in the New York Times.

2. Patti was the youngest of four siblings and by far the most famous. Her voice was described as having “moderate power but great compass, reaching to F in alt; her execution is brilliant and finished, and she has considerable charm both of person and manner” (Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Sir George Grove [London: Macmillan, 1894], 2:674). Her sisters, Amalia (1831–1915) and Carlotta (1835–1889), were well-known singers; Carlotta’s “voice was of considerable size, extremely flexible and extended up to g” and even g#” (The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians 14:303). A brother, Carlo (1842–1873), was a violinist and conductor in New Orleans, New York, and St. Louis.

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that achievement was forgotten by all but a few at the time of her death, and she has been ignored by most later music historians, who associate the first African American singing of European art music with Marian Anderson.

Several dictionary articles and reference books offer a general outline of Jones's career. As is often the case in brief items of this sort, however, there are mistakes and omissions in chronology and facts, and conflation of various separate events in her life. A dissertation by Willia E. Daughtry also provides some additional information, but it was completed before the discovery of Jones's scrapbook in the late 1960s. In this article, I attempt to document the details of Jones's personal and professional life up to the formation of the Black Patti Troubadours in 1896, so that we may better understand how her career intersects with and diverges from the still mostly unexplored larger question of the presence of African American performers of European art music in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Similar studies need to be undertaken for some of her contemporaries, such as the singers Marie [Smith] Selika, Flora Batson, and Sidney Woodward, and the violinists Joseph Douglass and Clarence Cameron White, before we can interpret more accurately the complex racial interactions in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American society.

3. See Henry T. Sampson, Blacks in Blackface: A Source Book on Early Black Musical Shows (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980); Eileen Southern, Biographical Dictionary of African-American and African Musicians (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982); Southern, The Music of Black Americans, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983); and The New Grove Dictionary of American Music and Musicians, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1986). Sampson, for example, indicates that Jones's 1888–89 tour of the West Indies lasted "about six weeks." He continues: "Upon her return to the United States, she was selected to appear as the stellar attraction of the Grand Negro Jubilee at Madison Square Garden in April 26–28, 1892" (pp. 385–86). Most of the misinformation is derived from articles that appeared during Matilda's lifetime. An undated 1892 clipping from the Pittsburgh Times, published just before the exposition was to open, states: "In appearance Miss Jones is said to be refined and modest. She is highly educated and speaks French, English and Italian fluently.... When 16 years of age she went to Paris to study, and finally made a tour of South America, appearing before Don Pedro and other potentates. Upon her return an enterprising manager got hold of her and introduced her to critical New York. She then made her American debut, outside of her home and the Boston conservatory, at the Madison Square theater. Among the notables that occupied the box that evening was Adelina Patti. The white diva was enraptured with her ebony-hued competitor and paid her a personal tribute." As detailed below, there is no evidence that Matilda spoke French and Italian fluently, studied in Paris, or made her American debut at the Madison Square theater, or was heard there by Adelina Patti.

4. "Sissieretta Jones: A Study of the Negro's Contribution to Nineteenth Century American Concert and Theatrical Life" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1968). Jones's scrapbook of press clippings (hereafter SPC) contains newspaper articles and reviews mostly from 1892 to 1896, with a few from later years. It is now at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Manuscript Division, Howard University, as part of the Dr. Carl R. Gross Collection. Many of the clippings are not dated, and some newspapers cannot be identified except through reference to the theater mentioned in the review.
Although Jones, as the Black Patti, was to become one of the most famous women of her generation, she certainly was not the first African American singer to appear in concerts. In addition to Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (1809–1876), whose performances a generation earlier had awakened Americans to the abilities of African American artists in European-based musical traditions, there were several female singers actively concertizing in the late 1880s. Both Marie Selika (ca. 1849–1937) and Flora Batson (1864–1906) had successful concert careers, although in the United States they performed primarily for black audiences in churches and auditoriums. The Hyers sisters, Anna Madah (1855–1930s) and Emma Louise (1857–1899?), were also seen in cities across the country, usually with their own company, but sometimes in traveling African American minstrel troupes.5

Jones initially pursued a different career goal. While her earliest concerts were given in African American venues, as word of her superior singing abilities spread beyond the black community, she was increasingly sought after to appear before diverse audiences. As one of the first African American women to associate professionally with white musicians and entertain predominantly white audiences, Jones had to forge new paths. How she chose to interact with white American culture and how those choices affected her early career are the issues I shall explore here.

Early Life

The eldest of three children, the Black Patti was born Matilda Joyner, probably on 5 January 1868, in Portsmouth, Virginia.6 According to the 1870 Virginia census, her father, Jeremiah, was born into slavery in 1833 in North


6. Various references give different dates for her birth. The most common is 12 January 1869, which is listed on her death certificate and in a variety of articles. The *New Grove Dictionary of American Music and Musicians* and Southern’s *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* give her birth as 5 January 1869, while Southern’s *Music of Black Americans* gives 1868, and several articles written in the 1890s have a date of 12 January 1870. Jones herself provides conflicting dates. A biographical article by W. Alison Sweeney that appears in the *Indianapolis Freeman* notes that “this charming lady and celebrated singer was born Jan. 5, 1868 at Portsmouth, Virginia” (Columbian Exposition edition, 29 August
Carolina. He is listed as a carpenter, and it is noted that although he had been a slave, he was educated to read and write. His wife, Henrietta, also from North Carolina, was fifteen years younger; she was a washerwoman and illiterate, according to the census. The remaining members of the household were Matilda, aged two; her younger sister, Isabella, nine months old; Jeremiah’s twenty-four-year-old younger sister, Silvia, a domestic servant who could read but not write; and William Brayton, a twenty-two-year-old laborer who was boarding with the family. The Joyners’ extended family lived in a two-apartment house on Bart Street, between Effingham and Chestnut Streets (Norfolk Journal and Guide, 15 July 1933, p. 1). It is apparent that, by the time they were established in Virginia, they were part of the recently emancipated emerging black lower middle class.

In 1870, the Joyners suffered the loss of Isabella, the cause of death, as reported by her mother, being “Teething.”18 Several months later, on 12 March 1871, Matilda’s brother, Jerry M., was born. It may be after his birth that Matilda was first called “sis” by her parents and relatives. Five and a half years later, on 10 October 1876, Jerry Jr. died from an “Abcess in [the] Bowels.”19

It is not certain whether the Joyners moved to Providence, Rhode Island, together. Clearly, Jeremiah was still living in Portsmouth when Jerry Jr. died. But Matilda was not consistent about when she arrived in the northern city. Interviews in various newspapers indicate that she was two, three, or four years old when she moved, but one article from 1906 or 1907 states: “Her father, J. M. Joyner, was pastor of the Afro-Methodist church [in Portsmouth, Virginia] and was also chief chorister. . . . In 1876, Mr. Joyner received a call to Providence, R. I. . . . and the entire family moved to that place” (unidentified newspaper, SPC). To add to the confusion, Matilda’s obituary in the Norfolk Journal and Guide notes that “senior residents of this city remember

1891). But in her interview in the New York Dramatic Mirror, Jones says, “I was born . . . in Portsmouth, Virginia, in 1869” (11 January 1896, p. 17). Rather strangely, the birth date, “January 12, 1869,” recorded on Jones’s certificate of death is crossed out; an unknown hand has substituted “Dec. 25, 1864.” Although I have not found a record of her birth, if the 1870 Virginia census, which lists her as two years old and her younger sister as nine months, is taken into account, the only birth year that can be correct is 1868.

7. The Virginia Old Births Index, 1867–1879, lists Isabella’s birth as “Aug. 1869.” The family name is spelled “Joiner,” the father’s name is given as Jerry, and his occupation is given as “lumberman.”

8. There is some confusion concerning Isabella’s age at the time of her death. In the Virginia Register of Deaths for 1870 (no. 66), “March 12” is given as the date of her death at 12 months, just before her first birthday. It appears, however, that the 1870 census at the Joyners’ residence was not completed until April of that year. Isabella’s age is given as “9/12” in that document. Since the census entry confirms she was born in August 1869, she probably died in July 1870, rather than in March.

9. Register of Deaths, 1876 (no. 126). Jerry’s death, according to this document, was reported by his mother, “Mary.” This name may have been entered in error, or it may indicate that Jeremiah and Henrietta had separated by 1876. See below.
the active young Matilda as a student in the old Webster school on Queen Street in the later 70s. . . . Sometime in the early 80s she was sent to the North to further her education” (15 July 1933). It is possible that one or both of the Joyners commuted between Portsmouth and Providence during these years, which would account for the discrepancies enumerated above.

In any event, by 1878, according to the Providence City Directory, Jeremiah, a carpenter, was boarding at 20 Congden St. Two years later, the 1880 City Directory lists for the first time a “Miss Henrietta Joyner” at 31 Mathewson St.; in 1881, she is identified as a “widow” living at 7 Jackson Court. The designation of “widow” may have led to the recent speculation that Jones’s father died soon after the family arrived in Providence.10 Jones, however, said in 1892 that both her parents were living in Providence (The Message, 14 May 1892). Her statement is verified by the city directories, which continue to list her mother and father at separate addresses through 1893, after which her father’s name no longer appears.11

Matilda’s musical talents were noticed when she was a child; the Norfolk Journal and Guide obituary observes that like her mother, who “was a talented musician and vocalist, having sung in the Ebenezer Baptist Church until her death,” the young Matilda “showed possibilities as a singer and would fill the air with melody on the slightest provocation.” As her mother was a singer and possibly also a pianist, she was probably Matilda’s first teacher. There is no direct evidence to support this speculation, but given the economic burdens Henrietta had to endure as a single parent, it is unlikely that there was enough money in the household for the young Matilda to take private lessons. The first extant indication that Matilda would pursue music as a career comes from when she was a teenager. According to an 1891 biographical article in the Indianapolis Freeman (hereafter Freeman), she “commenced her instrumental education at the age of 15 at the Academy of Music, Providence, R. I., under the tutelage of Baroness Lacombe, an eminent Italian preceptor, and Mr. Monros, also eminent in the world of music.” A search of the Providence city directories has not uncovered any listing for an Academy of Music. Neither are

10. In the Rhode Islander Magazine section of the Providence Sunday Journal, a well-meaning but error-filled biographical sketch by Maureen McGarick, “‘Black Patti’ Was a Success; Her Audience Was a Failure,” posits that the family moved when Matilda was seven and that her father “may have died shortly after coming to Providence” (28 September 1980, pp. 14–21).

11. I have found no further mention of Matilda’s father until 18 May 1912, when, as he was approaching eighty years old, an item appeared in Vanity Fair: “Black Patti is shrouded in darkness. Her father, Jeremiah Malachi Joyner, D. D., P. D. Q., C. Q. D., etc., refuses to accept his daughter’s offer of a sustenance, insisting upon continuing as butler in the home of George L. Spaulding, the Witmark man of music. Joyner is a former Carolinian slave and has the distinction of having been his master’s body servant during the Civil War. His favorite narration to the present generation of emancipated blacks relates how gingerly he sat on his young ‘masra’ when the latter, tired of dodging Unionist’s bullets, enveloped him[sel]f with straw and hid under the feet of Joyner as the latter drove a one-mule chariot through the ranks of both armies to the ‘masra’s’ home in Dixie.”
there entries for a Baroness Lacombe or a Mr. Monros. There was, however, an Academy of Music theater in the Phenix Building at 129 Westminster Street, where music studios were probably available for private instruction. There is also a listing and advertisement for a “Providence Conservatory of Music” run by Joseph Hastings, Jr., though no teachers are mentioned in his 1880 advertisement and no archival materials are extant. In the 1883 directory, however, an entry for “Coombs, Ada B., Miss, teacher of elocution” appears in the “Teachers, Music” section.\[12\] Later listings add “vocal culture” to her qualifications. Her studio was located at 283 Westminster Street, which is the thoroughfare where most Providence musicians had their studios, schools, and offices at the turn of the century. Coombs can be found in successive directories through 1913. If the information in the Freeman article is correct, Coombs’s first listing in the City Directory coincides with Matilda’s recollection of her lessons. Although I have not been able to identify positively “Mr. Monros” (or “Mouros” in several sources), a Mr. Munroe, who also taught music in Providence, can be found in the 1884 directory, though not at the Academy of Music address. I have not been able to determine whether Matilda studied at Hastings’s school.

Sometime during the first half of 1883, Matilda met David Jones. He was born in Baltimore and was working as a “Bell-man” at the Narragansett Hotel in Providence.\[13\] David Richard Jones and Matilda Sissie Joyner were married by John C. Stockbridge, a Baptist clergyman, on 4 September; in the Register of Marriages their ages are recorded as twenty-three and eighteen. On 8 April 1884, Matilda gave birth to a girl, Mabel A. (Matilda’s correct age, sixteen, is recorded in the Register of Births; David’s age is given as twenty-one, and he is now employed as a waiter at the hotel.)

By 1884, Matilda’s father had moved to a semidetached house at 8 Grave’s Lane. During his seven years in Providence, Jeremiah had apparently given up carpentry, for he is now listed as a carpet cleaner. Matilda’s mother lived at 7 Jackson Court by that time, and Matilda Jones is listed as a boarder there.\[14\] No further information on Matilda’s musical progress or her studies during this year exists, though it seems probable that her mother, Henrietta, took care of little Mabel during those times when Matilda had to practice or take her lessons. While David, Matilda, and Mabel were boarding with Henrietta, David evidently was able to leave his job as a waiter to become a newspaper

\[12\] In Matilda’s 1896 interview in the New York Dramatic Mirror, the interviewer says that “she began taking lessons . . . from Mme. Ada Baron Lacombe in Providence” (11 January 1896). This reference to her teacher suggests that Ada Byron Coombs is probably the same person as Baroness Lacombe.

\[13\] Register of Marriages, City of Providence, Rhode Island State Archives.

\[14\] The Providence City Directory for 1887 lists “Joyner Henrietta, widow, h.[ouse], 5 Jackson ct.” and “Joyner Jeremiah M., carpet cleaner, house, 8 Grave’s lane.” In the directory for 1892, Jeremiah is listed at the Grave’s Lane address, but “Mrs. Henrietta Joiner” is now listed at 321 No. Main Street.
dealer (1885 City Directory). The Providence census of 1885 also sheds some light on Matilda’s parents: her mother still indicates that she is a widow, while Jeremiah’s name is followed by the letter “D,” indicating that he is divorced.

On 23 February 1886, tragedy struck the Jones household when their not-yet-two-year-old daughter, Mabel, died. It was undoubtedly a difficult time for the family and may have precipitated Matilda’s decision to pursue her singing career in earnest. According to the 1891 Freeman article, Matilda moved to Boston to study: “At 18 she commenced vocal training at the Conservatorium at Boston.” I assume that her studies began in the fall of 1886, though she may have arrived in time for the spring 1886 semester. It is not clear which music school is being referred to here. No record of her attendance survives at the New England Conservatory, and it is possible that she was not registered there, but instead studied privately with a member of the faculty. It may also be that she studied at a different music school, perhaps the Boston Conservatory of Music. Matilda probably remained in or around Boston during the 1887-88 academic year. In the Freeman article there is mention of an 1887 “grand entertainment for the benefit of the Parnell Fund before an audience of five thousand” at which Matilda was asked to sing. Since Charles Stewart Parnell, an Irish member of Parliament, was first charged by the London Times in mid 1887, the organization of the defense funds in various American cities did not occur until early 1888. A thorough search of the Boston Pilot, which lists all contributions to the fund, did not reveal when or where the entertainment took place. Perhaps it occurred not in Boston but in Providence, where there was another large Irish American community.

