

What Race Sounds Like: Perceiving American Music
Through the Carolina Chocolate Drops

by

Mary Tess Barrett
Class of 2014

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Music and American Studies

Acknowledgements

Many, many thanks to my advisor, Professor Mark Slobin, without whom I would not have been able to complete this thesis. Your guidance and unceasing support were helpful beyond compare. I am continually grateful for the ways in which you inspired me throughout this process.

I also extend special thanks to Professor Paula Matthusen. Your constant encouragement allowed me to challenge myself and grow musically. Thank you for believing in me, and helping me learn to believe in myself. Much love to Dr. Lisa Moore, who has supported me since my first weeks at Wesleyan. You encouraged my passion for the piano and made me smile on a weekly basis for the past four years. I also truly appreciate the guidance of Professor J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, whose intellectual stimulation inspired this project.

Much gratitude is extended to the residents of 72A Home Avenue, who loved me at my craziest. I would not be at the point I am today without support from my friends, both nearby and far away. Thank you all for giving me strength, laughter, and joy.

Finally, thank you to Mom, Dad, and Amy. I could not have asked for a more loving and supportive family. Thank you for reassuring me when I was stressed and believing in me no matter the circumstances.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	4
Historical Background.....	4
Basis for the Project.....	19
Methodology.....	28
Chapter 1: African American String Band Heritage	31
Reclamation: A Case Study.....	31
Piedmont Heritage.....	38
Joe Thompson and “Cindy Gal”.....	41
African Roots of a Black String Band.....	45
Other African American String Band Models.....	51
Chapter 2: Other African American Roots	53
The Minstrel Stage.....	53
The Blues.....	64
Other Black Folk Influences.....	68
Dance.....	70
Chapter 3: What Race Sounds Like	75
Sounding White.....	76
Eclecticism.....	87
Music and the Racial Binary.....	92
Conclusion	97
Bibliography	100
Recordings.....	100
References.....	102

Introduction

Historical Background

I. Unique Members of a Modern Revival

Over the past decade and a half, the increase in popularity on radio programs and in the festival circuit of folk sounds rooted in the string band tradition has given rise to what some label a “modern folk revival.” Almost all of the main players that constitute this revival are white.¹ In this context, the Carolina Chocolate Drops (henceforth referred to as CCD), an all-black string band group from the Piedmont of North Carolina, are somewhat of an anomaly. Their visibility in the budding modern folk revival has overturned the misconception that string band music is only for white performers. This is an especially notable feat in comparison to America’s² previous folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s, which was centered in the musical scene of New York City’s Greenwich Village. That “urban folk revival” prominently featured artists and ensembles such as the Weavers, Woody Guthrie, Joan Baez and, most famously, Bob Dylan.³ Though these and other primary players that popularized and reinterpreted folk music in the earlier American folk revival were white, the source

¹ Allen Farmelo, “Another History of Bluegrass: The Segregation of Popular Music in the United States, 1820-1900,” *Popular Music and Society* 25:1-2 (2001): 196; *Goin’ Across the Mountain*, ed. Brad Watson and Dennis Jones, 2014, WNCW, 04 March 2014, <<http://wncw.org/programs/goin-across-mountain>>; *2014 Artist Lineup*, 2013, MerleFest, 04 March 2014, <<http://www.merlefest.org/content.aspx?id=56&cb1=8896&spnsr=6606>>; *A Folk Revival*, Imogen Goodman, November 2010, Varsity, 24 March 2014, <<http://www.varsity.co.uk/comment/2921>>; *This Southbound Train*, ed. Mary Barrett, 2014, Spinitron, 04 March 2014, <<http://spinitron.com/radio/playlist.php?station=wesu&ptype=n&showid=794#here>>. It is worth noting that though This Southbound Train is my personal radio show, I have been tracking trends of folk music in the 21st century as an avid listener to the genre and would consider myself a well-informed resource

² For the sake of brevity, “America will be used to refer to “North America” throughout this thesis.

³ Norm Cohen, *Folk Music: A Regional Exploration* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005) 278-279.

material that these performers drew upon was often based on a African American musical tradition, specifically that of black string band music and early blues sounds. Some artists, such as Mike Seeger, a New York-based traditionalist and member of the New Lost City Ramblers, and Pete Seeger, a five-string banjo player, took an interest in the roots of 1960s folk music and traveled south to learn firsthand from old-time or bluegrass players.⁴ However, the popularized versions of these Southern folk songs were performed in New York City by white musicians, regardless of the African American roots of the string band and folk music featured in the revival.

While there were some black performers in the urban folk revival, such as Furry Lewis and Mississippi John Hurt, they performed the blues, rather than the string band and old-time⁵ styles popularized by white performers.⁶ Elizabeth “Libba” Cotton, a housekeeper in the Seeger household, was made famous for her blues song “Freight Train,” just as Josh White, otherwise known as Pinewood Tom, gained notoriety in the revival for his blues or work songs, rather than the type of old-time numbers revived by the New Lost City Ramblers.⁷ Though Odetta, a talented black singer of the revival, released an album containing covers of Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan in 1963 (*Odetta Sings Folk Songs*) alongside her previous spirituals and blues

⁴ Cohen, *Folk Music* 230-233; Neil Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985) 144.

⁵ Old-time music is an acoustic folk music tradition. However, the term “old-time” is one that circulated after the genre arose in the early 1900s and is used most often by scholars and performers retroactively categorizing the era’s sound. The scholarly journal *Old Time Music* primarily focuses its discussion on music prior to the 1950s. String band music refers to a similar style of music, though it was a term that appeared on record labels as early as the 1920s.

⁶ Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) 50, 280, 432; Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003) 51.

⁷ “Libba Cotton’s Guitar” *Smithsonian.com*, Marika Carley, October 2000, Smithsonian Institution, 24 March 2014 <<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/libba-cottens-guitar-32846747/?no-ist>>; “White, Josh” *Oxford Index*, Paul Oliver, January 2001, Oxford Music Online, 24 March 2014 <<http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.41395>>

recordings, most black contributors were solely blues performers, allowing for the impression of blues as black music and string band and old-time music as white.⁸ Thus, the CCD offer a unique contribution to the current resurgence of folk music in that they are black musicians performing the string band music that has so often been identified with white artists.

The CCD also provide a unique counter-example to the music of the urban folk revival. They perform music whose roots can be traced back to both black and white communities, but they do so as black performers. In contrast, Bob Dylan's cover of the black blues guitarist Blind Lemon Jefferson's "See That My Grave is Kept Clean" is a prime example of a musical exchange across racial lines in the 1960s. Exchanges such as these were taking place in the South well before the urban folk revival or the time of the CCD.⁹ Beginning in the late 1800s, there is evidence that style and instruments were exchanged between white and black musicians in the Appalachians, giving rise to what is now known as "string band music." Though often mislabeled, string band music is a style of music that originates in the rural South and consists of acoustic instruments. Fiddle and the banjo are the primary instruments, though other accompanying instruments, such as the guitar, string bass, mandolin, harmonica, and cello, have permeated the genre since its start.¹⁰ There is evidence that string band music dates back to colonial times in the form of banjo and fiddle duets.¹¹ However, the label did not appear on records until the 1920s with

⁸ Melissa Ursula Dawn Goldsmith, "Odetta" Musicians and Composers of the 20th Century, 2009 ed., 1044-1046.