Concert Tours of the Caribbean, South America, and the United States, 1888–91

During the spring of 1888, Matilda was asked, probably by Flora Batson, a Providence neighbor, and her husband, John Bergen, the white manager of the Bergen Star Company, to participate in a series of Bergen concerts in a number of New England cities, as well as in Philadelphia, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. A review of the Philadelphia concert appears in the 12 May 1888 New York Age: “Mrs. M. S. Jones of Providence appeared . . . for the first time, and created a marked impression. Her voice is sweet, sympathetic and clear, and her enunciation a positive charm.” It is possible that at one of the Bergen

15. I wish to thank Jean Morrow, librarian at the New England Conservatory, for her generous help in trying to verify Matilda’s attendance at the school. The records of the other major music school of the period, the Boston Conservatory of Music, are not extant for this period. It is mentioned as the school she attended in the New York Clipper (see p. 566 below).

16. An undated article in SPC from a September 1892 Pittsburgh Chronicle Telegraph places the concert in 1889, and in a January 1893 interview in SPC from the Chicago Evening Post, Matilda says the concert took place in Providence.
concerts, Matilda was heard by William Reisen, who was an agent for Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau, the management company that led the Metropolitan Opera during this period and had represented Adelina Patti on her South American tours. James R. Smith, another agent for the firm, contracted with Matilda to join the Tennessee Jubilee Singers for a two-year tour of the West Indies, the Windward Islands, and South America (see Fig. 1); the twenty-year-old singer would star as the prima donna of the new company. Although he represented to his singers that the tour was being sponsored by Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau, Smith probably organized the tour in partnership with C. H. Matthews as a separate venture for his own profit. He had taken a troupe of actors to the West Indies several years earlier and would have known the problems associated with a prolonged visit of the sort.

At the beginning of August the troupe—consisting of nine African American singers, a pianist, and their white manager—gave an open rehearsal at Wallack’s Theatre on Thirteenth Street and Broadway in Manhattan. The next morning, they left on the steamer Athos for Jamaica, landing at Kingston after a voyage of six and a half days. On August 11, two days after their arrival, they gave their first performance. Anticipation was high among the Jamaicans, perhaps due to the “puffs” that appeared in the Kingston Daily Gleaner during the week. For example, the first notice, on Tuesday, 7 August, begins: “These extraordinarily successful Choral Singers, who have received enthusiastic admiration both in Europe and America for the perfection of their

17. The use of the words Tennessee and Jubilee in the name of Smith’s troupe was indicative of the drawing power and fame of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a group formed in the late 1860s to provide the college with needed funding. During the first half of the 1870s, the Jubilee Singers achieved international renown, particularly after appearing in Boston at the second World Peace Jubilee in 1872. Demand for their appearances was so great that in the 1880s they formed two troupes.

The availability of lucrative concert appearances and the establishment of a second company led to the use of their name (or similar names) by troupes with no connection to Fisk. By calling his troupe the Tennessee Jubilee Company, Smith was hoping that prospective audiences would associate “Tennessee” with Nashville, the home of Fisk. In his introductory remarks to audiences, he indicated that his singers were raising money for the college (see below).

18. A letter of introduction that Smith produced for the newspapers in Trinidad confirms that Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau were not managing the Tennessee Singers: “Mr. James Smith / Manager, Jubilee Singers / My Dear Sir,—The Tennessee Jubilee Singers, under your management, are indeed a great novelty, and recognized as musical marvels” (signed “Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau,” it was printed in the Port-of-Spain Gazette, 12 December 1888). The letter, dated 10 April 1888, probably refers to the troupe before Matilda was signed on to the tour. An article in the Freeman relates an interview between Florence Williams and James Smith, in which the latter claims that the troupe rebelled against him and broke their contract. Members of the company claimed that Smith broke the contract by not paying their traveling expenses and, according to Williams, by informing the company “that they were under the management of Henry Abbey; that he was backed and sent out by him as acting manager. I called at Mr. Abbey’s office last September to see about how the company was getting on, and met Mr. Matthews, Mr. Abbey’s ‘right-hand’ man, and in conversation with him he told me that the company was not one of Mr. Abbey’s, but was sent out by him (Matthews)” (20 April 1889).
Figure 1  Tennessee Jubilee Singers, 1888–89 tour. Numbers indicate the order in which stops were made.
harmony, will arrive in Kingston.” The 8 August issue, quoting Harper’s Weekly, discusses the “cabin songs of the South” (i.e., spirituals): “These songs become finally a part of their workshop, and so strong is the desire to exhort in song among them, that often during prayer the wailing, mournful strain of some soul will pour forth.” Thursday’s paper carried two items, the first of which whetted the appetite of its readers: “[They] will . . . give . . . the opportunity of listening to their weird, melodious harmonies, camp meeting chants, cabin songs, refrains and melodies.” The second item reprinted reviews, including one from the New York Herald, which documented that “The Tennesseans” had performed at Chickering Hall (in New York City) and had been well received. One day before their arrival, an item in the Daily Gleaner reprinted the New York Times notice of the “musicale” that was heard at Wallack’s. The members of the troupe mentioned in the Gleaner and in another Kingston newspaper, Gall’s Newsletter, were Annie Smith and Hattie Brown, sopranos; Kate Johnson, alto; Will Pierce and George Richards, tenors;19 and John Woldord and George Stevens, bassos. The troupe was “augmented” by Matilda, who sailed with husband David, and Louis L. Brown, an exceptionally fine baritone. Professor A. K. LaRue served as accompanist and teacher. Some deception on Smith’s part was intended, since he was attempting to use the reputation and goals of the real Fisk Jubilee Singers to promote his company. While he never said outright that his troupe was from Fisk University, he suggested that it was one of the college’s jubilee groups criss-crossing the United States and Europe to raise money for the institution.20

A review of the Tennessee Jubilee Singers’ first concert at the Theatre Royal, which took place on Saturday evening, 11 August, extolled the troupe’s rare talent: “It is seldom that any company of vocalists, or indeed that of any professional theatrical performance, has been so enthusiastically greeted by a Kingston audience” (Daily Gleaner, 13 August 1888). The detailed review comments favorably on virtually all the numbers on the program. The only negative comment concerned the length of the concert: “The programme, which consisted of no less than eighteen items, of which nearly every one was wholly or partially repeated, rendered the entertainment a little too long.” Matilda sang only one number, “The Night Birds Cooing,” in the first

19. Richards’s name may be in error, since other references to the singers include David Jones as part of the group. It is interesting to note, however, that when Will Pierce enumerates the members of the troupe in his Freeman interview, he does not refer to David Jones as a singer (13 July 1889; this interview, apparently conducted in a single session, was serialized in the issues of 22 June, 29 June, and 13 July).

20. At the first concert in a new venue, Smith usually addressed the audience. He spoke of the post–Civil War effort to educate freed slaves by establishing a college at Nashville, and the realization that there was not enough money to run it: “It was then that . . . the idea of a singing tour occurred to Mr. George White, the treasurer and teacher of singing and music at the college” (i.e., Fisk). Smith followed this history with the information that there were three companies in existence in 1888—one in Australia, one in Pennsylvania, and this one in Trinidad (Public Opinion, 4 December 1888).
half; she then opened the second half with Henry Russell’s famous descriptive song “The Ship on Fire.” The reviewer noted that “her range of voice is as remarkable as it is even, and her enunciation and method display the most careful cultivation.” He continued, “Mdme. Jones sang the dramatic and descriptive song, ‘The Ship on Fire,’ with great declamatory power, and in response to a rapturous encore, she gave the lullaby song from [E. Jakobowski’s] Erminie, which was received with great enthusiasm.” Although there is no other mention of her in the review, Matilda is listed in the published program for a duet, “God in Mercy,” and she most likely participated in the final number, which is not specified.21 (The repertory of the troupe, to the extent it can be determined from reviews and notices, is given in Appendix A.)

A review of the second concert, which took place on 14 August, was even more enthusiastic than the earlier one: “There is no doubt whatever that the quaint and harmonious vocalization of the Company, combined with the attraction of some voices of exceptionally fine quality, have scored a great success with the music-loving people of Kingston” (Daily Gleaner, 16 August 1888). Matilda’s repertory included the “Magnetic Waltz Song” and “Marguerite’s Farewell,” as well as a repetition of “The Ship on Fire.” She also sang a duet, “Tell Me, Ye Merry Birds,” with Will Pierce, and as an encore “responded by a most beautiful rendering of the sweet song, Home, Sweet Home. . . . Mdme. Jones created a genuine feeling of pleasure and pensive sadness in the large and sympathetic audience . . . by the sweet and expressive rendering of the well-remembered notes.”22

21. The program, as given in the Daily Gleaner of 13 August 1888, was:
1—The Lion Chase—Piano Solo—Professor LaRue
2—Mary and Martha have just gone along—Jubilee
3—Marguerite—(solo)—W. H. Peirce [sic]
4—Go down, Moses—Jubilee
5—Old Oaken Bucket—Solo and Quartet
6—The Night Birds Cooing—(selected)—Mdme. Matilda S. Jones
7—Steal Away—Jubilee
8—Only to See her Face (Solo)—Louis L. Brown
9—Good News, the Chariot is Coming—Jubilee

PART II
1—Solo description (Ship on Fire)—Mdme. Matilda S. Jones
2—Swing Low, Sweet Chariot—Jubilee
3—God in Mercy—(Duet)—Mdme. Jones and Miss A. M. Smith
4—Humble Yourself—Jubilee
5—Talk about your Moses (Solos and Chorus)—Jubilee
6—Down by the Sunrise—Mixed Quartette
7—Anchored—(Solo)—Louis L. Brown
8—Suwanee [sic] River—Solo and Mixed Quartette
9—The Last Chorus—The Tennesseans

22. According to a later review in the Times, a newspaper in Barbados, the chorus provided “a sort of echo” behind the scenes while Matilda sang the ballad (14 November 1888).
For the third program, the Tennesseans performed the expected jubilee songs, but also introduced a novelty, a "Dramatic Musical Concert, entitled 'The Professor at Home,'" with the following cast:

The Professor ......................... L. L. Brown
Prima Donna ............................. Mme. Jones
Tax Collector ............................ W. H. Pierce
Domestic Annie ........................ Katie Johnson

Although this comic opera sketch was performed a number of times during the tour, no review thus far uncovered describes it in detail. Matilda also sang Arditi's "Ecstacy" (sic), which was to become one of her crowd-pleasing specialties during her early career.

On Saturday, 18 August, as their fourth concert was about to take place, Smith announced that the company would leave Kingston during the week of 20 August to tour the countryside of the island. After appearing at Spanish Town, Linstead, Poros, and Old Harbour, they would return to Kingston for two additional concerts to "close the season." Another notice appeared on Tuesday, 21 August, which announced a new tour of twelve additional towns, to be visited between the third and twenty-first of September.

Although there is no direct evidence that the first inland tour did not draw large audiences, several items in the Daily Gleaner suggest that the troupe was not doing as well as was expected financially. On 23 August, it was noted in an item in the "Local News" column that "to accommodate the public [in Poros] ... the management has decided to play at popular prices in the inland towns. Front Seats 2/-, Back Seats, 1/-." The new prices were half of those charged in Kingston and may reflect the disposable income available in the countryside. In addition to the possible meager receipts generated on this part of the tour, the company had to contend with difficult travel conditions. Will Pierce commented in the Freeman:

It would have amused you to see us riding from Kingston to New Castle on small mules. Well you would have burst your sides had you have noticed "Lew" Brown and myself hitching our mules together and then trying to drag Miss Jones' and Miss Brown's behind us.... Mr. Jones had often boasted of his superb horsemanship. He started out on a two year old filly, which had not been broken to the saddle. He had been gone about two hours when we discovered him coming back leading the horse, covered with mud from head to foot. The horse had evidently been trying to ride Mr. Jones. (13 July 1889)

Two days later, another item appeared: on their return to Kingston, the troupe would perform their two concerts at the "Conversorium" to accommodate those "who for conscientious reasons would not visit the Theatre." On Monday, 27 August, Smith announced that the troupe would not tour the island again, but that this would be their last week of performances in Jamaica. (It appears that even with reduced admissions, there were not enough new engagements to sustain another inland tour.) But by 31 August,
Smith had evidently changed his mind once again, since he announced that the Tennesseans would sing a number of benefits during the following week in the towns that had been visited the previous week.

Although the performance of 1 September was advertised as the Tennesseans’s last appearance in Kingston, when they returned, another concert, a benefit for the building fund of the Chapel School House, was scheduled for Saturday, 8 September. Smith advertised that following this final concert, the troupe would definitely leave on Monday, 10 September, on the steamer Orinoco for Colon, Panama. It is difficult from this vantage point to gauge the public response to these various contradictory announcements, or to determine whether Smith had indeed organized his itinerary in advance. But when the Orinoco left on Monday afternoon, Smith and his troupe were not aboard. The next day, it was announced that because the troupe had been “so successful both in Kingston, and in those inland towns within reach of the Railway, . . . they have been induced to prolong their stay in the country and proceed at once on a tour of the island” (Daily Gleaner, 11 September 1888). After touring once again, the Tennessee Jubilee Singers returned to Kingston to sing ten additional concerts, of which eight were benefits. Finally, on Monday, 22 October, some six weeks after their first announced departure, the Tennessee Jubilee Singers sailed on the steamer Medway for Colon. Although the company had been scheduled to sing only six concerts in Kingston, their tour was so profitable that they performed more than fifteen. As they prepared to depart Jamaica, several members of the troupe were given presents. Matilda and Katie Johnson each received a gold medal. Hattie Brown was presented with a necklace and pendant, John Wolford with a silver watch, and Will Pierce with a silver medal. As the Medway was about to depart, Smith was honored by the secretary of the Sailors’ Home, who gave him a purse “as an acknowledgement of your valuable services.” The company then sang “Good Bye on the Ocean,” “Roll, Jordan, Roll,” and “God Save the Queen,” to the applause of those on the dock as well as those on board. Two days later, they arrived at Colon.

Although it was advertised that the Singers would stay in Panama for six weeks (Gall’s Newsletter, 18 October 1888) before returning to Jamaica, they arrived back in Kingston two weeks later, on 5 November. While Smith volunteered no official reason for the early return, it is probable that the company

23. The Tennesseans’ benefit concerts were probably organized to attract larger audiences than might otherwise have attended. In one published item, it was noted that one-third of the proceeds, after expenses, went to the organization being benefited (Antigua Observer, 8 and 17 October 1891). While a gift of that amount might reduce the troupe’s proceeds for the night, it generated good will and probably helped to increase attendance at the next benefit. This last group of concerts in Kingston (on 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 15 October) included benefits for the Kingston Ragged School, the Sailors’ Home, the Conversorium, and the Jewish Alms House. Somewhat surprisingly, the company returned to Spanish Town to give still another benefit on 17 October, this time for the Baptist church. Two final benefits were given; the first, on 18 October, was for Matilda, while the second, on 20 October, described as a “complimentary,” was for J. R. Smith, the manager.
did not attract large enough audiences and could not communicate well due to the difference in language and culture in Panama. There simply may not have been enough Americans living there to sustain a six-week engagement. Back in Kingston, the troupe sang two more concerts (Daily Gleaner, 2 November 1888). Then, on 7 November, they boarded the Medway once more to resume the tour. During the first three months, several members of the company had evidently returned to the United States: Smith’s wife; the treasurer, Frank de Fonteny; and the soprano Annie Smith24 were no longer listed on the steamer’s published passenger list.