⁹ "See That My Grave is Kept Clean" Bob Dylan Roots, ed. Manfred Helfert, January 2011, 24 March 2014 <<http://bobdylanroots.com/see.html>>.

¹⁰ Cohen, Folk Music 75; Malone, Country Music: U.S.A. 50.

¹¹ Cohen, Folk Music 75.

recordings of banjo and fiddle duos such as Gid Tanner and Riley Puckett, who recorded together in 1924. The term was tied specifically to “hillbilly” records, a commercialized genre descended from acoustic folk music played at house dances or other social gatherings prior to the 1920s.¹²

During the origins of the genre there were documented examples of black and white musicians playing together, whether collaborating in a traveling medicine show in the Blue Ridge Mountains in the early 1900s or in a dance band group in North Carolina in the 1930s.¹³ Bob Carlin’s chapter “African Americans and String Band Music” claims that it was “unusual, but not unheard of, for musicians of both races to band together,” possibly due to what folklorist Kip Lornell asserts as a more egalitarian racial environment in North Carolina’s Piedmont region.¹⁴ A previously enslaved man from Chatham County recalled that black residents of the area “thought well of the poor white neighbors,” just as high-profile court cases in Wake and Davidson County revealed interracial love between enslaved African Americans and free men and women.¹⁵ Etta Baker, an African American, white and Native American Piedmont-based banjo and guitar player, attests to the more racially egalitarian society of central North Carolina, claiming that “everybody was one family” regardless of race.¹⁶ The more amicable musical exchanges across the black-white racial divide in the American South are ultimately uncommon examples in that

¹² Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.* 50.

¹³ Barry Lea Pearson, “Appalachian Blues,” *Black Music Research Journal* 23 (2003): 30, 38; Bob Carlin *String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004) 37.

¹⁴ Carlin, *String Bands* 32, 36.

¹⁵ Jeff Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006) 35, 141, 188.

¹⁶ “Etta Baker,” *Artists*, ed. Tim Duffy and Denise Duffy, 2012, Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc., 28 January 2014, <<http://www.musicmaker.org/artists/etta-baker/>>.

many musical interactions between blacks and whites from the time of slavery until the early 1900s involved less collaboration. Rather, whites tended to pick up styles from enslaved African Americans on their plantations or, in the late 1800s, by listening to black string band performers at white dances and using these styles to popularize the white string band sound.¹⁷

II. Historical Roots of the White String Band

Despite its interracial history, one reason for string band music's association with whiteness is the prominence of the banjo within the genre. The instrument symbolizes the problematic history of minstrel performance and musical misappropriation. On the minstrel stage, a white entertainer performed dances, songs, and skits in blackface, theoretically drawing inspiration from slave life. In doing so, performers would utilize their knowledge of music from African American communities as part of a show that featured a co-opting "of black cultural materials for white dissemination (and profit)," in a way that portrayed blacks as backwards for the purpose of audience entertainment.¹⁸ Though the banjo was not a part of the initial minstrel performances of the early 1800s, it became a staple in minstrel shows with the rise of Joel Walker Sweeney as well as the Virginia Minstrels in the 1830s and 40s, solidifying a strong connection between the instrument and the mockery of black musical production.¹⁹

¹⁷ Bob Carlin, *The Birth of the Banjo: Joel Walker Sweeney and Early Minstrelsy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007) 5; Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995) 137; Carlin, *String Bands* 33.

¹⁸ Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy," *Representations* 39 (1992): 24; Carlin, *Birth of the Banjo* 6, 11-12.

¹⁹ Carlin, *Birth of the Banjo* 7, 9, 55.

As the minstrel show was the most popular form of entertainment in America from the mid to late nineteenth century, the performance, in the words of Rex Ellis, “became a way of degrading and trivializing the African American community” in front of a national audience.²⁰ Though touring minstrels such as Dan Emmett, Billy Whitlock and, most famously, Joel Walker Sweeney, were said to have learned the banjo from southern black men, their performances caused many in the African American community to shy away from the instrument and its racist connotations.²¹ These racist associations continued to be solidified onstage via twentieth-century medicine shows. These traveling variety shows were known for their high entertainment value, in which white and black performers alike used music, jokes and storytelling to entertain audiences between sales pitches for miracle medications. The medicine shows’ entertainment routines were often borrowed from or inspired by the derogatory humor of the minstrel show.²² The banjo was a prominent part of this act, and was notably featured as a staple in medicine shows, even in the smallest of traveling outfits.²³

As black performers gravitated away from the banjo and its negative connotations, white Americans were increasingly drawn to the instrument. The medicine show was actually a place for the transmission of the black and mountain folk style of claw-hammer banjo to a white audience, since these traveling shows, alongside minstrel performances, were so common that most white Americans came

²⁰ Give Me the Banjo, DVD, dir. by Marc Fields, Knockout Media LLC, 2011.

²¹ Allen Farmelo, “History of Bluegrass” 190-191.

²² “About Medicine Shows,” Black Entertainers and the Medicine Show, ed. Brooks McNamara, 2005, Folkstreams.net, 24 March 2014 <<http://www.folkstreams.net/context,136>>.

²³ Jeremy Agnew, Entertainment in the Old West: Theater, Music, Circuses, Medicine Shows, Prizefighting, and Other Popular Amusements (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011) 162

in contact with the sound.²⁴ Though white performers played the banjo in a folk music and minstrel performance setting, there was also a movement in the 1800s to incorporate the instrument into classical repertoire.²⁵ By the late 1800s the banjo was in vogue among Victorian Americans, resulting in banjo, fiddle, and mandolin ensembles as well as classical compositions modeled on the banjo sound.²⁶ The shift in the perception of the banjo as a black folk instrument to a white bourgeois one was aided largely by the Dobson brothers, whose patented banjo design situated the instrument in a parlor setting. The Briggs, Rice, and Buckley banjo instructors further helped to move the banjo into the classical sphere by establishing a written repertoire for the instrument.²⁷ With the help of Samuel Swain Stewart, a student of George Dobson and a gifted salesman, the banjo infiltrated the middle class market by the last decade of the 1800s, allowing many Americans access to the instrument and its genteel associations. By the turn of the century, the banjo was recognized as a popular instrument in white America, while many continued to play it in a folk setting, resulting in its inclusion in old-time or “hillbilly” music.²⁸

Racism played a part in the recording of hillbilly music, as it did on the minstrel stage and in other performance arenas, though it manifested itself in a subtler fashion. White string bands were preferentially recorded over their black counterparts, even though the source material of these records was often appropriated from the black community. In the early 1900s, recordings were usually divided

²⁴ Conway, [African Banjo Echoes](#) 121.

²⁵ Carlin, [String Bands](#) 33; Philip F. Gura and James F. Bollman, [America's Instrument: The Banjo in the Nineteenth Century](#) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 76.

²⁶ Jeffrey Noonan, [The Guitar in America: Victorian Era to Jazz Age](#) (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi) 22; Gura and Bollman, [America's Instrument](#) 76, plate 4.7.

²⁷ Gura and Bollman, [America's Instrument](#) 76, 78.

²⁸ Gura and Bollman, [America's Instrument](#) 249-250.

racially, with hillbilly records featuring predominantly white musicians playing string band songs and so-called “race records” containing primarily black blues music.²⁹ The label “race record” simplified the racial dynamics of music by marking blues as a solely black artistic form, only fit for consumption by black people, or people with a “race.” Interestingly, Patrick Huber’s research reveals that more than 175 hillbilly records prior to 1933 included African Americans, though the genre’s “earliest advertisements [were] so deliberately and overtly linked to whiteness.”³⁰ The shift to racially-based marketing was established primarily due to sales figures, as the recording industry noticed that targeting audiences based on racial demographics resulted in greater sales. A notable example of this phenomenon is Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues,” a “race recording” which sold one million copies in 1921, in large part because the recording was marketed specifically to a black audience.³¹ While some string band tunes were intended for black consumers—such as Eddie Anthony and Peg Leg Howell’s 1928 recording “Turkey Buzzard Blues”—most were not.³² Even when select black musicians like Anthony and Howell were recorded, Carlin notes that the recording was done in “bits and pieces,” and from a “white point of view” that “[was] often derogatory.”³³

As the record industry promoted the ideology that black music consisted mainly of the blues, awareness of the black string band tradition in America

²⁹ Farmelo, “History of Bluegrass” 179.

³⁰ Patrick Huber, “Black Hillbillies: African American Musicians on Old-Time Records, 1924-1932,” *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) 22.

³¹ Thomas Richardson, *African Americans in Old Time Music: Past and Present*, diss. Indiana University, 2012, ProQuest (UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2012) 27.

³² Richardson, *African Americans in Old Time Music* 46.

³³ Carlin, *String Bands* 32.

decreased.³⁴ This lack of awareness was compounded as many black musicians gravitated toward the guitar and the blues associated with it, and away from the banjo and its racist associations.³⁵ By World War II the banjo and the fiddle were perceived as white country instruments, removed from their heritage as instruments with a long-standing association with black musical culture. The popularity of hillbilly records, followed by country, bluegrass, and ultimately the white performers in the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s caused the genre of folk music to be even more tied to whiteness, even though select black string band musicians have kept the tradition alive throughout the twentieth century.³⁶

III. Black String Band Roots

Scholarship of the 1990s and early 2000s has revealed the continuous presence of black string band musicians, despite the silencing of these musicians that took place through their omission from the recording industry in the early 1900s. In particular, Cecelia Conway's 1995 book *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* engages with the history of African American old-time music. She traces the lineage of African precursors to the banjo and the five-string picking style in the North Carolina Piedmont, the region from which the CCD originated. She conducted fieldwork in the region during the 1970s, analyzing and listening to the playing of three black banjo players—Dink Roberts, John Snipes, and Odell Thompson—revealing the presence of an African American sound in the string band genre in more recent times, while also detailing the continued presence of this

³⁴ Carlin, *String Bands* 31.

³⁵ Farmelo, "History of Bluegrass" 192, 195.

³⁶ Carlin, *String Bands* 32, 38-39.

sound in the region since the arrival of enslaved Africans.³⁷ Though Roberts, Snipes, and Thompson were the focal points of Conway's research, many other black string band musicians were active in the region, either as players of a previous generation, contemporaries of these three men, or as collaborators with these players.

Carlin's *String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont*, alongside works of other scholars, has expanded upon Conway's research in the early 2000s. His chapter "African Americans and String Band Music" brings to light a detailed lineage of African American string band musicians, exemplified by John Snipes and his musical influences.³⁸ Snipe's predecessors alone reveal a vibrant black string band music scene, as he acquired his repertoire and an understanding of the banjo from at least three known African American musicians in the genre. Though Will Baldwin is said to have had the most influence on Snipes' sound, Duke Mason and "Uncle" Dave Alston also played a formative role. Dave Alston's position in the musical scene of central North Carolina reflects the longevity of string band music in the region. He was born in 1835 and played in the area until his death in 1910. His legacy then continued through Snipes, as well as in the playing of his grandson Jamie Alston who performed in the area during the 1930s.³⁹

Though it is evident that there has been a continued presence of black banjo performers, other string band instruments were popular among musicians in the Appalachians of North Carolina and surrounding areas. The fiddle in particular was a dominant choice for African American players in the region and the popularity of the

³⁷ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 1-2, 7.

³⁸ Carlin, *String Bands*, 31-42.

³⁹ Carlin, *String Bands* 36.

banjo-fiddle duo rose in the early 1900s.⁴⁰ Though the fiddle, unlike the banjo, was of European origin, there is evidence that black men were taught to play by their masters as early as the 17th century.⁴¹ The instrument's sustained presence and popularity in central North Carolina's Iredell County was such that a convention entitled "A Meeting of Old-Time Colored Fiddlers" took place in 1909. Musicians such as Pinkning Keaton, a former enslaved man born in 1840, and Baldy Gaither, father to fiddler Harvey Gaither, were in attendance. Baldy Gaither, who was born into slavery just after 1830, is worth drawing attention to. He was also featured in a predominately white convention in Iredell County a year before, demonstrating the existence of interracial collaboration in North Carolinian music during the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴² This collaboration decreased throughout the 1900s as recording was popularized and social divisions became more rigid, though the legacy of some black fiddlers from the late 1800s has continued throughout the past decades.

A notable contributor to the string band tradition throughout the 1900s is the late Joe Thompson, a fiddler born in 1918 near Mebane, North Carolina.⁴³ Joe comes from a long line of musicians in North Carolina's Cedar Grove region, a previous hub for Orange County's black population in the center of the state. Joe's grandfather Robert Thompson was said to have played the fiddle. His three sons, John Arch, Jacob A. and Walter Eugene, played string band music at parties and at home,

⁴⁰ Cohen, Folk Music 67.

⁴¹ "Joe Thompson Dies at 93; Helped Preserve the Black String Band," Music, Douglas Martin, 01 March 2012, New York Times, 22 January 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/arts/music/joe-thompson-dies-at-93-fiddler-of-string-band-legacy.html?_r=0>; Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans: A History (New York: Norton, 1997) 170.

⁴² Carlin, String Bands 37-39.

⁴³ Conway, African Banjo Echoes 11.

eventually passing along the skill orally to their children, Joe Thompson's siblings and cousins, as well as Joe himself. Collaborations arose among Joe and his brother Nathan when they replaced the older generation at house parties.⁴⁴ Most recently, Joe and his cousin Odell, a banjo player highlighted in Conway's study, formed a duo in the 1970s after playing together prior to World War II.⁴⁵ The two musicians are noteworthy not only for their talent as players but also for the increased visibility they granted black musicians within the string band genre by playing at folk festivals as well as Carnegie Hall in New York City.⁴⁶

IV. A New Generation of Black String Band Performers

The Music Maker Relief Foundation and the Black Banjo Gathering were two organized entities that, alongside the playing of musicians such as Joe Thompson, helped increase awareness of the legacy of black string band music in the United States. Founded in 1994 by Tim Duffy, a graduate of North Carolina's Warren Wilson College, The Music Maker Relief Foundation offers aid to musicians in the South to help preserve the sounds of the region. Though an aspect of the Music Maker Relief Foundation involves providing artists with monetary aid for things like groceries and prescription medications, it also plays an important role in promoting the music of southern performers by producing recordings, booking shows, and acquiring instruments for American roots musicians.⁴⁷ Etta Baker, Preston Fulp, and the CCD are all black string band musicians who have had access to this aid through

⁴⁴ Carlin, *String Bands* 39-40.