After a five-day voyage, the company disembarked in Barbados and that same evening gave their first concert. Unfortunately, the performance was not a success, due to a rainstorm that kept the audience quite small. Smith evidently surmised that the small attendance was some sort of slight to the company,25 but, as noted in the Barbados Globe of 15 November, the second concert was so well attended that sales for the back seats were halted at an early hour and many members of the audience had to stand. A third concert was scheduled for Saturday, the seventeenth, while three more were advertised for the week of 19 November, on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. This schedule of six concerts over a two-week period appears to conform to the general plan Smith formulated when he organized the trip. Several notices in Jamaica refer to a six-concert subscription; one can speculate that a similar plan was in effect during the troupe’s two-week sojourn in Panama as well.

The reviewer for the Globe wrote enthusiastically about the concerts, citing Jones, Pierce, Johnson, and Louis Brown for their solos:

But who was there present that could not appreciate Mdm. Matilda Jones’ Ecstasy, from Ardit. . . . She kept the audience spell-bound . . . and was received with rapture. . . . She is unmistakably entitled to the lavish praise she so justly deserves. . . . We have had the pleasure of hearing two or three brilliant singers, Prima Donnas from the boards of Italy and France, who were highly spoken of in leading journals of the day, and we have never heard a piece [‘Caro nome’ from Rigoletto] better rendered; there was a perfect command of a voice flexible, pliant and sweet . . . Miss Katie Johnson’s magnificent Alto . . . elicited much applause . . . Mr. Pierce’s rich Tenor voice is not to be despised. . . . We have heard some good Baritones, but it has never fallen to our

24. Although Annie Smith is listed in the Daily Gleaner as a soprano, Will Pierce, in his 22 June 1889 interview with Florence Williams in the Freeman, says “she was engaged as an accompanist and not being able to handle our music she was of course dismissed to our sad regret.” If she was indeed hired to accompany the troupe, then the role of Professor LaRue is not clear.

25. An article in Public Opinion, a newspaper published in Trinidad, reprinted the detailed story that had appeared in the Barbados Agricultural Reporter of 12 November. When the assembled audience was not more than two dozen people at 7:45 P.M., Smith decided to refund their money; he then announced his intention to give a free concert for all who chose to attend. When the hall filled, he addressed the audience. In part, he said that he regretted that the troupe had met with such a frigid reception in Barbados “because, as he understood, it was owing to prejudice, the Company being composed of Black Singers.”
lot to listen to one like Mr. Browne [sic], whose modulation and harmony are perfect and complete. (15 November 1888)

Such an enthusiastic review inevitably invites some skepticism. Was the troupe really that exceptional, or was the quality of other performers who toured Barbados so poor? Or was the reviewer paid by Smith to give a “puff”? Or was the reviewer black? It is probable that all the newspapers where the troupe toured were white-run organizations with a staff of white reporters, so one cannot suggest that these reviews are the result of racial pride. Our skepticism is also tempered by seeing the reviews that Matilda received back in the United States over the next few years. Then there is the public response that her appearances generated. Typical of the accolades she received on this trip is the ceremony that took place before the second half of the concert on Monday, 26 November. The Globe reported that at the first of two added concerts, Matilda was presented with a gold medal from the governor and citizens of Bridgetown. The enthusiastic intermission presentation was made by a black citizen of Barbados, a Mr. T. C. Roberts, and S. E. Brewster, who was probably white. The complete text, as reported in the Barbados Times, is given in Appendix B. The company was heard one last time on Tuesday evening.

After a three-day voyage on the steamer Eden, the Tennesseans arrived in Trinidad to give a series of five concerts. The first, scheduled for Saturday, 1 December, again played to a partial house. At the second, according to the reviewer of the Port-of-Spain Gazette (5 December 1888), there were as many people outside the hall as inside. Both groups agreed that the troupe was very good. The critic continued that the large audience at the second performance was undoubtedly due to word of mouth. The twenty-year-old prima donna once again received exceptional reviews:

It is difficult to do her justice without incurring a suspicion of being betrayed into exaggeration . . . Madame Jones’ voice is of great compass, and of combined strength and sweetness, and she articulated every word distinctly; she is one of those rare singers whom one can listen to without the idea of ever getting satiated.

On Monday, 10 December, just before the company embarked on the steamer Barracouta for British Guiana (now Guyana), Matilda received another gold medal, this one from the citizens of Port-of-Spain.

The first concert in Georgetown was scheduled for Thursday, 13 December, but had to be postponed until Friday because the voyage from Trinidad was quite rough and several members of the company had become ill.26 The reviewer for the Daily Chronicle noted that the opening night audience was

26. Will Pierce commented in the Freeman on the extent of seasickness the company faced while traveling by steamer: “After leaving port generally the only food that was consumed by most of the party was soup, but our party seemed to take great delight in feeding the fishes” (13 July 1889).
rather modest, but suggested that the house would be full for the second offering. In commenting on Matilda's voice, he noted that she was

possessed of few of the airs and graces of a petted *prima donna*, . . . and though her voice is not distinguished by the inherent sweetness of Adelina Patti's, it has much of the *bravura* for which Carlotta Patti has gained great favour; and it is withal well-trained, of extensive register, and remarkable for clear enunciation.

(15 December 1888)

The audience for the second concert, however, never materialized. Rather than cancel the performance, Smith announced that the program would be shortened (to about an hour) and that all who were there could stay to enjoy the singing and still have their tickets refunded. He concluded his remarks to the small audience by saying, as he had in Trinidad, that "he did not wish the members of his company to be insulted by being the victims of colour prejudice" (*Daily Chronicle*, 16 December 1888). The troupe prepared to leave for Surinam on the next Dutch steamer. Smith's speech evidently had an effect, because on 18 December, a notice appeared indicating that a petition requesting one more concert was circulating in Georgetown. A local resident, who had attended the second concert, wrote to the editor protesting Smith's insinuation of prejudice. He questioned the notion that British Guianians were prejudiced toward Americans, with whom they maintained close commercial ties, and posited that "there is no place in the world where less prejudice exists in the minds of whites against negroes and other coloured subjects of the Queen" (*Daily Chronicle*, 19 December 1888).

Smith's suggestion that racism in Trinidad and British Guiana was responsible for the small audience turnout cannot be proven. But his comments do raise the question of the racial makeup of the typical audience greeting the Tennesseans on this Caribbean tour. I have found no article or review that speaks of a divided house, where whites sat in the orchestra and blacks in the balcony, as was the case in many theaters in the United States. Furthermore, the benefit concerts given in Jamaica appear to have been in support of white institutions, which would indicate the presence of a substantial white audience. Yet, as the report from the Barbados *Times* demonstrates, a black presence was certainly in evidence when Matilda received her medal. In the absence of more specific documentation, one can conclude that, in general, racially mixed audiences attended these concerts, though it cannot be determined in what percentages.

In response to the circulating petition (and perhaps the public letter to the editor), Smith relented and scheduled a concert for Wednesday, 19 December, and then an additional one for the following evening as a benefit for a local barrister. He also offered to give a concert gratis if it might benefit any other deserving institution or person. (As I have noted above, benefit concerts netted the company 66 percent of the proceeds and usually increased attendance. This offer would have had the troupe perform free of charge.) Smith then cut
the admission price in half (as he had done in Jamaica) and scheduled two
concerts on Saturday, 22 December. The first was a matinee for children, to
which he invited two special groups from the Orphan Asylum and the Ursaline
Convent. It was noted in the Daily Chronicle (23 December 1888) that
although the invitation was gracious, the head of the convent declined the of-
fer, since the children were not allowed to attend public performances of any
kind. The evening concert enjoyed a large audience, and Matilda’s admirers in
Georgetown presented her with a gold medal. Although the company did not
sail on the Prinz Frederik Hendrik from British Guiana to Surinam until
Friday the twenty-eighth, they gave no additional concerts.

The troupe disembarked in Surinam on 7 January 1889. The trip should
have taken no more than two or three days; I have not discovered if they were
at sea for the entire ten days between their departure from British Guiana and
arrival at Surinam or if they stopped to perform in another country en route.
Although I have no reviews from this part of the tour, Will Pierce suggests in
his Freeman interview (29 June 1889) that their week of performances there
was not particularly successful, since they were playing to audiences who could
not understand them. From Surinam, the Singers may have gone further
down the east coast of South America to Brazil27 or perhaps started their trip
back to the United States. After a possible return visit to Trinidad, on 25
January, the troupe arrived in Antigua, where they probably gave one or two
concerts. On 31 January, they boarded the Barracouta for New York, though
they may have stopped at St. Kitts. They arrived in New York City in mid to
late February.

In spite of the small audiences at some of the concerts, the tour appears to
have been financially lucrative. In his interview Pierce estimates that Smith
cleared around $4,000 after expenses, which, he adds, included first-class ac-
commodations for the entire trip. Pierce also alludes to some conflicts be-
tween the company and their manager:

Smith was one of the toughest managers that I ever had any dealings with.
Our contract was signed to sing three nights a week, and we sang every night in
the week and Sunday nights for a change, and now and then a matinee was
thrown in. . . . He would frequently give benefits for different members of the
company, but he always took the money and we got the benefit of his spending
it. (Freeman, 13 July 1889)

It appears, however, that Pierce’s claims were an exaggeration. On the basis of
the itinerary presented above, it is clear that, for the most part, the company
did give only three performances each week. Where a fourth performance was
added, such as in Georgetown, it was followed by more than a week at sea.
Furthermore, with the exception of a benefit for Matilda in Kingston, the
other documented benefit concerts were offered to institutions and people of

27. In several accounts, Jones says that she sang in Brazil. It is mentioned in the Chicago
Evening News, January 1893 (SPC).
the island or country they were visiting. But if Pierce’s account was not entirely truthful, there was clearly a strained relationship between Smith and some members of the company. In Barbados, the Times published a letter to the editor from “Fairplay,” who questioned whether the success of the company was due to the singers or the manager: “It is rumoured that some of the singers themselves are declaring that their abundant success here is solely due to their efficiency. I also heard very little if any credit given to their Manager” (21 November 1888). The letter goes on at great length to extol the role of the manager in financing the tour, developing audience attendance, and maintaining order in the rear of the auditorium. This letter was transmitted to Trinidad, where on 14 December an editorial strongly suggested that the letter had been written by Smith himself. The editor noted that, in Trinidad, Smith had publicly “endeavoured to exalt himself at the expense of the Singers, whom he alluded to in public as ‘his niggers,’ and boasted that they brought him larger profits than [another manager] made with his circus horses. . . . we have never heard a company of educated ladies and gentlemen compared with dumb animals in so off-hand a manner.” Another issue discussed in several newspapers concerned Smith’s relationship with bass Joseph Stevens, who attempted to book cheap passage from Trinidad back to New York “in consequence of the very harsh treatment he had suffered from . . . Smith.” It appears that Stevens was asked to preach at a local church on his day off, and Smith was angry that the singer accepted. This conflict generated several letters, including one signed (but probably not written) by Stevens that didn’t deny the story, but questioned the unauthorized use of his name (Port-of-Spain Gazette, 12 December 1888). While we cannot judge, at this distance, the pros and cons of the argument, it is apparent from this event and Pierce’s accounts that a variety of problems simmered throughout the tour.

In spite of the problems and issues connected with the tour, Matilda had clearly thrived on her new-found fame and had reached a new plateau in her nascent career. Although she had had little actual concert experience, she had been hired as the prima donna and had been enthusiastically received by virtually all the critics and most of the audiences. She was returning to the United States after an international tour, which could only help her to establish her fame back home.

On her return to New York, Matilda agreed to appear with the Tennessee Concert Company, under the management of Colonel George Dusenbury.

28. Florence Williams ends her interview with a denunciation of Smith: “We thank Mr. Pierce . . . for exposing the rascality of James R. Smith. This man took advantage of a class of poor people in one country by using a poor people in another country as the inducement. These kind of men should be exposed, for the white man has been robbing his colored brother all his days and it is time it is ended” (Freeman, 13 July 1889).

29. New Era, 14 December 1888. That Smith would make such comments in public indicates that his indignant scolding of allegedly prejudiced audiences might best be viewed as nothing more than a tactic to fill more seats.
This new troupe had no connection to the Tennessee Jubilee Singers, but used “Tennessee” to indicate that the performers were African American. The company gave concerts in New York, several cities in New England, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Richmond. In April, Matilda joined the all-black Georgia Minstrels for a week at Dockstader’s Theater on Broadway. It was then announced that she would leave for London in mid May. This trip, however, did not take place, since she began a tour with a twenty-four-year-old African American actor, Benjamin F. Lightfoot, appearing with him and Louis L. Brown in cities along the Eastern seaboard. During this tour, Brown was replaced by Will Pierce. While appearing with Lightfoot, Matilda also sang in at least two concerts managed by husband David Jones, which were benefits for the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in his hometown. By the end of June 1889, Matilda had organized her own company, Star Concerts, also managed by her husband.

Although it was announced that she would embark on another tour of the West Indies during the fall of 1889 under the management of Florence Williams, Matilda eventually changed her plans due to a contract dispute. She continued to give concerts up and down the east coast, though in February 1890 an abscess confined her to her home. During the spring, the young diva and her husband evidently decided to organize another company to tour the cities and towns of her first international triumphs: by June 1890, they were the Star Tennessee Jubilee Singers (which included some of the same performers as Smith’s troupe, but had no connection to him or the Abbey organization), this time under a management team that included Matilda’s husband. The similarity of the new troupe’s name to that of Smith’s company would make advance booking easier, since the residents of the Caribbean would have fond memories of Matilda’s first appearances. The tour started once more in Kingston, Jamaica. While there, her costar, Louis Brown, died, and David Jones returned to New York to find a replacement, as well as to add several people to the troupe. Will Pierce and Hattie Brown, both

30. The announcement of this trip may be responsible for the rumor that David Jones took Matilda to London for skin-lightening treatments.

31. Lightfoot was a resident of Providence and may have known Matilda when they were growing up. His career was cut short in August 1891 when he drowned in Gloucester, Massachusetts, at age twenty-six (Freeman, 22 August 1891).

32. Florence Williams’s troupe, the New York Star Company, left New York on 20 October 1889. On 24 November, an “observer” from Kingston wrote to the Freeman, complaining that instead of the troupe that had appeared earlier (i.e., Smith’s company), the residents of Kingston “were tortured by a group of 3rd rate singers, who have failed entirely. To-night a company of ‘amateurs’ will give a concert to aid them back to their homes. Let 3rd class men ‘give us a rest.’ The race is quite able to hold its own when singing is called for; therefore ‘we’ ought to try to be ‘sine culpa’ on our own ground” (14 December 1889).

33. Brown was quite popular in Jamaica. During the first tour, his reviews were almost as enthusiastic as Matilda’s. His sudden death led the citizens of Kingston to propose commissioning a memorial tablet (Freeman, 13 September 1890). It is not known if the tablet was ever produced.
members of the first company, agreed to join, as did an elocutionist and dramatic specialist, Alice Franklin. From Jamaica, the troupe traveled to Haiti, where they remained for several months. See Figure 2 for the itinerary of the tour.

A letter of 1 November to the Freeman from David Jones related the great success of the company in Haiti. Jones speculated that the company might visit England and Cuba before returning. On 16 November, the troupe appeared at the president’s palace in Port-au-Prince. The president “complimented the singing in a neat speech and had refreshments served after the concert” (Freeman, 17 January 1891). After additional concerts, the company left Haiti on 5 January 1891, arriving at St. Thomas two days later. During their three-week stay, they performed eleven concerts, of which two were benefits for local causes.

Following another two-day trip, the company arrived at Barbados on 29 January, where they stayed until their departure for Grenada on 16 February. They agreed, however, to return to Barbados by 6 March to meet the “B. N. A. squadron” and give “a few concerts in honor of H. R. H. Prince George of Wales” (St. Thomas Bulletin, 20 February 1891). From Barbados, the company made a second visit to Grenada and then, by the twentieth of March, arrived in British Guiana. An item in the St. Thomas Bulletin notes that “the troupe intends returning there [i.e., to Grenada] shortly, when M'dme. Jones will be presented with a gold medal subscribed for by the inhabitants of St. George’s” (20 March 1891). Before departing Georgetown, however, Matilda received still another token of appreciation, a gold tiara (see Fig. 3) “surmounted with three stars, . . . in the centre of each of which is a diamond. The stars can be detached and worn, one as a necklace pendant, the other two as sprays for two golden hair pins, which accompany the tiara” (St. Thomas Bulletin, 18 April 1891). The company probably also performed in New Amsterdam, British Guiana. Then, after stopping a third time at Grenada, they left for several islands not previously visited on this tour: Antigua, St. Kitts, Montserrat, and Nevis (as noted in the St. Thomas Bulletin of 1 June). A little more than one month later, on 6 July, the troupe finally returned to New York City.

34. According to the St. Thomas Bulletin (10 January 1891), the company included D. R. Jones, Mrs. D. R. Jones, Wm. H. Pierce, Mrs. Margaret Allen, Frank W. Bosley, Edw. Whitfield, Miss Florence Williams, and E. [= G.] W. Brown. Prof. D. N. Cox, the accompanist, is not on the passenger list, nor is Hattie Brown, but the published list of departures for 28 January includes them as well as E. Grant. Of interest is the presence of Florence Williams, who had interviewed Will Pierce in 1889 and had organized her own unsuccessful troupe just one year earlier (see nn. 28 and 32 above).

35. Matilda was given several medals on her first tour of the Caribbean, but there is no doubt that she received many more honors on this second tour. In addition to the tiara from Georgetown, British Guiana, and the gold medal from St. Thomas, she received a gold medal from the president of Haiti, as well as $500 in gold for the company and another gold medal from the residents of St. George, Grenada.
Figure 2  Star Tennessee Jubilee Singers, 1890–91 tour. Numbers indicate the order in which stops were made.
Figure 3  Matilda Sissieretta Jones, the Black Patti, wearing a gold tiara; this may be the tiara given to her by the residents of Georgetown, British Guiana. This photograph was taken in Los Angeles, probably in 1898. Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries, Negative No. UW 18730.
While the music performed on this tour was mostly different from that sung on the first tour, much of the new repertory belonged to the same genres as before. Matilda sang a few new pieces, including “Il Bacio” by Arditi, Gounod’s “Ave Maria,” and Anton Rubinstein’s “When the Heart is Young.” Will Pierce added two comic numbers, a “stammering” song, “Wait til the Clouds Roll By,” and somewhat surprisingly, one of the earliest of the “coon song” genre, Paul Allen’s 1883 hit “A New Coon in Town.” The “Anvil Chorus” from Il trovatore, sung by the entire company, was also added. It appears that just a few spirituals were performed (only five are mentioned in the reviews I’ve seen versus twenty-eight for the first tour), perhaps because the troupe was no longer being represented as singers from Fisk University.

The importance of this second tour should not be underestimated. A small group of young African American singers had set out to tour the Caribbean and South America without the financial backing of a professional white management organization, such as Abbey or one of his agents. Although the name of this company, the Star Tennessee Jubilee Singers, was obviously intended to resonate with audiences who had heard Smith’s Tennessee Jubilee Singers, Jones’s troupe did not pretend to be raising funds for a black college. They had learned from their first experience under Smith’s management how to organize a tour. They had managed to sustain this second tour from their own resources for over a year and had returned with unimaginable riches as well as new fame. While various schools had supported groups of jubilee singers on a variety of tours around the world, the Joneses, as the proprietors of an African American troupe, had managed to tour successfully with a musical program that ignored minstrel show stereotypes and demonstrated a versatility of musical styles and genres.

The Black Patti, 1892–93

Although Matilda joined again with Flora Batson and the Bergen Star Company during the fall of 1891 to give concerts in New York and Brooklyn, an item in the Freeman on 4 December notes that she “is making a Southern tour and is not with the Bergen Star Concert Company.” Two weeks later, another item places her in the “West.”

By 1892, Matilda’s career was moving in a new direction. For one thing, she was no longer using her given name in her publicity releases. While “Matilda Jones” might have served her well in small venues, her impending fame undoubtedly dictated that a more distinctive name was necessary—one that audiences would remember without difficulty. Thus, sometime after her return from the Caribbean, her given name became “M. Sissieretta” or just “Sissieretta” (possibly derived from “Sissie,” which appears in the marriage record). Over the past three years, she had also been advertised as the Black Patti at some concerts. The first evidence of the official name change probably
occurring in the long biographical article published in the *Freeman* on 29 August 1891, whose headline proclaims “THE BLACK PATTI. THE RACE’S MOST BRILLIANT SONG BIRD, MADAME M. SISSIERETTA JONES.” There are several explanations proffered as to how her sobriquet was conferred. The most common is the one that Matilda appears to have given during the interview that resulted in that same article:

Before entering upon her West Indian trip she sang before all the newspaper critics of New York City. The Times spoke of her as a phenomenal singer without an equal in her race. The Sun said she would eventually surpass some of the world’s greatest singers. The Herald predicted a great future for her, and the Providence Journal said she would be a credit to her race and do honor to any stage on which she might appear. The New York Clipper gave a glowing account of her, and gave her the name of the “Black Patti.”

If the critics did make such pronouncements, however, they do not seem to have appeared in print. A thorough search has not uncovered any of these reports. The brief item in the *New York Clipper* (4 August 1888), from their Providence correspondence, reports that

Mme. Matilda S. Jones has signed a two years’ contract with Abbey, Schoeffel, & Grau. Mme. Jones left the city [Providence] for New York [July] 31, and leaves that city Aug. 2 for Kingston, and makes a tour of the West Indies, South America and Australia. She is a native of Portsmouth, Va., is twenty years of age and received her musical education at the Boston Conservatory of Music. The Providence Journal says of her singing: “Every quality that the exact critic might look for she possesses in a high degree.”

The *New York Times* likewise refers to her as “Mme. Matilda Jones, prima donna, of Providence” (31 July 1888). An announcement in the *New York Age*, a black paper, does mention the sobriquet: “Mrs. Matilda Jones, a young

36. The conferring of sobriquets was not unusual. Jenny Lind was called “The Swedish Nightingale” and Adelina Patti was known as the “Queen of Song.” It was common from the 1880s on to associate black singers with their famous white counterparts or to label them with superlative epithets. Marie Selika was called the “Queen of Staccato” and “Creole Patti”; Flora Batson, the “Queen of Song” and “Peerless Queen of Song”; Rachel Walker, the “Creole Nightingale”; Louis Brown, the “Black Mario”; the pianist Blind Boone, the “Black Paderewski”; the comedian John Rucker, the “Alabama Blossom”; Mamie Flower, the “Bronze Melba”; Verina Gilliam Lewis, the “Black Melba”; and popular singer Bessie Hamilton, the “Black May Irwin.” Why Louis Brown was called the “Black Mario” is not clear, since Brown was a bass, while Giovanni Mario (1810–1883), for whom he was named, was a tenor.

37. It may be that James Smith represented to Matilda that the contract she was offered was issued by Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau, which has led to the oft-repeated statement that Jones was offered a contract to sing at the Metropolitan Opera. As discussed above, it is clear that Smith and his partner, C. H. Matthews, were the sole proprietors of the Tennessee Jubilee Singers and that Abbey’s contract was never proffered. Matthews was the financial manager of Abbey’s firm. Frank de Fonteny, the treasurer of the Singers, had been previously associated with the American tour of the Adelina Patti company.
lady of 20 years, and Mr. W. H. Pierce of Providence will be the stars of the affair. Mrs. Jones is called the ‘Black Patti’ by such men as Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau, who should be competent to judge in such matters” (4 August 1888). How does one interpret these last remarks? There does not appear to be an extant document that confirms this claim. Did the reporter speak to Grau, to Smith, to Matilda? Was the sobriquet coined as a press gimmick? If so, why wasn’t it used with any consistency until four years later?

There are other discrepancies as well. In Will Pierce’s interview (Freeman, 22 June 1889), he says that Panama “is also the place where Madame Jones the prima donna of the troupe was first styled the Black Patti.” There is evidence, however, that the name “Black Patti” was used for advertising purposes from time to time on the first tour prior to the troupe’s arrival in Panama. The Daily Gleaner in Jamaica refers to the “Black Patti” just once, on 18 October. Later references appear as well: in Trinidad, for example, the Public Opinion review of the Tennesseans’ first concert states, “She well deserves the name of ‘Black Patti’ by which she is designated on the hand bills” (20 November 1888). In another Trinidad newspaper, the New Era, the reviewer refers to Matilda first as the “Tennessean Patti” and then as the “Black Patti” (7 December 1888). On 14 December, the notice describing the presentation of a medal to Matilda says she is “called by her admirers, the ‘Black Patti,’” and the name is also mentioned by the Daily Chronicle of Georgetown, British Guiana (15 December 1888). Two years later, the sobriquet is still not used with any consistency. In the St. Thomas Bulletin, one review notes “the appellation ‘colored Patti’ has been very aptly applied” (9 January 1891). An advertisement on 22 January proclaims “the only acknowledged coloured Patti and Medalist of her race and West Indian favourite.” Finally, in an 11 January 1896 interview in the New York Dramatic Mirror, Matilda says, “One of the papers spoke of me as the ‘Black Patti’ in 1884, and the name has clung to me ever since” (emphasis added). None of these accounts are completely satisfactory, since no creditable source confirms the 1884 or 1888 date.

There is one additional factor that casts suspicion on Matilda’s and Pierce’s explanations. When Matilda’s daughter was born in 1884, her name was entered in the Register of Births as “Mabel A.” On her birth certificate, however, the “A.” has been spelled out as “Adelina.” So it is possible to conclude that Matilda, as a teenager with thoughts of a singing career, created the sobriquet herself. During the early 1880s, after an absence of twenty years, Adelina Patti was giving concerts in the United States. Her name was surely known to anyone interested in singing; she endorsed many commercial products and received as much as $5,000 for some concerts. It is not too much of a stretch to envisage the young Matilda, whose unusual singing voice had already attracted attention, imagining herself as a star singer who could command an extraordinary salary. She would pattern herself on this world-famous diva, sing some of the same repertory, and suggest to critics and reporters that other critics or prestigious managers had compared her to Adelina Patti.
From Matilda’s earliest studies, her teachers had coached her in some of the standard concert repertory. She had mastered a few popular operatic arias (such as “Caro nome”) that were performed by most prima donnas when they appeared in concert, as well as operetta arias, English ballads, and a few virtuoso songs (such as the “Bobolink Song” by Sir Henry Bishop). During the early 1890s her studies with Louise Cappiani (fl. 1880s–1890s) clearly resulted in a more extensive solo repertory that included “Sempre libera” and Meyerbeer’s “Robert, toi que j’aime” (from Robert le Diable). But although she spoke in several interviews of wanting to appear in opera, Matilda, as far as is known, never attempted to learn a complete operatic role. While she probably had no chance of securing a contract to sing with the Metropolitan Opera, other opportunities were available to her. The African American baritone Theodore Drury headed his own opera company, which gave performances of complete operas for black audiences. Given her drawing power, his company would certainly have benefited from the addition of the Black Patti in some of its presentations. There were also possibilities in Europe; in 1899, the black tenor Sidney Woodward wrote from Europe that he had received several offers to join opera companies there.38 While the mix of pieces performed by the Black Patti was equivalent to that of her contemporaries, her expanded repertory was still somewhat limited in comparison to singers such as Carlotta Patti or Emma Thursby, even though the latter, by choice, restricted her appearances to concerts and oratorio.39

Through the first third of 1892, most of the Black Patti’s career was centered around concerts attended by predominantly black audiences. In mid February, for example, she came to Washington, D.C., where she sang at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. There were exceptions, however; on 24 February she was invited to sing for President Harrison, his family, and guests at a luncheon at the White House. This was the first of her many official visits to the White House.40 After a concert in Missouri in mid April, the Black Patti returned to New York to appear in three “Colored

38. In a letter from Moscow to the Colored American, Woodward says, “I . . . have had three offers for grand opera, but my present position pays me better, and I have [to do] less work” (22 July 1899, p. 5).

39. Thursby (1845–1931) was an important American singer who, for reasons of religious conviction, would not sing opera in costumed performances. Thus, her career was centered on oratorio and concert appearances with various bands and orchestras, as well as recitals. Her repertory was chosen from art songs similar to those sung by the Black Patti and arias from opera and oratorio. In a series of five concerts at Chickering Hall in 1882, she sang in German, French, Italian, English, and Spanish, performing a wide range of arias and songs by Mozart, Beethoven, Jomelli, Handel, Bach, Gérard, Verdi, Bizet, and others. For a detailed survey of Thursby’s career, see Richard McCandless Gipson, The Life of Emma Thursby, 1845–1931 (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1940).

40. Although she was not the first African American woman to sing at the White House, the Black Patti was most certainly the first invited to sing for four consecutive sitting presidents: Harrison, Cleveland, McKinley, and Roosevelt.
Jubilee” concerts at Madison Square Garden on 26, 27, and 28 April.\textsuperscript{41} The first program was reviewed by many writers in the white press, including the reviewer for the \textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, who seemed genuinely surprised by what he heard:

The negro jubilee . . . would be worthy of little note were it not that it brought to the attention of New Yorkers a singer, who leaving her color altogether out of the question, has one of the most pleasing soprano voices ever heard in this city.

We confess that the advance notice of Sisieretta [sic] Jones, the singer in question, did not predispose in her favor. The announcement that she was “the Black Patti” and the wearer of more medals than any other singer in the world savored of palaver and vulgarity. She appeared on stage, however, in a modest and becoming gown of pearl gray; she stood quietly and seemingly at ease, and then sang the cavatina from Robert le Diable with a purity of tone, an accuracy of phrasing, and a richness and a power that the audience, which hitherto had been bored, applauded and cheered. She also sang “Way down upon the Suwannee River,” a waltz song by Celle, and Verdi’s “Sempre Libera.”