⁴⁵ Cohen, *Folk Music* 67. Carlin, *String Bands* 42.

⁴⁶ Carlin, *String Bands* 42.

⁴⁷ *Music Maker Relief Foundation*, ed. Tim Duffy and Denise Duffy, 2012, Music Maker Relief Foundation, 28 January 2014, <<http://www.musicmaker.org/>>.

the foundation, resulting in performance and recording opportunities that allow their sound to be heard in spaces that might not have been otherwise accessible.⁴⁸ The benefits of the foundation to the black string band community are especially evident in the example of the CCD. The group rose to stardom in part from Tim Duffy's management of the band, as well as promotion on the part of the famous guitarist Taj Mahal, a benefactor of the foundation and fan of the Drops.⁴⁹

Though the Music Maker Relief Foundation has played a role in increasing the visibility of black performers in string band music through artist support, the Black Banjo Gathering did this through community organization. Many connections were formed—including those which resulted in the formation of the CCD—in 2005 as a result of the Black Banjo Gathering. The first gathering, which took place in Boone, North Carolina, served as a hub for roughly two dozen black banjo players, various banjo enthusiasts, and scholars to come together to celebrate the roots of the instrument.⁵⁰ The Black Banjo Gathering began as an online discussion through a Yahoo Group page called Black Banjo Group which was hosted by Tony Thomas, a banjo revivalist. This online discussion was later transformed by Cecelia Conway

⁴⁸ "Music Maker Artists," Music Maker Relief Foundation, ed. Tim Duffy and Denise Duffy, 2012, Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc., 28 January 2014, <<http://www.musicmaker.org/artists/>>.

⁴⁹ "CCD," Music Maker Relief Foundation ed. Tim Duffy and Denise Duffy, 2012, Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc., 28 January 2014, <<http://www.musicmaker.org/artists/carolina-chocolate-drops/>>; "Tim Duffy: Music Maker Relief Foundation," Swampland.com, James Calemine, March 2007, Swampland Inc., 22 January 2014, http://swampland.com/articles/view/title:tim_duffy_music_maker_relief_foundation>; CCD, Performance at the Rhythm and Roots Festival, perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, and Leyla McCalla, Ninigret Park, Charlestown, RI, 01 September 2013.

⁵⁰ "CCD: 21st Century Banjo Revivalists," Music, Andrew Perry, 27 February 2012, The Telegraph, 22 January 2014 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/worldfolkandjazz/9070073/Carolina-Chocolate-Drops-21st-century-banjo-revivalists.html>>; Give Me the Banjo, Marc Fields, 2011; "Interview with CCD's Dom Flemons," Artists and Styles, Kim Ruehl, 2014, About.com Folk Music, 22 January 2014 <<http://folkmusic.about.com/od/artistsaj/a/ChocolateDrops.htm>>.

into a conference entitled “Black Banjo Gathering: Then and Now” at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, where she is currently a professor.”⁵¹

The Black Banjo Gathering proved influential in that it resulted in an increased awareness of the African roots of the banjo within the banjo playing community, but also in that it gave rise to the CCD, who, as a group, have dramatically increased the visibility of black string band music. A foundational aspect of the group’s formation lay in the collaboration that took place at the Gathering between Joe Thompson and the original members of the CCD: Rhiannon Giddons, Dom Flemons, Justin Robinson, and Sule Greg Wilson.⁵² Just as Joe carried on the legacy of musicians that came before him, Joe’s mentorship of the CCD allowed the band to do the same for him after his death in 2012. The time he spent in collaboration with the CCD has directly informed their distinctive sound and “planted a seed for the future” of the musical production of African Americans in the realm of old-time music.⁵³

The group’s bright future was made possible by weekly trips to Joe’s house to learn tunes which eventually made their way into the band’s first album, *Dona Got a Ramblin’ Mind*. The album featured Rhiannon, Dom and Justin as core members of the group and Sule as an accompanying member on the snare drum.⁵⁴ The CCD maintained their connection with Joe by continuing to feature tunes he taught them in

⁵¹ “Faculty Expert: Cecelia Conway,” Faculty and Staff Experts Directory, 2014, Appalachian State University, 03 March 2014 <<http://facultyexperts.appstate.edu/expert-profile/faculty-expert-cecelia-conway>>; Richardson, African Americans in Old Time Music 97-98.

⁵² Richardson, African Americans in Old Time Music 98-99.

⁵³ “Joe Thompson Dies at 93,” Douglas Martin, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/arts/music/joe-thompson-dies-at-93-fiddler-of-string-band-legacy.html?_r=0>.

⁵⁴ Richardson, African Americans in Old Time Music 99.

performance and on recent albums,⁵⁵ even as their repertoire grew to incorporate more genres and song styles.⁵⁶ Though the band formed as a result of a shared interest in string band and old-time music, they have since created a sound influenced by a number of genres such as blues, jug band music, bluegrass, and R&B.⁵⁷ The evolution of the Drops' sound has been aided in the past few years by the addition of three new players, Hubby Jenkins, a multi-instrumentalist who replaced Justin Robinson in 2011, beatboxer Adam Matta, who toured with the band in 2011, and Leyla McCalla, a cellist with Haitian roots who toured with the Drops throughout 2013. The stylistic innovation that has resulted from these collaborations allows the Daily Telegraph's assertion that the Drops are "homespun, yet exploratory" to ring true.⁵⁸

Since the CCD's initial encounter at the Black Banjo Gathering, they have toured internationally and domestically, played a substantial number of festivals, received a Grammy, and garnered praise from media sources such as the New York Times and NPR, who labeled the group as the "hottest thing to hit the old-time music community in decades."⁵⁹ In 2008, the Drops were the first all-black band to grace

⁵⁵ Joe Thompson is prominently featured on the album *CCD and Joe Thompson*, which was released in 2008. The album is a recorded version of the live concert that Joe Thompson played with Rhiannon Giddons, Dom Flemons, Justin Robinson, Sule Greg Wilson, and Bob Carlin at Merlefest in April of 2008.

⁵⁶ CCD, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch, 2010; CCD and Joe Thompson, rec. 1 March 2009, *CCD with Joe Thompson*, Music Maker Recordings, 2009.

⁵⁷ "About," *Band*, Michael Hill, 2014, Carolina Chocolate Drops, 25 March 2014 <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/band>>.

⁵⁸ "CCD: 21st Century Banjo Revivalists," Perry, The Telegraph <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/worldfolkandjazz/9070073/Carolina-Chocolate-Drops-21st-century-banjo-revivalists.html>>;

⁵⁹ "CCD: Hooked On Old-Time Sounds," *Music Interviews*, ed. NPR Staff, 09 March 2012, National Public Radio Music, 25 March 2014 <<http://www.npr.org/2012/03/10/148300894/carolina-chocolate-drops-hooked-on-old-time-sounds>>; "Chocolate Drops Revive String-Band Sound," Karen Michel, 28 January 2007, National Public Radio Music, 25 March 2014 <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7054539>>; "Styles of Southern Black Music,

the stage of the Grand Ole Opry.⁶⁰ In this context it is important to draw attention to the fact that North Carolina is the place that Rhiannon Giddons, Dom Flemons, Justin Robinson, and Sule Greg Wilson originally came together over their shared appreciation for black folk music. The tradition of string band music in this state is a rich one, though it is a state with a racially charged history of slavery and inequality.⁶¹ Despite this, the CCD have carved a space for black musicians in the modern folk revival by reclaiming a sound that originally stemmed from black performers such as Joe Thompson, Dink Roberts, and players before them in North Carolina, with the help of Thompson, other performers, and historical recordings.⁶²

Basis for the Project

I. Critical Race Theory

I will approach this project through the lens of Omi and Winant's work *Racial Formation in the United States*. The authors present a working definition of race that will inform my conversations in relation to black string band music. They define race as a "concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies," separating it from the belief that race is a fixed or biological concept, while still maintaining its fundamental role in informing

Shouting Included," *Music*, Ben Ratliff, 03 May 2010, New York Times, 25 March 2014
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/04/arts/music/04carolina.html>>; "About," Carolina Chocolate Drops <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/band>>.

⁶⁰ "Young String Band Draws on Nearly Forgotten Tradition," *News: Local*, James Reaney, 03 May 2010, Ifpress.com, 25 March 2014
<<http://www.lfpress.com/entertainment/music/2010/05/03/13802926.html>>.

⁶¹ Carlin, *String Bands* 5-8.

⁶² Thomas Richardson, "Review," *Ethnomusicology* 54 (2010): 537-540; Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 19.

social interactions.⁶³ This definition will provide a framework with which I will approach musical analysis of string band music because the music is racially coded as white due to cross-racial collaboration as well as appropriation. Musical genres couldn't become associated with different racial groups without the construction of these racial groups in American society, which Omi and Winant label "racial formation."⁶⁴ In the context of these racial formations, or the ways "by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed," Omi and Winant assert that "everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification...often without obvious teaching," allowing that certain markers become tied to specific racial identities in a society.⁶⁵

John Hartigan's book *Race in the 21st Century* provides a theoretical basis with which to expand upon Omi and Winant's racial theory in relation to music. Hartigan identifies blackness as a "position of disadvantage," a concept which will help me to better explain how white "hillbilly music" was preferentially recorded over black string band music in the early 1900s.⁶⁶ This disadvantage has extended into the 21st century as white supremacy persists in post-World War II American society by adapting to the "new U.S. racial order," an adaptation analyzed by Howard Winant in "White Racial Projects."⁶⁷ These scholarly works ground my research project in critical race theory, allowing for a more thorough explanation of the

⁶³ Michael Omi and Howard Winant *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s-1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 54-55.

⁶⁴ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation* 55.

⁶⁵ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation* 55, 60.

⁶⁶ John Hartigan, Jr, *Race in the 21st Century: Ethnographic Approaches* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 120.

⁶⁷ Howard Winant, "White Racial Projects," *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen et. al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 98, 100.

relative absence of black performers in the modern folk revival as well as the uniqueness of the CCD in this context.

I will also be analyzing the uniqueness of the Drops' musical production alongside their distinctive stance as black performers in a stereotypically white genre by engaging with academic works specifically related to the intersection of race and music. In academic circles as well as in popular understanding, certain acoustical sounds have become associated with different racial groups. Scholars have supported this effect by asserting that musical elements such as timbre, rhythm, and tonality can convey racial meaning.⁶⁸ In America in particular, genres or stylistic elements within these genres are often dichotomized along the lines of white or black sounds. George Lewis explored different improvisatory frameworks in the context of "Afrological" versus "Eurological" musical spaces.⁶⁹ Lewis uses these terms to situate improvised music in either an African or European domain, claiming that music can be shaped sonically by the social and cultural circumstances of an African or European experience. While Lewis contends that the categories of Afrological or Eurological are "historically emergent rather than ethnically essential," claiming that "a white person can play Afrological music," I would claim that Lewis's categories of analysis are reduced to racial categories, despite his efforts to do otherwise.⁷⁰ On the whole, what Lewis terms as Afrological music most often connotes black musical production, just as the Eurological music analyzed is produced in a white cultural space.

⁶⁸ Richardson, George Lewis, "Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16:1 (1996): 91-122.

⁶⁹ Lewis, "Improvised Music" 91-122.

⁷⁰ Lewis, "Improvised Music" 93.

Though I appreciate the intent behind Lewis’s categories as they indicate that cultural spaces result in sonically different musical material, I hope to push his analysis further than two neatly separated classifications in my analysis of the CCD, black musicians playing music with both Eurological and Afrological roots. As string band music is an amalgamation of the European fiddle and the African banjo and songs within the genre have been passed back and forth between white and black performers, my analysis will involve examining the intersection between the two cultural spheres articulated by Lewis. My musical analysis will be further complicated by the fact that the CCD’s founding members—Rhiannon Giddons, Dom Flemons and Justin Robinson—are classically trained musicians. Rhiannon in particular was situated firmly in the Eurological musical tradition as a trained opera singer and graduate of Oberlin College’s conservatory.⁷¹ I will also draw heavily on the writing of Ronald Radano while discussing music produced at the intersection of Western and non-Western musical aesthetics. Radano claims that black music is “interracial” because “situating black music within the texture of American life means no longer easily separating ‘black music’ from ‘white music.’”⁷² In the context of America as a space of interracial conversation and cultural interaction, I analyze the meaning of the multiplicity of the CCD’s sound. Though the CCD’s name alone draws direct attention to their blackness, and the sound they create is distinctively different from the white performers that constitute the string band genre,

⁷¹ Mark McGrath, “CCD,” *Making Notes: Music of the Carolinas*, ed. Ann Wicker (Charlotte, NC: Novello Festival Press, 2008) 128.

⁷² Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 2, 4.

I will utilize Radano's framework to critically engage with the ways in which the sound of the CCD is also intrinsically tied to white cultural production.