No manager need be afraid to have Sisieretta Jones in his company. She is an artist, and the statement made by her manager that she is the greatest singer of her race should be altered to the statement that she is one of the best of any race. (7 May 1892, p. 5)

By the beginning of May, word of the Black Patti’s exceptional talents was beginning to spread beyond the black community. On 8 June 1892, her career appeared to be moving into high gear when she signed a one-year contract, with the possibility of a two-year extension, for $150 per week (plus expenses) with Major James B. Pond, the white proprietor and manager of the American Lecture and Musical Agency. Pond was a well-known and

\textsuperscript{41} An advertisement in the \textit{New York Times} on Sunday, 24 April 1892, announces the performances:

\begin{verbatim}
Grand Negro Jubilee Entertainment  
TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND  
THURSDAY  
April 26, 27, and 28  
at 8 o’clock  
THE FAMOUS  
“BLACK PATTI”  
MME. M. SISSIERETTA JONES  
The Greatest Singer of Her Race  
The Alabama Quartet—Jubilee Chorus of 40 Voices  
Skirt, Jig and Buck Dancing and the Buzzard Lope  
Double Quartet of Banjos  
Battle Royal—“Hit a Head Where You See It”  
Levy in Two Cornet Solos  
LEVY’S GREAT AMERICAN BAND  
Finale at 11 o’clock  
CHAMPION CAKEWALK, 75 COUPLE[S]
\end{verbatim}
well-connected manager, who represented many famous authors, including Charles Dickens, George Washington Cable, John Greenleaf Whittier, Mark Twain, and somewhat later, Paul Laurence Dunbar, as well as some musicians.\(^1\) On 14 June, less than a week after joining with the major, the Black Patti appeared on an all-black program sponsored by a black fraternal organization, the Society of the Sons of New York, to afford relief for the African American poor of New York City. The concert, a benefit for the Free Bread Fund, raised $1,100.

The major moved quickly to feature the Black Patti in venues where she would be seen by large audiences and get coverage from the white press. While he announced that she would be touring with Jules Levy and his military band, initially he featured her as the star of a small troupe, the rest of whom were white musicians. Thus, after four years of singing exclusively with other black performers, the Black Patti was suddenly thrust into a new arena in which she became the first black artist to be featured as the star of an otherwise white company. The major’s shrewd strategy guaranteed that curious white audiences would flock to the Black Patti’s concerts to hear for themselves what the critics raved about. While the other artists appearing with her—Princess Lillie Dolgorouky,\(^2\) the Lutteman Swedish Sextette, and pianist Rudolph von Scarpa—may have been able to interest some audiences by dint of their exotic European credentials, Pond staged a major coup by signing as his headliner an African American singer who was not associated with minor musicological society.

42. The *New York Dramatic Mirror* carried the announcement: “Major Pond, who has spent his life in piloting such attractions as Henry Ward Beecher, H. M. Stanley, . . . Mark Twain and George W. Cable, has just secured an attraction which he declares will rank with any of those named. This attraction is the African lady who appeared at the Madison Square Garden a short time ago under the title of ‘the Black Patti.’ She will travel through the country this season under Major Pond’s management, supported by Jules Levy and his great band” (SPC). Levy (1838–1903), an Englishman by birth, spent the last thirty years of his life in America. One of the most famous cornetists of the last third of the nineteenth century, he toured extensively with his band.

43. The princess’s biography is recounted in a review from the *Springfield Republican* (SPC). She was “related to the reigning family of Russia; . . . she was born in Seville, Spain, and studied in Russia, receiving when she was nine years old a gold medal at the conservatory of Varocia; . . . she is the conductor of the orchestra that plays for the empress of Russia, and . . . [at] the late Paris exposition [of 1887] she conducted a Russian orchestra—she is said to be a fine conductor. . . . She is without a question a superior player, an artist of high rank. . . . Her bowing is perfection, her tone no less, in its elegant fineness and singular smooth depth, whose resonance moves every musical fiber in the hearer.” The reviewer then remarks that it is a shame she played no “real” music, but attributes this fault to the nature of the popular concert. Her performance on this occasion included Vieuxtemps’s caprice “Les arpèges,” Op. 15, and his “Souvenir d’Amérique, on ‘Yankee Doodle,’” Op. 17, as well as an unidentified mazurka by Wieniawski and Paganini’s variations on the “Carnival of Venice.” On another concert she performed Beriot’s Concerto No. 5 with piano accompaniment. The princess was probably one of the three children born to Yekaterina Dolgorukaya, who was mistress to Czar Alexander II. When Alexander’s wife, the Empress Maria, died in 1880, he married Yekaterina in a private ceremony and was about to proclaim her his consort when he was killed by terrorists’ bombs in March 1881.
strelsy or some other “lowbrow” entertainment. This novel arrangement was certainly a brave move on his part, since there was no precedent for a mixed-race “high-art” troupe in the United States just twenty-six years after emancipation. His decision to feature the Black Patti in a company of foreign artists probably reflects his astute intuition that most American white performers might have balked at the prospect of touring and appearing in a troupe that starred an African American singer.

During the summer of 1892, the major booked the Black Patti at a number of festivals. In August, she appeared several times at Saratoga Springs, New York, and at Asbury Park, New Jersey. Her first appearances at Saratoga Springs on 5 August drew such large audiences that, to meet the public’s demand, she was invited back twice more during the month, for a three-performance stint on 15, 19, and 20 August, and for another two-day engagement beginning on 27 August. In the midst of her second set of performances, she traveled to the Buffalo Exposition, where, between the sixteenth and eighteenth, she drew overflow audiences and received immense press coverage. The reviewer in the Buffalo Inquirer commented on the audience reaction to the Black Patti’s performance:

Madame Jones, the Black Patti, is indeed a fine singer. When she sang...the crowd listened to her with rapt attention through several selections, and when she went to put on her cloak to leave the building, the crowd would not have it that way. Manager Robinson jumped on the platform and spoke a few words to the singer. She laid her cloak aside and stepped out once more to sing. She had been requested to sing the old song, ‘Way down upon the Suwannee River,’ and when the first words of the piece fell upon the listeners’ ears all held their breath and listened. The room...was as still as death. (18 August 1892)

In Saratoga Springs, curiosity about the young black singer was so intense that people had difficulty getting into the pavilion. On 16 August, the Daily Saratogian offered the following account:

The interest manifested in the “Black Patti” was shown by the great crush of people who began pouring into the park an hour before the beginning of the concert. Both entrances were used and the rush did not cease for an hour and one half. Every chair, bench or seat of any kind, or anything that could be used as a seat was taken and still sixty percent of the people stood during the entire program. The romantic little lake, with the pavilion in the center, was surrounded on all sides by the crowd of between five and six thousand people who were attracted by the phenomenal singer they were anxious to hear.

The reviews in Saratoga, Asbury Park, and Buffalo were all encomiums to her talent, technique, and above all, her voice:

It must be said that the quality of the Black Patti’s voice, her great range, her power, and the entrancing sweetness and smoothness of her tones, her distinct enunciation, and the ease and naturalness with which she handled her voice, astonished and captivated the most critical, and convinced them of the truth that
she had a phenomenal voice, such an one as comes as a gift to very few people, and having that seems to know almost by intuition how to handle it to perfection. *(Daily Saratogian, 16 August)*

Clearly, the major’s initial gamble paid off, both artistically and financially: as these reviews demonstrate, the public had a genuine fascination to see and hear the Black Patti. And once they heard her, they were enchanted by the exceptional qualities of her voice.

Early in September, Jones made her first appearance in Toronto, Canada. Once again, her performance was so successful that she returned a month later. After several other concerts, she was finally paired with Levy. As the “king of cornetists and the queen of colored prima donnas,” they began to tour together as the Black Patti–Levy Concert Company. Once again, the Black Patti was the only black performer in the company. One of their first joint appearances was for a week’s engagement at the Pittsburgh Exposition in late September 1892, where the Black Patti was received with great enthusiasm. Expectation ran high. A “puff” article in the *Pittsburg Times* related the exposition manager’s interest in her appearance:

Mr. Johnson’s face was aglow with enthusiasm. He is certainly fortunate in the engagement of such a stellar attraction. “Black Patti” is said to possess a marvelous voice. It is said to be as fine and as well cultivated as the fair Adelina’s in her palmiest days. The fact that Major Pond has taken hold of her is in itself a guarantee of the singer’s sterling qualities.

At the end of the engagement, the newspapers rhapsodized about her presence at the exposition. The headline in the *Pittsburg Times* conveyed the general sentiment: “ADIEU, SWEET SINGER.” An audience of fifteen thousand packed the hall

almost to suffocation. . . . Black Patti has sung her way to the hearts of Pittsburg’s usually cold audiences, and last night nothing was too good for her. . . . The applause was deafening and in acknowledgement Miss Jones bowed gracefully and responded by singing “The Cows in Clover.” This was another triumph and the audience refused to be satisfied until the band struck up “Suawnee [sic] River” and the popular singer sang that good old melody. At its conclusion Manager Johnston stepped forward and on behalf of the management of the Exposition presented the songstress with a handsome basket of cut flowers. There was another whirlwind of applause which continued until she retired. (27 September 1892)

Another review (unidentified in the SPC) confirms the enthusiasm of the crowd: her rendition of “The Last Rose of Summer” was followed by “five minutes of most deafening applause.”

During November, Levy and Jones concertized in Erie, Pennsylvania, and various cities in New York and Massachusetts. In pairing her with Levy, whose reputation as Patrick Gilmore’s successor was national, Pond’s gamble was
paying off handsomely.44 While his earlier combination teamed the Black Patti with unknown foreigners, her appearances with Levy were different. Levy already had a reputation as a soloist and band leader; his tours were well attended before the Black Patti joined his band. Now a curious public went to these popular band concerts, and their word-of-mouth recommendations and positive newspaper reviews made the Black Patti an overnight sensation. Many reviewers clearly reflect the public’s curiosity as they discuss the Black Patti’s color, height, teeth, and demeanor. As before, some of them seem to be genuinely surprised. There is a sense that they expected the Black Patti to be some kind of Barnum sideshow; when the demure, attractive, well-dressed prima donna was brought on stage, their reviews sometimes register shock that she was a real singer with a trained voice.45 In a December 1892 interview, the Black Patti commented that singing before predominantly white audiences was still a new experience. Several weeks later, in a January 1893 interview in the Chicago Evening Post (date unknown), she acknowledged her career change when she told the reporter, “It is only during the past two years that I have sung for white people. Before that time I sang only in the presence of my own race.”46 Certainly white listeners attended some of the Black Patti’s concerts during her early years of concertizing; they were assuredly part of her audience in the West Indies. But they probably did not constitute a majority of the audience as was the case in Saratoga Springs and Pittsburgh, for example. During this period of new-found fame, the Black Patti’s studies with Louise Cappiani resulted in the addition of new repertory. Continuing her lessons over the next few years, she acquired still more classical repertory, so that by the time of her European tour in 1895, the Black Patti had a balanced assortment of ballads, arias, and virtuoso songs at her disposal.

In January 1893, the Black Patti debuted at Central Music Hall in Chicago as part of a new troupe in which she was once again the only African American performer. The other members of the troupe (referred to in several reviews as local performers) were Señor Encarnacion Garcia, who played the salterio; William Sherman Baxter, a banjo virtuoso; and the Lady Arion Quartette. The

44. Gilmore (1829–1892) was born in Ireland and came to the United States in 1849. In 1858 he established his own band, which quickly gained renown across the country. In Boston, Gilmore organized the National Peace Jubilee (1869) and World Peace Jubilee and International Music Festival (1872). In 1873 he moved to New York to lead the 22d Regiment Band. Levy served as one of a number of virtuoso cornet soloists in the band. During the 1880s, in addition to its national tours, the band played at Manhattan Beach, New York, each summer and at the St. Louis Exposition each fall.

45. For example, a review in the Chicago Herald notes that “Mrs. Jones is a negress almost as black as can be found, but she has a voice that would make many a Caucasian cantatrice jealous. This statement holds true both as regards the quality and the cultivation of the voice. It is one of great power and great range” ([8?] January 1893).

46. Numerous items in the Freeman cite concerts at various African American churches; see, for example, notices on 4 December 1891 (p. 6), 5 March 1892 (p. 1), 23 April 1892 (p. 6), and 7 May 1892 (p. 3).
Black Patti received the largest size type, and her most famous picture, with all her gold medals pinned to her bosom, adorned the top of the program cover. The company, under the management of F. Wight Neumann, gave four concerts on 5, 6, and 7 January. Although the majority of reviews were laudatory, several critics had reservations about the extent of her training:

Mrs. Sissieretta Jones is a success as an uneducated singer. Since she is possessed of a naturally pure and strong voice which, under proper instruction, would no doubt improve to an extent that would win her renown. As it is, however, there are many other sopranos of her race less well known, it is true, who sing with a greater degree of finish, although they may not possess the natural gifts of Mrs. Jones. (unidentified Chicago newspaper, SPC, 6 January 1893)

Nature has been lavish in the bestowal of this rare voice, but not so generous in providing the higher quality of intellect that should guide a vocal organ to its greatest sphere of usefulness. The voice has been fairly well cultivated, but not to the extent that it deserves nor in the measure it demands. Much of her singing is still without the stamp of art, being crude and at times almost amateurish. (Chicago Tribune, [6?] January 1893)

One can only wonder whether the first of these anonymous reviewers was attempting a none-too-subtle comparison of the Black Patti with Marie Selika, who was active in Chicago at this time and had traveled, studied, and performed in Europe; she was particularly noted “for her trills and staccatos,” and it was said “by able critics that she is only excelled as a prima donna soprano by Madame Adelina Patti” (Cleveland Gazette, 28 April 1888). Of the second reviewer, one can speculate that he may have been biased against black performers in general. Of all the reviews I have seen, these are virtually the only ones that are so decisively negative. After performances in Canada and several midwestern cities, on 15, 16, and 18 March 1893 the troupe returned to Central Music Hall for another four concerts. The program for this second series demonstrates the increased drawing power of the prima donna. The picture of the ladies of the Arion Quartette no longer adorns the program cover, and the size of the typeface announcing the Black Patti has been further enlarged. Inside, the program states “Black Patti Concert.” There is no doubt that she had become the headliner of this tour.

Early in 1893, Will Marion Cook (1869–1944) announced that the Black Patti would appear at the Chicago Columbian Exposition on 25 August as part of the Colored American Day festivities. She was to participate in his new opera, Scenes from “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” On 13 February, in the midst of her midwestern tour, the Black Patti traveled to New York to appear at a Carnegie Hall concert presented by the World’s Fair Colored Opera Company, which

47. It may seem surprising that these concerts were not managed by Major Pond; his agency, however, had an interesting policy by which he “rented” to other managers those artists for whom he had no immediate bookings. In the case of the Black Patti, it meant that her salary of $150 a week (plus expenses) would be paid by Neumann instead of the major.
was intended to showcase the black performers who would appear at the Chicago fair. Although it was announced that Cook, a violinist who had studied with Joachim in Europe, and baritone Harry Burleigh would also appear, a review in the *New York Review* (undated, SPC) notes that Cook didn’t play enough at the concert because he didn’t have sufficient time to practice, and that Burleigh didn’t appear at all. It was the first performance given in the hall by black artists, and it was attended by many of New York City’s wealthiest patrons of the arts, including a Judge Andrews, Mrs. Jeannette Thurber, and Henry Villard. The following day, St. Valentine’s day, the Black Patti sang at Judge Andrews’s home before a party of thirty ladies, including Mrs. Astor and Mrs. Vanderbilt. Afterwards, the chief justice of India presented her “with a valentine which, when opened, contained a check for $1,000. She also received a solid silver basket filled with choice flowers. The ladies pronounced the singing superior to Patti’s and then sat down to lunch with Mme. Jones” (*Freeman*, 11 March 1893).

Toward the latter part of February, the new occupant of the White House, Grover Cleveland, invited the Black Patti to sing—the first of three visits during his presidency. In March 1893, Major Pond contracted the Black Patti to two New York managers, J. C. Velder and E. S. Jones (no relation), for a tour of Ohio and Indiana. The terms of the contract required that they pay $150 per night for the singer’s presence. In Cincinnati, the first stop of the tour, the concert was a financial success. But in Columbus, where she was to perform twice, the first night’s receipts were only about $100. During the concert, Jones paid his bills as far as his receipts would go; he then left the house for “a few minutes” but never returned. Since there were still unpaid bills, the second concert, on 21 March, was canceled. In a letter to the editor, the Black Patti was careful to lay the blame squarely with Jones, who “is not my manager, as many have told me they supposed. My manager is Major J. B. Pond. S. E. [i.e., E. S.] Jones and his partner . . . simply contracted with Major Pond for my services at the two concerts” (unidentified Columbus newspaper, SPC). But instead of returning directly to New York, she traveled to Dayton, where she appeared at the scheduled concert with several local performers, including Paul Laurence Dunbar. The *Dayton Herald* reported that “the entertainment nearly fell through. Black Patti’s manager skipped out with all the cash receipts, and her efforts last night were entirely gratuitous, she receiving no pay whatsoever” (24 March 1893). Through the remainder of the spring, the Black Patti continued to concertize; her performances took her to St. Louis, where the editor of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* rhapsodized, “To say that her singing is grand sounds tame. It swayed the large audience at will. . . . Her singing reminds one of the beauty of nature and brings back visions of the still, glassy water and soft swaying branches of some drowsy nook in summer time. She trills the chromatic scale to perfection and varies it in a manner too rich to describe” (undated, SPC). She also sang in Baltimore, Richmond (Virginia), and her hometown, Providence.
Under Pond’s management, the Black Patti was singing mostly for white audiences, generally in northern cities. When she appeared in the south, however, as, for example, in her home state of Virginia, it was usually in an African American venue. Yet her travels there were not without problems. At her 27–28 March concerts in the Masonic Temple Hall in Louisville, Kentucky, the theater manager separated the audience in the usual southern manner, with whites in the orchestra and blacks in the balcony. As reported in the local papers the next day, “the parquet and dress circle seats were only about half filled” but “the gallery was packed with colored people.” The headline for an interview with the Black Patti in the *St. Louis Commercial* (28 March 1893) trumpeted, “The Black Patti Thinks Her People Not Well Treated.” In the article, she states that she was not pleased that the division had been made:

> It’s so strange; I never have met with anything like it before . . ., putting the colored people off in the gallery and leaving all those vacant seats down stairs. Why, the house would have been crowded if “they” had allowed them to have seats down stairs. I felt very disappointed. I never before had such an experience, and I could not help feeling it . . . I think people of my own race ought not to be shut out in this way.

The interview evidently aroused her feelings to the point that she offered her opinion on another topic that affected her more directly—her lodgings in various cities: “We had so much trouble at the hotels in Cincinnati. We had to search and search before we—Mrs. [Albert] Wilson [her accompanist] and I—could find a nice place. We are at the Galt House here.” The reporter adds that she “said it with the same droll amusement that seemed to say much still was to be desired.”

While it is evident that the Black Patti’s career had reached new heights under Major Pond’s management, there was apparently some friction between them. Sometime during the spring of 1893, the major secured an injunction in New York Superior Court against the Black Patti to restrain her from singing in concerts under the management of any other person. The Joneses produced affidavits that demonstrated that the concerts she gave under her husband’s management were with the full knowledge and consent of the major, in accordance with arrangements made between them. Their defense was strengthened by an assertion that the major had told them at a concert in Troy, New York, that “he would be obliged to give up the contract and they would have to make other arrangements. He told Jules Levy that he desired to get rid of the Black Patti and her husband, and that he (Levy) could have them if he wanted them. He then gave them authority to make other arrangements, which they did . . . He also gave up the contract last December.”

48. This item, most likely from a New York City newspaper, is unidentified in SPC. Since the article makes reference to concerts in Brooklyn and Baltimore, it probably dates from the latter part of April or early May 1893. Black Patti’s mention of Major Pond’s giving up the contract in December 1892 probably refers to the series of concerts she gave under Neumann’s management during the first three months of 1893.
Judge Sedgewick, after listening to the arguments, denied the major's injunction.

This conflict with the major was to be but the first of several during 1893. As the first anniversary of the Black Patti's contract with Pond approached, the Joneses apparently decided not to extend it for an additional two years. When the major was informed of their decision, he again took legal steps to try to enforce his option. While he had appeared anxious to release her from the contract just six months earlier, he now fought to keep her. It is possible that he had already negotiated for her well-paying appearances at the Pittsburgh Exposition of 1893 when he decided to hold her to the contract option. In any case, he went to court seeking another injunction. On 11 June, the New York Tribune reported that an order "restraining Sissieretta Jones . . . from singing under other management than that of Major J. B. Pond, who has a three-year contract with her," had been granted by Judge McAdam. At the end of June, the New York Times's account is headlined "LECTURED THE BLACK PATTI / Judge McAdam Says She is Ungrateful to Major Pond—Must Sing for Him Alone." In reviewing the case, the article notes that Pond and his "colored star" had been in court for several months "over a clause in the contract which gave the manager the privilege of re-engaging the singer for an additional two years under the same terms [i.e., $150 per week] provided for the first year's work." McAdam, as can be inferred from the headline, granted the injunction. The complete text of his decision is given in Appendix C.

In August, the Black Patti once again played the summer festivals, appearing at Asbury Park, Saratoga Springs, and Atlantic City. Her appearance at Asbury Park on 25 August is particularly interesting because she was expected to appear at the Chicago World's Fair that same day to sing in the world premiere of Will Marion Cook's opera, Scenes from "Uncle Tom's Cabin." A black Chicago newspaper, the Conservator, published a long article on 5 September by "Rambler," who told the story with more than a touch of irony. According to his account, Cook and a partner, Morris, were "a precious pair of straw colored pets, . . . who blarneyed a confiding people by one of the boldest confidence games ever seen in Chicago." Forcing out another manager who had already planned the musical celebration, "they were soon managers of 'watermelon day' with the understanding that the more people they packed into the hall the more dollars would jingle in their pockets." "Rambler" continues:

That was a picnic and they proceeded to make the most of it. They had no stock on hand but two dandy imaginations and two eighteen carat tongues warranted to stand any test which emergency might require. They first fastened on two good singers, [Harry] Burleigh and [Sidney] Woodward who were visiting and hence didn't cost very much. Then they resurrected Cook's scheme of his great Afro-American opera, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" which he says he has written and which we are expected to believe will knock out all the operas that the white people ever knew or heard of. They billed this opera and as a climax advertised that Mme. Sissieretta Jones would appear in the title role. . . . Sissieretta Jones was the drawing card and the managers knew it. They did not stop to perfect
arrangements so as to have her here. That didn't bother them. . . . If Sissieretta Jones got there all right. If not, neither of the slick managers would die of heart ache. 49

A large audience (about fifteen hundred) showed up to hear Frederick Douglass's speech and to see the Black Patti in the new opera. After Douglass spoke, the audience "settled back to wait for the great Afro-American Opera and the Only Jones. But neither came." It appears that Major Pond required that $300 be sent in advance to secure the services of his star. Cook and Morris sent $100, but were unable to send the other $200 before the major's deadline. When the money finally arrived,

back came the answer that Sissieretta Jones could not be present. . . . Morris and Cook drew down over $500, and they can afford to smile at their brilliant success. There are only two people who can get any smile out of the affair; they are Black Patti and her manager, Pond. When Morris and Cook found that Patti would not come, they thought that, of course, they would get their $300. The "mon" didn't come, so they sent for it. You can imagine the smiling match which occurred in New York between Sister Jones and her manager as they looked at the $300 and considered the suggestion of sending it back.

"Do you see anything green in my eye?" asked Manager Pond of Mrs. Jones. The lady smiled sweetly and assured him that there wasn't a sign of anything green there. "Are there any flies on Black Patti," suggested the only Mrs. Jones, and the manager said it was past fly time.

Then they divided the $300 between them and telegraphed Mr. Morris that they would have to keep the $300 for damages.

And their heads didn't bump.

"Rambler" obviously had some inside information on the situation, which perhaps came from Major Pond or, more likely, from the Black Patti herself; the article presents a devastating portrait of Cook and his partner, and indirectly attacks Douglass as well, since Cook was his protégé. The Black Patti did eventually sing in Chicago about a month later, when she gave two concerts in the Bethel Church on 18 and 19 September, and then finally appeared at the World's Fair in the Women's Pavilion on the twenty-fifth to sing in a concert with Desseria Plato (Mrs. Boardley), who was making her debut.

The Black Patti's next major engagement was at the Pittsburgh Exposition once again. Given the tumultuous reception she had received during her first performances there, it is not surprising that Major Pond would want to book her there again. In the intervening year, her reputation had grown by leaps and bounds, and she was returning as a star, first as soloist with the band of Ellis Brooks (1848–1920), then sharing top billing with opera star Italo Campanini (1845–1896) and accompanied by Gilmore's band, now under

49. If Cook did indeed write an opera on Uncle Tom's Cabin, it was never publicly performed and has disappeared without a trace. It is also unlikely that the Black Patti would have sung the title role; more likely, she would have taken the role of Eliza.
the direction of David W. Reeves (1838–1900). In announcing the final week’s programs, the manager commented that in order to allow the season to “go out in a blaze of glory,” he had, “in deference to the expressed wishes of hundreds of patrons, secured the release of other engagements of the Exposition mascot, ‘Black Patti.’ . . . We have had great difficulty in closing this engagement; to do so necessitated our buying off two other places where she was scheduled to sing.” Once again, the reviews were enthusiastic for her entire engagement there.

Following those triumphant appearances at the Pittsburgh Exposition, for which the major was said to have received $2,000 per week, the Black Patti joined a new group of performers—three young musical sisters, the Vilonas, and Della Thompson, an elocutionist. They toured through the end of 1893 and the first few months of 1894. The Black Patti’s performances continued to dominate the reviews, though the Vilona sisters also received a share of the critics’ plaudits.

Looking back over the past two years, the Black Patti undoubtedly recognized that despite her trials and tribulations with Major Pond, she had become a household name. Her fame was widespread. She was interviewed in both black and white newspapers and spoke her thoughts freely. Thousands of people had jammed into concert halls and summer festivals to hear her sing; they left these concerts with a new impression of African Americans, for here was a young woman who did not fit the post–Civil War stereotype, who did not sing minstrel or other lowbrow songs, who was educated and trained as a singer, and, above all, who had a voice that was extraordinary, striking, and beautiful to hear, equal to those of the most famous singers in the world. She was making a salary of almost $8,000 a year, not including expenses, which made her one of the highest-paid African American entertainers of her time. She was a role model, a public representative of the progress and accomplishments of her generation of African Americans, born after the Civil War. There was still significant white opposition to black progress in some quarters, but many educated blacks were achieving middle-class status within their African American communities. During the 1890s, before the advent of the Supreme Court’s 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision and state Jim Crow laws, interracial contact

50. The Vilona sisters, Emma, Nina, and Lilly, graduated from the University of Berlin. Emma and Nina were violinists, and Lilly was a pianist.

51. Elocutionists were quite popular in the latter part of the nineteenth century. They read dramatic passages from famous novels, recited poems, and sometimes played a scene from a well-known classic play. Elocutionists were parodied and ridiculed in minstrel show recitations as well as “stump” speeches, which were generally incoherent and filled with malapropisms.

was occurring with some regularity. The Black Patti, under Major Pond's management, was proof that white audiences would attend popular events with high-art programs in which the races were mixed.

**National and International Fame, 1894–96**

During the last half of 1893, although she was still under contract with the major, the Black Patti was temporarily managed by the African American elocutionist Ednorah Nahar, and her career continued to flourish.\(^53\) Evidence of her new fame was seen in January 1894, when she was invited to join Harry Burleigh to participate as a soloist in a charity concert under the direction of his teacher, Antonín Dvořák, at Madison Square Garden Hall, sponsored by Jeannette Thurber's National Conservatory of Music and the *New York Herald* in New York City. Dvořák, who was quite interested in black spirituals, decided to write an arrangement of "Old Folks at Home" for soprano and tenor solo, mixed chorus, and orchestra.\(^54\) The concert on 23 January, one of several that featured major artists,\(^55\) netted $1,047 for the *Herald*’s Free Clothing Fund. In addition to her appearance in Dvořák's brief work, the Black Patti, who was the only performer who was not a student or faculty member at the conservatory, sang the "Inflammatius" from Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, and "Robert" from *Les Huguenots* as an encore. The review in the *New York Herald* noted that "Mme. Jones was an enormous success with the audience. To those who had heard her for the first time she came in the light of a revelation, singing high C's [in the 'Inflammatius'] with as little apparent effort as her namesake, the white Patti" (24 January 1894, p. 10).

On 12 February, the Black Patti appeared in another benefit, this time for the *New York World* and the Society of the Sons of New York. The audience at the Standard Theatre was mostly black: "They occupied more than half the orchestra and balcony seats and all of the gallery." The concert was also attended by a number of white "celebrities," including State Treasurer Colvin,

53. Nahar was one of several African American elocutionists who toured the country reciting poetry and giving both humorous and serious speeches. In one program, Nahar read a poem (unidentified), recited "The Chariot Race" from Wallace's *Ben-Hur*, and played Lady Teazle in the "Quarrel Scene" from Sheridan's *School for Scandal*.


55. On 4 February, for example, the benefit concert featured Anton Seidl and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Victor Herbert and the 22nd Regimental Band, and the soprano Amalie Materna.
his wife and friends, and Edward Harrigan, of Harrigan and Hart fame.\textsuperscript{56} The Black Patti “was the bright particular star of the evening. Never was this gifted woman heard to better advantage,” the unidentified review in her scrapbook continues; “Never were her songs received with greater enthusiasm. Her rich flexible voice, with its marvelous range, power and sweetness, rang out superbly.” Other African Americans who performed at the benefit were Sidney Woodward, Fred Piper, Elzie Hoffman, Ednorah Nahar, and the secretary to Colvin, Charles J. Anderson.