II. Appropriation and Musical Exchange

I am informed in my efforts to understand the interracial nature of the Drops' music by works on musical appropriation. As defined by Mark Busse and Veronica Strang, appropriation is the "act of making something one's own," often when the object in question is "obtained through exchange or inheritance." Busse and Strang note that this exchange can be either a positive or negative one for one or more of the parties involved, depending on the level of agency granted to both members of the exchange.⁷³ It is this variable nature of appropriation that I wish to expand upon below. Though instances such as Baldy Gaither's appearance at a predominantly white fiddler's convention in 1908 indicate that there was an amicable exchange of musical ideas between white and black string band musicians, minstrel shows, beginning over fifty years prior, indicate otherwise.⁷⁴ Hartigan's assertion that "whiteness entails a range of systematic advantages in our society" and that, "concomitantly, blackness encompasses a variety of related disadvantages," is especially illuminating in the context of musical appropriation.⁷⁵ Eric Lott helps to corroborate Hartigan's claim and affords me a basis with which to discuss songs such as "Dixie" that the CCD play that are tied to the minstrel tradition. Lott's chronicle of the initial exchanges between "black sounds" and white men who "understand for the first time that there [is] fame and money to be made," as well as his explanation of

⁷³ Veronica Strang and Mark Busse, *Ownership and Appropriation* (Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers, 2011) 4.

⁷⁴ Carlin, *String Bands* 38-39; Carlin, *Birth of the Banjo* 55.

⁷⁵ Hartigan, *Race in the 21st Century* 120.

the “cultural commodity of ‘blackness’” during the nineteenth century clarifies the power dynamics inherently at play in the CCD’s performance of music appropriated in years past for the minstrel stage.⁷⁶

Cecelia Conway’s insight into early oral transmission of minstrel songs offers an alternative to Lott’s conception of minstrelsy as theft. She describes the apprenticeship model through which many minstrel performers obtained their on-stage material. In the mid-1800s, minstrel music was orally transmitted from black musicians to white minstrel performers, often through an apprenticeship in which the white performers “acknowledged their genuine debt to African-American sources.” Though these musical interactions were more amicable, they still produced problematic results as “the white men, of course, usually failed to achieve an authentic portrayal of Negro life.”⁷⁷ The work of the CCD can be placed in the context of Conway and Lott’s work on the appropriation and musical exchanges behind minstrel music because minstrel music is a distinctive and interesting part of their repertoire. Conway’s chapter entitled “The Transmission of Playing Methods and Tunings” will further inform my thesis by offering a musicological background with which to discuss the sonic results of this reclamation of a sound passed between white and black performers.⁷⁸

It is further helpful to situate the transmission of music between white and black string band performers within the broader category of “country music.” Though the genre is almost impossible to succinctly define, it is a popular genre with distinct

⁷⁶ Lott, “Love and Theft” 24, 39.

⁷⁷ Conway, African Banjo Echoes 85, 87.

⁷⁸ Conway, “The Transmission of Playing Methods and Tunings,” African Banjo Echoes 194-237.

roots in the rural American South, notable for its folk roots and increased commercialization over time.⁷⁹ Appropriation in the realm of country music is of particular interest to me because string band music is considered a subset of the genre. Additionally, country music as a whole is racially coded as white even though the presence of black artists and song material from African American cultural spaces suggests otherwise. Bill Malone's compendium *Country Music, U.S.A.* calls attention, however briefly, to the stylistic influences that black musicians had on mainstream country music through examples such as Aubrey "Moon" Mullican's piano style and Arthur "Guitar Boogie" Smith's rhythmic aesthetic. He also establishes a precedent for the CCD's appearance on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry by mentioning DeFord Bailey, who graced the same stage in the early 1900s.⁸⁰

III. Acknowledging the Importance of the Carolina Chocolate Drops

Despite Malone's acknowledgement of the influence that black musicians had on country music, I would argue that these contributions are worthy of more exploration than Malone allows. In the context of Charlie Pride's predecessors, Malone claims that "the black contributions to country music are too well known to warrant repetition here," a statement which I take issue with.⁸¹ My research has revealed how the presence of black artists in the genre has been silenced time and again in scholarship on country music and its subsets. I hope to more deliberately engage with the presence of African American performers and their sonic legacy by studying the CCD. The anthology *Hidden in the Mix: The African American*

⁷⁹ Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.* 1-29.

⁸⁰ Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.* 166, 313.

⁸¹ Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.* 313.

Presence in Country Music addresses many themes that underpin my discussion of the CCD, such as interracial musical collaboration, racism, erasure, and the racialized understanding of genres. Diane Pecknold's introductory chapter on "Country Music and Racial Formation," Tony Thomas' chapter entitled "Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down," and Kip Lornell's chapter "Old-Time Country Music in North Carolina and Virginia" will be of particular interest to me as I analyze the historic context and music of the CCD.⁸²

Though this book was published in 2013, the impact of the CCD as an all-black string band group was not discussed extensively by any of the scholars who contributed to the volume. I believe that the music of the CCD serves as a powerful disruption in the perception of string band music as a white music. I will not be the first to call attention to the group's importance, however, as Thomas Richardson's thesis entitled "African Americans in Old-Time Music: Past and Present" uses the CCD as his focal point in discussing black string band music in the twenty-first century. Richardson firmly establishes the intervention that the Drops pose in the string band genre as black performers, noting that they "challenge old-time music's silent celebration of white Southern culture and the privileged lineages that have led to the dominant repertoire, style, aesthetics, and venues for contemporary old-time music."⁸³ Though Richardson recognizes the importance of the CCD's reclamation of an underrepresented black musical genre, his thesis is particularly concerned with issues of authenticity and classification in old-time or string band music because the

⁸² Diane Pecknold, ed. *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

⁸³ Richardson, *African Americans in Old Time Music* 60.

CCD introduce a myriad of sounds and styles outside of the genre. His work will serve as a framework for my discussions of revivalism and the heritage work that the CCD are engaging with through their music.⁸⁴ However, I plan to expand on his discussion of the Drops' music in the context of race and its influence on the CCD's musical production, song selection, instrument choice, and performance style. While Richardson asserts that the Drops' sound is "rooted in bicultural aesthetics," he does not spend much time analyzing the musical implications of these aesthetics. Though my thesis is informed by Richardson, I hope to pursue a new line of inquiry by bringing the sonic dimension of race, appropriation, and reclamation to the forefront of my analysis.

I hope to prove that the CCDs are engaging with black musical culture in a revivalism setting in order to establish the history of black presence in string band and old-time music. This reclamation can be heard in their recordings and seen actively in their live performances, which I will analyze in Chapter 1. While their song selection, instrument choice, and interpretation style in the production of their music establishes the CCD as a black string band group, it is clear that the band is influenced by elements that lie beyond this musical sphere. The CCD's heritage work constitutes a revival project, in that they uniquely revitalize the music, resulting in marked similarities to past material as well as innovations that help create a distinctive sound. The resulting combination of sounds makes a distinct contribution to black and white musical production in America, which I will address over the course of two chapters. In Chapter 2, I will address the ways in which the CCD

⁸⁴ Richardson, *African Americans in Old Time Music* 79-97.

engage with a broader spectrum of African American cultural production. I will extend my discussion of the group's musical influences to white string band music and other eclectic sounds in the first half of Chapter 3. Despite the multiplicity of the group's musical influences addressed in these chapters, they are continually identified as black performers of African American music. This need to define the CCD's music as characteristic of a singular racial group, despite their eclectic influences, reflects the pervasiveness of the racial binary within American society, which I will explore at the conclusion of Chapter 3. Through the CCD, I hope to explore "what race sounds like" in the context of a group that engages with musical heritage associated with different racial communities.