Although the Black Patti continued to perform during the first five months of 1894, few items or notices appear in the newspapers and journals. One small bit of evidence can be gleaned from the \textit{New York Dramatic Mirror}, where in the “Dates Ahead” listings, the “Black Patti Concert” schedule details a two-week itinerary of one-nighters in Baltimore, eight towns in Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. Several weeks later, there is a notice for a concert on 2 May at Wheeling, West Virginia. For this tour, the Black Patti may have headlined an all-black company that included Harry Burleigh, the Burr Edwards Quartet, the Merritt sisters, and her accompanist, Mrs. Wilson. In spite of the absence of detailed itineraries, we can assume that the troupe was touring smaller cities up and down the east coast during this entire period. The concerts at the beginning of May may have ended the tour for the season. During the 1890s, many houses closed down at the end of April due to the heat. The beginning of May through the first week of August was usually a time for vacation, unless an artist wished to perform in open-air summer concerts or on the roof gardens of several New York theaters. An item from the Providence correspondent in the \textit{Dramatic Mirror} for 11 August notes that “Sissieretta Jones, the colored Patti, has left her home in this city 30 [July] for New York. She will be at Saratoga 12–16, and Milwaukee later” (p. 6). Two weeks afterward, a brief notice from Saratoga Springs appears: “Congress Springs Park: Sissieretta Jones, ‘Black Patti,’ sang to an audience of over two thousand persons [August] 12.”

I have not been able to determine when the Black Patti was finally free from Major Pond’s management; under the original terms of the contract, she should have remained with him through June 1895. But by mid 1894, his name is no longer mentioned in the various items that describe her tours. During the fall of 1894, she became associated with Rudolph Voelckel, a white manager who would be central to the rest of her professional career. In November 1894, he announced the formation of the “Black Patti Concert Company,” which consisted of the diva; Matilda Walter, contralto; Vincenzo Bielletto, tenor; Orme Darvall, bass; Felix Heink, pianist; and Little Ruby, a

\textsuperscript{56} The popular theatrical team of Edward “Ned” Harrigan and Tony Hart was seen on Broadway every season from 1872 to 1885. For a brief summary of their careers, see Charles Hamm, \textit{Yesterdays: Popular Song in America} (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 279–81; for Harrigan’s songs, written in collaboration with David Braham, see Jon W. Finson, \textit{Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs} (Madison, Wisc.: A-R Editions, 1997).
child dancer from England. According to the advertisement, the company was “entirely” booked for a twenty-week season in the United States, and the Black Patti was to appear at the Palace Theatre in London in April, May, and June of 1895. His notice pointedly gives theater managers the opportunity to hire either the whole company or the Black Patti by herself.

The company gave its first concert, with a different pianist and without Little Ruby, at Carnegie Hall on Sunday, 18 November (tickets were priced at 25¢, 50¢, 75¢, and $1). The New York Herald reviewer commented that “the house was crowded, many of the audience being colored” (19 November 1894, p. 8). The classically oriented program included an aria from Max Bruch’s opera Das Feuerkreuz (sung by Walter), a duet from Gounod’s Faust (sung by BIELLETTO and DARVALL), and several instrumental pieces by Sarasate, Leonard, and Czibulka by the Vilona sisters, who apparently replaced Little Ruby. The review concluded with an encomium to the Black Patti: “The honors of the evening were all, however, for Mme. Jones. She sang charmingly and without any affectation of manner the ‘Villanelle’ waltz, by DEL ACQUA, which she sang as an encore to GOUNOD’s ‘ARIETTE’ waltz [which was composed for Adelina Patti], and also the ‘Suwanee River.’ Her other numbers were an aria from ‘Traviata’ and GOUNOD’s ‘Ave Maria.’”

Although the tour was billed as being transcontinental, I have found little information on the cities included on the itinerary. On 16 December, a concert was given at the Columbus Theatre, probably Oscar Hammerstein’s house on 125th Street in New York City; this engagement suggests that the troupe may not have traveled far from the east coast. On 26 January 1895, the Atlanta correspondent to the New York Dramatic Mirror refers to a concert by the Black Patti, without the rest of the company: “Black Patti drew a tremendously top-heavy house at De Give’s Grand Jan. 24.” The next notice of a concert appears in the “Dates Ahead” listing on page 16 of the 16 February 1895 issue: “SISIERRETTA JONES: Galveston, Tex. Feb. 14–16.” In the “Personals” column on page 12 of the same issue, however, the following appears: “JONES.—Mrs Sisseretta Jones (the Black Patti) sailed for Europe last Tuesday [12 February]. On February 17 she will begin an eight weeks’ engagement at the Winter Garden [sic], Berlin.”

There is no explanation for the contradictory notices, though it is obvious that the Black Patti did not appear at Galveston. Several questions arise from this discrepancy. If it was planned that a European tour would occur during 1895 in conjunction with the engagement in London, when was the Galveston date canceled? One usually does not embark on a European tour without some advance preparation. We can assume that the Berlin engagement was known by the middle of January at the very latest. Why, then, wasn’t the “Dates Ahead” listing removed? Given that there is little evidence of the tour, I doubt that the 1894–95 twenty-week tour, which would have lasted until 6 April 1895, was as well subscribed as Voelkel indicated. It is possible that
when theater managers around the country found out that the new Black Patti company was performing opera, operetta, and "serious" instrumental works rather than "popular" pieces, they feared small audiences and shied away from making bookings. Adding to the mystery is the question of who was managing the Black Patti's affairs during the first half of 1895. Although the advertisements list Voelckel as the manager of her company, the Black Patti implies in an interview in the *Dramatic Mirror* that she went to Europe on her own and there met Mary A. Rodman, who "is now my manager" (11 January 1896, p. 17).

The itinerary for the European tour has not yet been fully uncovered. From items in a variety of sources, there is evidence that she appeared in London, Paris, Milan, Naples, Monaco, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Cologne, and possibly several other German cities, and gave command performances before the Prince of Wales and duke of Cambridge in England and the king of Italy, as well as the German emperor, who gave her a silver cross; the dates for most of the engagements are still unknown.57 Reviews of her first appearance in Berlin, where she remained for two months,58 were translated and published on page 1 of the 4 May 1895 *Freeman*.59 The reviewers were enthralled with her singing, the good taste of her delivery, her musical understanding, and the purity of her voice. Several commented on her color and her sobriquet: "Only half the name fits, but fortunately the better half. 'Patti' we may rightly call her, although we protest against the adjective 'black'" (Berlin *Post*, [20 February 1895]); "The applause which greeted the close of each number was a tribute to a talent which is quite independent of color or nationality, a talent worthy of admiration for its own sake alone, and which can well appeal to an intelligent audience" (Berlin *Borsen-Courier*, [20 February 1895]).

By the second week of April, the Black Patti was in London for a six-week stay at the Palace Theatre. A notice in *The Stage* announced her opening: "The star turn is Black Patti, who will make on Easter Monday her first appearance in this country" (11 April 1895). A review in the following week's issue fairly glowed:

57. An unsigned column in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* on happenings on the foreign scene refers to her appearances in Paris at L'Horloge, an establishment very similar to the Wintergarten in Berlin: "The sensation of the week was the debut at L'Horloge of the Black Patti on July 1. She sang as well as I ever heard her sing, and the audience was genuinely delighted" (20 July 1895, p. 2). A relatively thorough search through the Parisian newspapers and journals in June and July 1895 has uncovered no advertisements or reviews. I have not been able to determine how long she remained in Paris.

58. Although an item in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* on 16 February 1895 states that she had an eight-week engagement in Berlin, in her 11 January 1896 interview, the Black Patti says it lasted for three months. The dates of her Berlin and London openings (19 February and 16 April, respectively) corroborate the *Mirror*'s version.

59. The translations of the Berlin reviews published in the *Freeman* are reprinted in full in Southern, "In Retrospect," 100–102.
The most noteworthy feature of the show is Black Patti. . . Miss Sissieretta Jones, to use the singer’s proper name, is an American, with a rich flexible voice that she well knows how to employ. On the night of our visit she sang well “Sempre Libera” (Traviata), her second effort “Bobolink” by Bishop, was even better rendered, but it remained for her third song, “The Idol of My Heart,” by Perry, “to pull down the house.” This showed great talent and expression of sentiment and the lady was encored again and again. (18 April 1895, p. 13)

The competing weekly, The Era, reported that she showed herself a mistress of the vocal art in her first selection, “Sempre Libra” [sic], an air from Traviata, which is indissolubly associated with the Black Patti’s great namesake, and which demands exceptional capacity for its rendering. Her selection of “The Last Rose of Summer” was justified by her artistic interpretation, and she further emphasized her undoubted success in two other items, Bishop’s “Bobolink,” and a waltz song, “The Idol of My Heart,” by Perry. (13 April 1895, p. 16)

Another London journal, The Entr’acte, was likewise enthusiastic, although the reviewer hints that there were members of the audience who greeted the Black Patti’s appearance with skepticism and some racial hostility:

The lady who is dubbed the “Black Patti” . . . prospered very well. . . . Her first essay (this was from “Traviata”) was of the bravura order, and was not apparently understood by some occupants of the gallery, in whom the spirit of ridicule lurked. The “Black Patti,” however, lived this feeling down, and with subsequent contributions evidenced her capacity for phrasing cantabile schemes, which won for her considerable applause.

Negro singers are very often regarded more as curios than legitimate vocalists, but it should be said that the “Black Patti” is not only well endowed in the matter of voice, but that she takes her intervals and phrases so well as to show that she has been well trained. In my humble opinion the lady shows to highest advantage in her bravura displays, for although the spirit of trickiness is sometimes asserted in these numbers, enough is done to show that the singer has subjected her voice to legitimate training, and that her method is the result of culture. (20 April 1895, p. 5)

Although the number of reviews is still limited, I believe one can conclude that the Black Patti was received by European critics and audiences with the same exceptional accolades that she had been given in the United States. That there seems to have been some prejudice in England similar to that seen in America is perhaps surprising, especially in light of the Black Patti’s statement several months later during her New York Dramatic Mirror interview that she saw no prejudice in Europe on her trip. Since her performances appear to have been quite successful, it is not entirely clear why she returned from Europe when she did. When asked the question, she answered, “I enjoyed being in Europe, but important business compelled us to come home,” to which her husband added (“laughingly”), “The important business was that she insisted on coming back to America to see her mother” (11 January 1896, p. 17).
In the same interview, she somewhat ingenuously told her interviewer that her recent appearance at Proctor’s Pleasure Palace, one of several Proctor houses at which she had performed during December of 1895, was the first regular vaudeville house in which she had sung. It is difficult to give credence to this statement, since she had appeared the previous April at a variety house, the Palace Theatre, in London, as well as at the Wintergarten in Berlin and L’Horloge in Paris: “I have been very successful, but I think I prefer to sing in concert. There are so many things in a vaudeville performance to distract the attention of the audience that they are not in a proper frame of mind to enjoy straight singing.”

A New Career Opportunity

One week later, in the 18 January 1896 Dramatic Mirror, Mary Rodman announced: “Just back from her European triumphs [the Black Patti] is available for a limited number of concert engagements, alone or with her Grand Concert Co.” I have been unable to discover the identity of the members of the new company. It is unlikely that the singers associated with the Black Patti before her European tour would still be available eight months later. A notice of 29 February in the Dramatic Mirror says that the company would make its first appearance in Lakewood, New Jersey. It also suggests that the Black Patti had been ill for a while, gives dates of appearances in Boston (2 March for two weeks) and Pittsburgh (23 March), and mentions an unspecified engagement in Chicago. According to another item (9 May), her tour during the spring took her as far west as Kansas City, Missouri, and as far south as Atlanta. There is one other mention of a performance (probably a solo appearance) in Boston at Keith’s New Theatre during the week of 11 May. What can be gathered from these items and brief reviews is that her career, for the most part, was now limited to appearances at vaudeville houses. While she was undoubtedly making a decent salary—perhaps as much as $300 a week for two performances a day—she was not achieving the kind of breakthrough that would drive her career to new heights.

Throughout the first five months of 1896, the Black Patti remained under the management of Mary Rodman. Rather surprisingly, on 27 June an article

60. Although I have not found any documents that give the Black Patti’s salary during 1895–96, one can assume that it was higher than the $150 per week she received under Major Pond’s contract. A brief article in the Dramatic Mirror describes a dispute in which she contracted to appear for one performance at a New York Conservatory: “The price agreed on was $75. It was a stormy night, and the receipts were a good deal less than $75, so [the proprietress] tried to induce the singer to take less, which she refused to do. Mrs. Jones brought suit and the result was a verdict in her favor for the amount named” (7 March 1896). Using this sum for a single performance as a guide, and with the knowledge of her salary ($500 per week) some months later, it is probable she averaged $300 per week during this period.
in the *Dramatic Mirror* announced the formation of a new company, to be called the Black Patti Troubadours and managed once again by Rudolph Voelckel, this time with an experienced partner, John J. Nolan. The Black Patti was to be the “stellar attraction,” supported by a company of forty, who would perform specialty acts, vaudeville turns, and operatic excerpts. The concept was not entirely original; there were at least three African American companies traveling across the country with this type of show.\(^1\) The difference here was that there was an identifiable and famous star—the Black Patti—at the head of the new company, one who would be able to attract large audiences wherever she appeared.

The announcement signaled an enormous change in the career of the Black Patti. For four years, she had been featured, for the most part, as the star and only black artist on programs that were otherwise limited to white performers. While she was booked from time to time in African American venues, the extraordinary success of her career up to this point was due to her appearances at events where she was seen by great numbers of white patrons. By agreeing to star in an all-black company that was being organized to spotlight her singing, the Black Patti was certainly abandoning the idea that, like her namesake, she might one day sing in complete staged operas as well as appear in concerts.\(^2\) The twenty-eight-year-old singer, who just a few months earlier professed a dislike for vaudeville settings, had now agreed to be the *star* of a company that featured vaudeville as well as comic antics and burlesque associated with the minstrel show.

Why the sudden change of direction? The reasons, though never discussed publicly by the Black Patti, are not difficult to discern:


\(^2\) In various interviews, the Black Patti indicated that she would like to sing opera. In January 1893, for example, in her *Chicago Evening Post* interview, she responded to a question: “My favorite music? Oh, operatic music of course. I like ballads because they seem to please the public very much. I should like extremely well to sing an opera. My teacher [Mme. Cappiani] wants me to study the part of Aida and Zelika [sic] in ‘L’Africaine.’ . . . I should like very much to go abroad and study acting and become an opera singer.” An article in the *Detroit Tribune* is headlined “HER FAVORITE IS ‘L’AFRICAINED.’ The Ambition of the Black Patti to Sing in That Opera. BUT HER COLOR’S AGAINST HER” (12 February 1893).
1. By 1896, her career choices were quite limited. She was a popular star who could attract large audiences at certain events or during the summer season, but it is likely that many of her other concerts were not so well attended. Her repertory was probably too highbrow for the "popular" concerts and other venues in which she appeared. During most of 1896, for example, she seems to have performed mainly in vaudeville houses, where operatic excerpts and art songs were not usually heard. A concert career similar to Emma Thursby's simply was not viable; there weren't enough white musical organizations who would hire her. The Black Patti's performances with several military bands do not appear to have continued beyond 1894. (Levy, for example, evidently refused Pond's offer to give him her contract, in spite of her great success.) So for most of her performances, she sang accompanied on the piano by Mrs. Wilson. Given the negative changes in race relations that were beginning to be seen in many parts of the United States, there was no indication that in the future there would be an expansion of the venues where she might appear.

2. Once her contract with Major Pond was broken, she had no guaranteed yearly income as she moved from manager to manager. While there is no doubt that some of her concerts in 1895 and 1896 were enormous successes, her acceptance of vaudeville houses as a venue probably indicates that they were more lucrative financially and provided her with a steady income as she toured the circuit.

3. In many cities she had to contend with staying at segregated facilities or in private homes; "good" (white) hotels were not always available to her, even though she was a major star.