Methodology

In order to understand the cultural and sonic meaning of the music of the CCD, I will compare their versions of songs to the original recordings on which they were modeled, paying particular attention to the differences and similarities in stylistic elements including arrangement, rhythm, tonality, and timbre. I will also engage with instrument choice and lyrics in my analysis of the group's music. Study of originals such as "Kissin' and Cussin'" or "Country Girl" will be positioned within the context of these source recordings.⁸⁵ This method of analysis will be particularly useful in addressing performative differences between white and black string band music, as well as issues of heritage, authenticity, and reclamation. I completed select dissertations in order to demonstrate my findings. I focus my analysis on the album

⁸⁵ CCD, "Kissin' and Cussin'" Genuine Negro Jig; CCD "Country Girl" Leaving Eden, Nonesuch, 2012.

Genuine Negro Jig, the group's Grammy-award winning fourth album, with a brief detour to their first release, *Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind*, to discuss the song "Dixie," a song so tied to issues of heritage and race that I believe it to be worth exploring further.⁸⁶ *Genuine Negro Jig* is of particular interest to me and my research since it contains examples of the varying types of songs that the CCD perform, including songs learned from Joe Thompson, string band tunes of white and black origin, African American roots music outside of the string band context, songs with contemporary sources, and original numbers.

As there are elements of revivalism and heritage work that take place beyond the recordings of the CCD alone, I also watched and evaluated the group's live performances. While some of the performances in question were prerecorded shows, I also attended and observed the CCD in a live setting. One of these performances took place in New England, and the other occurred in the band's home state of North Carolina, allowing me to glimpse how their performances shifted given the geographic and cultural setting. In my writing, I will pay particular attention to the physical aspects of the ensemble's performance, from Rhiannon's dancing to Dom and Hubby's showmanship during songs like "Briggs's Corn Shucking Jig/Camptown Hornpipe."⁸⁷ Analysis of the group's commentary to the audience between songs is also of particular importance because these interludes reveal the CCD's goals as performers and revivalists. I will corroborate the messages the band members relate during performance with an analysis of their published interviews. To delve deeper

⁸⁶ CCD, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch; "CCD," *Artists*, February 2014, Nonesuch, 28 March 2014 <<http://www.nonesuch.com/artists/carolina-chocolate-drops>>; CCD, *Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind*, Music Maker Recordings, 2006.

⁸⁷ CCD, *Leaving Eden*, Nonesuch.

into themes related to my project and to increase my awareness of the group's goal as performers, I conducted an in-person interview with Dom Flemons.

Beyond primary source analysis, academic works on the history of folk music, particularly African American string band music, in American society provide important background for the music of the CCD. References that look at the historical roots of the band's musical sources help me understand how the group negotiates the cultural heritage of black string band performance in their unique re-interpretations of historical techniques, instrumentation, and style. A knowledge of the history of black string band music also helps illuminate the meaning behind the CCD's banjo playing, in the context of the instrument's previous use promoting racist stereotypes on the minstrel stage. By understanding how black sounds were co-opted by white players in the past, I am able to better understand how the CCD engage with this history as they reappropriate the black string band sound. Historical research is a needed point of departure in assessing how the CCD interact with the history of black string band music today. In analyzing the band's performance of this heritage-based and racially-charged music, I also engage with critical race theory in order to explore what makes black string band music distinct from white string band music besides the race of the player as well as the extent to which the CCD work within or go beyond this classification. Academic works on race and ethnicity in America help me to understand the implications of the fact that the American listener feels a need to separate sounds along racial lines.

Reclamation: A Case Study

I. An African American Revival

In the introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Music Revivals*, Juniper Hill and Caroline Bithell claim that “revivals are almost always motivated by dissatisfaction with some aspect of the present and a desire to effect some sort of cultural change.”⁸⁸ In the case of the CCD, it is clear that they are performing with a specific purpose and desire to effect this sort of change by drawing attention to a music that has long gone unnoticed in the public eye. In an in-person interview with Dom Flemons, co-founder of the CCD, Dom demonstrated that increasing public awareness of black string band and old-time music is central to the group’s mission by stating that the band is an “academically-based and educationally-based act.”⁸⁹ He expands upon his dissatisfaction with the status quo of public ignorance in a question and answer session with *No Depression* magazine, firmly situating himself as a revivalist in the definition of Hill and Bithell:

This is the reason I got into this business. To create awareness. "Snowden's Jig" as we called it, became a calling card as much as our original statement of "the banjo is an African-derived instrument" and "Black people have as much of a claim on old-time music as anyone else" just by the sound of the fiddle, the bones and the stomp.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Juniper Hill and Caroline Bithell, “An Introduction to Music Revival as Concept, Cultural Process, and Medium of Change,” *Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, ed. Juniper Hill and Caroline Bithell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 1.

⁸⁹ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

⁹⁰ “Interview: An In-Depth Discussion with Dom Flemons of CCD,” *My Blog*, Chris Mateer, 28 February 2012, *No Depression*, 13 January 2014 <<http://www.nodepression.com/profiles/blogs/interview-an-in-depth-discussion-with-dom-flemons-of-carolina>>.

It is clear from Dom's quote that the band as a whole is invested in and known for its desire to create cultural change because the band's calling cards are educational statements rather than song licks alone. In this way, Hill and Bithell's determination that revivalists are often activists rings true for the CCD.⁹¹

As a group invested in drawing attention to the rich history of string band music played by black performers, it is initially somewhat surprising that the song "Dixie" appears on *Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind*, the group's debut album of 2006.⁹² Dixie is a song strongly tied to the Confederate South and its fight during the Civil War against the Union army for freedom as well as, notably, the right to retain slaves. The composition of "Dixie" is credited to Daniel Decatur Emmett—referred to as Dan Emmett by most—a composer and member of the Virginia Minstrels and, later, the Bryant's Minstrels.⁹³ The song, tied to blackface minstrel performance and heralded on Emmett's grave as one that "inspired the courage and devotion of the Southern people," seems an unlikely choice for the CCD to perform.⁹⁴ In fact, in the words of Sam Dennison, "the performance of 'Dixie' still conjures visions of an unrepentant, militantly recalcitrant South, ready to reassert its aged theories of white supremacy at any moment," an impression still held by many today.⁹⁵

II. "*Old-times dar am not forgotten*"⁹⁶

⁹¹ Hill and Bithell, "Introduction to Music Revival," *Oxford Handbook of Music Revival* 1.

⁹² CCD, *Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind*, Music Maker Recordings.

⁹³ Steven H. Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004) 39.

⁹⁴ Howard L. Sacks and Judith Rose Sacks, *Way Up North in Dixie: A Black Family's Claim to the Confederate Anthem* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993) 1; Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era*, 30; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* 264.

⁹⁵ Sam Dennison cited in Sacks and Sacks, *Way Up North in Dixie* 4.

⁹⁶ Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era* 31.