4. While her repertory was impressive, it was not very extensive. She had not attempted to enlarge her repertory of art songs greatly, nor had she gotten beyond a few famous arias associated with her namesake, despite strongly indicating that she wanted to sing opera. Even if an opera company had been willing to hire her, she had never been coached in a complete role. Opportunities with white companies were not likely in the United States, though she might have been able to launch an operatic career in Europe. But it is doubtful that the Black Patti would have relocated to Europe for an extended period. She was very close to her mother, as was noted by David Jones in the 1896 *Dramatic Mirror* interview.63

Voelckel and Nolan's offer to organize a new troupe, the Black Patti Troubadours, and to hire first-rate African American talent, responded to most of the issues that she faced. As head of the new company, the Black Patti was assured of a forty-week season that would give her an income of $20,000

63. When the teenaged Matilda was first married, she and David lived with her mother. During her peregrinations in the early 1890s, she returned to Providence to stay with her mother during the off-season. After the Black Patti's divorce from David in 1899, she and her mother continued to share a house in Providence until the latter died in the 1920s.
a year, a guaranteed lodging in a well-appointed and stylish Pullman car, and
the ability to sing opera and operetta excerpts in the final section of the show.
While she would not be performing complete operas, in her new company she
would appear in costume, singing arias and appearing in famous ensembles,
such as the quartet from Rigoletto, accompanied by a small orchestra. It was a
seductive offer that she really couldn’t have refused. For this young woman
who had grown up in a single-parent household with little money, the Black
Patti Troubadours held the promise of a regular income that would make her
the highest paid African American performer of her time. With this “popular”
entertainment, she would continue to attract some white audiences, but she
would also be performing for “her people,” and she would be providing em-
ployment for at least forty African American performers. This company would
make an important statement, demonstrating to all Americans that the “new
Negro” of the 1890s was educated and was capable of performing, not only in
minstrelsy, but in a variety of genres and styles, from lowbrow comedy to
highbrow opera.64

Thus, as the summer of 1896 began, Matilda Sissieretta Jones, the Black
Patti, ventured once again in a new direction. If she felt any regret at abandon-
ing her previous career, she never said so publicly. At the time, the move must
have seemed like a good career choice. We can wonder today if she made the
right decision. Had she persevered as a concert artist, might she have become
the first black singer to join a white opera company or sing with a white sym-
phony orchestra? Or would she have remained an exotic star, with limited suc-
cess in her endeavor? Her career through 1896 suggests that, with the right
manager, she probably would have been able to garner a few more “firsts,”
eclipsing those electrifying appearances at the Pittsburgh Expositions and at

64. Although the term “new Negro” is associated with the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s,
it was in use as early as the 1890s. An extended article in the Freeman by R. W. Thompson
discusses the new Negro in the context of the evolution of African American actors and musicians
from “the antecedent [sic] minstrel semi-circle, where mouth-stretching and lung-bursting vocal
gymnastics were the best passports to fame,” through “servant and Negro speaking parts in . . .
‘War plays’ and melodramas illustrative of southern life,” to that of “the ‘New Negro’ [who are]
surprising the most captious critics by their finished performances [of operatic gems by Verdi,
Donizetti, Offenbach, Gounod, Balfe, Von Suppé and Mascagni] . . . In our ranks, crude, to be
sure, are the same germs of greatness which favorable circumstances have created the Booths,
Barretts, and Keenes [sic] . . . the Melbas, Eames and Nordicas—the stellar lights of the upper
theatrical world. A step, well taken, emboldens a child to sturdier efforts. Past and present
achievements with Negro artists are fore-runners to still more pretentious experiments. We are in
a period of transition. The harvest but awaits the husbandman. A few years will see our embryo
actors accepted seriously by the scoffers of the day. This preliminary schooling in light comedy,
inducing the habit of character study, will eventually make the Negro a factor in all forms of
drama-romantic society and sensational Opera companies, grand and comic will come in their
season, and time will yet produce the modern successor to the toga so grandly worn by Ira
Aldridge [1807–1867]. The stage must be reckoned with by philosophers and sociologists as a
fixture in the equation of civilized institutions. It cannot and ought not to be eradicated. The wise
man will bend his energies towards its elevation” (12 December 1896).
Saratoga Springs. But one can’t be sure that once the curiosity of concertgoers was no longer aroused by the novelty of her color, she would have continued to attract large white audiences. Throughout the rest of her career, another nineteen years, the Black Patti remained a star and an important symbol, providing for her African American audiences a role model of the “new Negro,” and for her white audiences, the recognition that black performers were not just limited to minstrelsy but could sing in opera and other genres of art music. Although she is mostly forgotten today, her unexpected prominence on the American musical scene of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a fascinating and historically important chapter in the chronicle of race relations and musical interactions one hundred years ago.

Appendix A  Repertory of the 1888–89 Tour of the Tennessee Jubilee Singers

Jubilee Songs

Angel Gabriel
Come Along Sinners
The Foolish and Wise
For Been Listening
Go Down Moses*
Golden Crown
Good News, the Chariot is Coming
Gwine to Ride Up in de Chariot*
Hard Trials*
Ise Gwine in the Valley
John Brown’s Body*
Judgment Day*
Keep Me From Sinking*
Mary and Martha Have Just Gone Along
No More Auction Block for Me
Old Ark is a Movering
Rise and Shine*
The Rocks in the Mountain
Roll, Jordan, Roll*
Rumble
Steal Away*
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*
Talk About Your Moses
The Train
Turn Back Pharoah’s [sic] Army*
We’re All Here
Where Is Your Moses
Which Road You Gwine to Take

65. This list of pieces has been culled from the reviews I have seen and is not an attempt to list the complete repertory of the troupe. Composers are identified when known. Titles are as given in the reviews. Asterisked jubilees are included in the revised edition of J. B. T. Marsh, The Story of the Jubilee Singers; with their Songs (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Co., 1880).
Matilda Jones’s Solos
- Caro Nome [Rigoletto] (Verdi)
- Comin’ Through the Rye (Burns)
- Cricket on the Hearth
- Ecstasy [sic] (Arditi)
- Home, Sweet Home (Bishop)
- Huntman’s Horn
- In the Gloaming (Harrison)
- Life’s Story
- Love Comes In Like a Summer Wind
- Lullaby [Erminie] (Jakobowski)
- Magnetic Waltz Song (Hawley)
- Marguerite’s Farewell
- Mother’s Advice (Osborne)
- The Night Birds Cooing
- The Ship on Fire (Russell)
- Speak Love
- Stolen Glances
- The Spider and the Fly (anon., arr. Hudson)

Will Pierce’s Solos
- [Let Me] Like a Soldier Fall [Maritana] (Wallace)
- The Lime Kiln Club
- The Maid from Dundee
- Marguerite of Long Ago
- Sweet Heather Bells
- [Then] You’ll Remember Me [The Bohemian Girl] (Balfe)

Louis L. Brown’s Solos
- Anchored
- Hybrias, the Cretan (Elliott)
- Madeline
- Mr. Michael Will You (with male quartet)
- The Old Sexton (Russell)
- Only to See Her Face
- The Smuggler
- Thy Sentinel Am I
- Soldier and a Man
- Virginia Rose Bud

Jones and Pierce’s Duets
- Alice, Where Art Thou? (Ascher)
- Life’s Dream Is All
- Only Thee
- Tell Me, Ye Merry Birds

Jones and Brown’s Duets
- Hope Beyond

Jones and Annie Smith’s Duets
- God in Mercy

Vocal Quartets
- Basso Prophundo [sic]
Down by the Sunrise
Farmer Brown
Mary Had a Little Lamb
The Old Oaken Bucket
Rock-a-Bye Baby
Suwannee River
Entire Company
God Save the Queen
Good Bye on the Ocean
Moonlight on the Lake
Piano Solos
The Lion Chase
March, Militaire

Appendix B  Presentation of a Medal to Matilda Jones in Barbados, as Reported in the Barbados Times, 1 December 1888

Shortly after the intermission, the medal was presented by Mr. T. C. Roberts and S. E. Brewster, the delegates appointed for that purpose by the subscribers to the medal fund. Mr. Roberts addressing Madame Jones, said “I have been selected by the citizens of Bridgetown to present you with a Gold Medal as a token of their appreciation of your exceptional musical talent. (Cheers.) It is not because men of my race better qualified than I am to perform this duty are not to be found in this country, but, I apprehend it is owing to my patriotism and love of the race from which I have sprung and to which you and your talented Company belong that I have been selected; (Cheers.) and I only wish it were in my power to give adequate expression to all I feel on this occasion. All I can say is that I am proud of your talents, that I have been delighted with your singing, and that the fact of this hall having been crowded night after night, and being crowded again tonight to listen to you, and of this presentation being made to you, is undoubted proof of the high estimation in which you and your colleagues are held by the public of Barbados. (Cheers.) But, Madame, there is one thing I am more proud of still. It is this that, thanks to the great and good Lincoln, whose name we ought all to revere, our race has made such strides in civilization and education as to have Colleges and Universities of their own and that you, in particular, belong to a College where singing is taught to such perfection. To my mind, your Company is no ordinary Company travelling around the world for the purpose of money-making. I look upon it as a Company having a high mission to perform and that mission is to contradict the many false and erroneous statements which have been blazoned forth against our race. (LOUD CHEERS.) I would say more, but time is short. I will now read the inscription on the medal:—

‘To Madame Matilda Jones
Barbados, 26th Nov. 1888

Presented by the Governor of Barbados and the Citizens of Bridgetown as a token of their appreciation of her musical talents’

Madame Jones, allow me to present you with the Medal, accompanied with the well wishes of the people of Barbados.” (LOUD CHEERS.)
Mr. Brewster then addressed the audience. He said: "The Song Birds of the South having warbled their dulcet notes for your delectation [sic], His Excellency Sir Charles Cameron Lees, our respected Governor and many Citizens have to-night through their delegates, presented the Prima Donna with a medal of gold in appreciation of her high musical talent and the ability displayed by her worthy associates. Long may she live to wear the medal with those already won and others to be won in the ever-expanding field of music. Music, as you are aware, ladies and gentlemen, has ever held a powerful sway over the minds of men; and when our emotions have been stirred by its sublime grandeur, we leave those groveling passions behind us which beset our nature, and, purified, rise higher and higher, passing upwards through the ethereal sky, the spangled heavens in shining frame, and rising on the wings of faith we approach the pearly gates of the jasper-walled city which poets tell of, and lightly treading the golden streets, we cross the sea of glass and join the angelic choir. (Applause.) Italy, as you know, has from ancient days claimed the first position in the musical world, and with a pardonable devotion we have worshipped at her shrine. But it is so no longer. The veil of antiquity is now rent asunder, and America, the land of the free, where the Pilgrim fathers first sent up their hymns of praise and hope to Divine Providence enters the list, and, like a youthful and powerful gladiator, demands recognition of equality if not superiority. (Cheers.) Judging from the deep interest manifested at the many concerts which have been given by these talented artistes, that recognition has already been given and the gods in the gallery enthroned, as it were, on high Olympus, will seal their recognition tonight in rounds of unbroken applause. (Great applause.) On behalf of all present, it is my great privilege to wish publicly that long prosperity and further triumphs may attend the Tennessee Jubilee Singers—the Song Birds of the South—in the field of music, and to promise that should they ever be minded to come amongst us again we will gladly welcome them." Mr. Roberts and Mr. Brewster then withdrew and Madame Jones gracefully bowed herself off the stage amid deafening applause. She subsequently returned wearing the medal, and returned thanks as follows:—"My dear friends I am very pleased to receive the beautiful medal which has been presented to me by the Governor of Barbados and the Citizens of Bridgetown as a testimony of their appreciation of my musical talent. I shall always wear it in remembrance of my kind friends and admirers in Barbados, and I sincerely hope that you will accept my many and warmest thanks." After the applause which this speech elicited had subsided the remainder of the programme was gone through. The Medal, which is valued at £15, resembles a Maltese Cross, and consists of twenty-six pieces of eighteen carat gold, in the center of which is a highly burnished disc of gold three quarters of an inch in diameter.

Appendix C  Text of Judge McAdam's Ruling, Reprinted in the New York Dramatic Mirror, 8 July 1893

The "Black Patti" has great musical talent, and her performances are special, unique, and extraordinary within the meaning of the rule allowing injunctions in cases of this character. She was professionally unknown to the world, and had no hold on public favor until after she met the plaintiff. She had the genius but no opportunity of exhibiting it before critical and appreciative audiences, in order to earn a professional reputation. She was without means, and applied for aid to the plaintiff, who has had a large and successful experience as a manager of musical and literary celebrities and lecturers, as well as in conducting the business of a first-class musical and lecture agency. It was a
happy thought. He appreciated her wonderful talent, and made a contract with her which, at the time, was extremely fair and liberal. By it she put herself under his "exclusive" management. The contract was made June 8, 1892, and was to continue for one year with the privilege given to the plaintiff of continuing it for two additional years, on the same terms. The plaintiff elected to continue the engagement and the contract is to be read as if the term "three years" had been inserted in it originally. The agreement contains mutual covenants, the details of which are therein stated with particularity.

The defendant opposes the application upon two grounds. First: That the contract is inequitable; next, that the plaintiff violated its conditions on its part.

In reference to the first, the situation of the parties at the time the contract was entered must control. The defendant was then unrecognized as a professional or as having merit. She needed an introduction to the public by some successful manager, one whose high character would command confidence and carry weight. She required to be advertised in a manner to attract attention, and to be introduced at places worthy of her talent and aspirations. No one was better qualified for the duty than the plaintiff, and he did his work well. Indeed, so satisfactorily that her reputation is now well established and her fame precedes her wherever she goes. She is a pronounced success, so much so, that she feels and acts as if she can get along hereafter without further assistance from her benefactor, and she has therefore thrown down the ladder on which she ascended to the position she now enjoys. Every sense of gratitude requires her to be loyal to the manager who furnished her the opportunity for greatness, and every principle of equity requires that she be compelled to perform her engagement according to its spirit and intent. Talent is of little value without opportunity, and history records on its bright pages the names of many who would have died in obscurity but for opportunity. Opportunity is a golden word, and is itself more precious than rubies. In view of the facts there is now ground for declaring the contract inequitable. Equity, as applied to this instrument, means nothing more nor less than giving to each party his due, according to justice, equality of rights—fairness in determination of conflicting claims.

The second objection is without merit. The onus of proving a breach by the plaintiff is on the defendant, who asserts it in his defense. It is fully denied and disproved. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that the plaintiff intended to furnish the defendant with a legal excuse for not performing a contract, he was pecuniarily interested in having carried out all its integrities.

The plaintiff is therefore entitled an injunction enjoining the defendant from singing, except under the management of the plaintiff, and in conformity with the contract here referred to.

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Abstract

The early career of the African American singer Matilda Sissieretta Jones (1868–1933), known as the “Black Patti,” was unique in nineteenth-century America. Reviewers gave high praise to her singing, and she attracted large mixed-race audiences to her concerts across the country. Her fame was such that, during the early 1890s, she appeared as the star of several companies in which she was the only black performer. This article documents her early life in Portsmouth, Virginia, and Providence, Rhode Island; her two tours, in 1888 and 1890, to the Caribbean and South America; and her varied concert appearances in the United States and Europe up to the formation of the Black Patti Troubadours in the fall of 1896.