Further research reveals that “Dixie” tells a story of forgotten black voices, making it a decidedly less surprising choice for the CCD. Though the grave of Dan Emmett heralds him as the composer of the Confederate war song, the graves of Ben and Lew Snowden, members of one of the earliest black families to settle in Mount Vernon, Ohio, tell a different story. The Snowden’s grave informs the reader that “They taught ‘Dixie’ to Dan Emmett,” according to Howard and Judith Sacks’ book *Way Up North in Dixie*, which chronicles the Snowden family’s musical history and their original claim to “Dixie.”⁹⁷ The inscription demonstrates a trend in American music in which black voices are stifled or denied credit for their creative works time and again. Despite the recognition that the Snowdens received for “Dixie” from the local African American community in Mount Vernon, thirty-seven white men laid claim to the composition by 1904. Even in recent times, credit to the Snowden family has been obscured by Emmett’s claim of composition. Steven Cornelius’ book *Music of the Civil War Era*, first published in 2004, is a prime example of this phenomenon. While Cornelius mentions the work of Howard and Judith Sacks in relation to “Dixie” and allows for the possibility that the Snowden family provided the original composition, he still introduces the piece as one composed by Emmett for his performance with the Bryant’s Minstrels.⁹⁸

After discussing the song’s possible origin in the Snowden family, Cornelius assures the reader that it is “no criticism of Emmett to point out these many possible sources” as “composers have always used other people’s ideas as essential building

⁹⁷ Sacks and Sacks, *Way up North in Dixie* 2-3.

⁹⁸ Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era* 30, 33-34.

blocks from which to construct their own innovations.”⁹⁹ Though Cornelius passes the Snowdens’ influence off as the provision of building blocks for Emmett’s composition, the research of the Sacks suggests that the Snowdens provided not the building blocks but all or most of the composition itself.¹⁰⁰ Eileen Southern, in *The Music of Black Americans*, notes that it was common practice of the minstrel era for white performers to claim ownership of minstrel tunes written by black composers in the way that Emmett quite possibly did.¹⁰¹ While the CCD have not overtly stated their reasoning for playing “Dixie,” I would argue that their performance of the tune is reflective of their mission to raise awareness of the black influences on old-time music. Rather than let this truth of “Dixie’s” origin die in what *Way up North in Dixie* describes as a “small and obscure” cemetery, I contend that the CCD are claiming the heritage of this tune as their own just as much as white Southerners by including the tune on their album.¹⁰² The band’s concerted effort to give credit to the African American community and its involvement with string band music becomes even clearer when looking at another tune that the CCD play that originated in the Snowden family. The album title of *Genuine Negro Jig* refers to an instrumental Dan Emmett learned from the Snowdens. As a purposeful reclamation, the CCD chose to rename this song “Snowden’s Jig,” in order to give credit to the Snowdens and allow their listening audience to be cognizant of the African American musical sources of

⁹⁹ Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era* 34.

¹⁰⁰ Sacks and Sacks, *Way Up North in Dixie* 17.

¹⁰¹ Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 265.

¹⁰² Sacks and Sacks, *Way up North in Dixie* 1.

the song.¹⁰³ As such, the CCD's decision to play such songs allows Dom's statement that they are an "academically-based and educationally-based act" to ring true.¹⁰⁴

Though "Dixie" is a popular and well-known tune, the CCD's version is not one that most people have heard before. The changes that the CCD made to the song prove to be significant upon further examination. Conspicuously, the CCD's version of the number is without lyrics, though most iterations of the songs are focalized around the lyrics, using them as an opportunity to tell a story or convey political affiliations.¹⁰⁵ During the Civil War, different sets of lyrics to the "Dixie" tune were popularized, from Emmett's distinctly pro-Southern lyrics—"I wish I was in de land ob cotton"—to Union versions mocking Dixie land with jibes like "away down South in the land of traitors," proving the centrality of the lyrics to the piece.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, the CCD's version features Justin solo on the fiddle, reviving a Hobart Smith version of the song which was played originally on solo piano for an Alan Lomax recording.¹⁰⁷

Aside from Justin's predilection for the Hobart Smith recording, I think the group's choice to exclude the lyrics is more significant, especially given Dom's assertion that the CCD are "not a nostalgia band." Dom elaborates, stating that "with black folks you only go so far back and then the nostalgia...goes away quickly," a

¹⁰³ CCD, liner notes, Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

¹⁰⁵ CCD, Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind, Music Maker Recordings; Paul Sanders, ed., Lyrics and Borrowed Tunes of the American Temperance Movement (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006) 186-187.

¹⁰⁶ Cornelius, Music of the Civil War Era 31, 36.

¹⁰⁷ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013; Hobart Smith, "Dixie," The Alan Lomax Collection: Portraits-Blue Ridge Legacy, Rounder, 2001; CCD, Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind, Music Maker Recordings.

claim easily substantiated by American history.¹⁰⁸ The well-known lyrics of “Dixie” are overtly nostalgic, as evidenced by the first three lines of the most well-known stanza:

I wish I was in de land ob cotton,
Old-times dar am not forgotten,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie land.¹⁰⁹

The subtext of these lyrics invites the listener to reflect fondly on “old-times” in which slaves were used as free labor to pick cotton in Dixie land. Given the connotations of these lyrics, it is no surprise that Justin was drawn to an instrumental version.

Justin’s use of Hobart Smith’s version of “Dixie” is also notable due to the stripped-down nature of Hobart’s rendition, which sonically displaces it from a wartime atmosphere and military band sound. Rather than the written and orchestrated versions of the song performed by orchestras or ensembles, Hobart Smith and Justin Robinson’s versions both have the improvised feel of Southern folk music. Both versions alter and embellish the original melody, making the patriotic origin of the tune less obvious upon listening.¹¹⁰ There are also some key differences between Hobart’s recording and Justin’s version on *Dona Got a Ramblin’ Mind*. While Hobart’s piano performance features the stride bass line of the ragtime era and swung eighth notes of early jazz, Justin’s fiddling is easily at home in the old-time musical tradition, due to the instrumentation as well as his rhythmic aesthetic (**Figure**

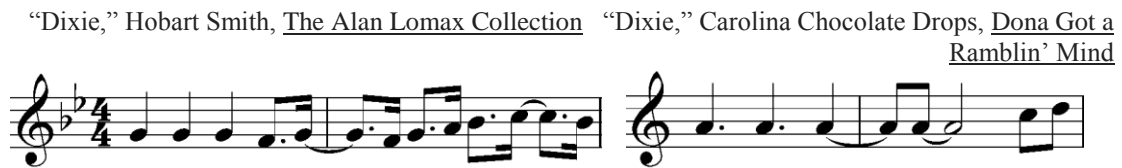
¹⁰⁸ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era* 31.

¹¹⁰ Hill Bowen Orchestra, “Dixie,” *Reader’s Digest Music: God Bless America-Patriotic Favorites Vol. 1*, The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., 2007; The Americus Brass Band, “Dixie,” *More Songs and Music from Gettysburg*, Turner Pictures, Inc., 1993; CCD, “Dixie,” *Dona Got a Ramblin’ Mind*, Music Maker Recordings, 2006; Hobart Smith, “Dixie,” *Alan Lomax Collection*, Rounder.

1.1).¹¹¹ Justin trades Hobart Smith’s swung eighth notes for a more straight-tempered lilt, similar to the style heard from old-time fiddler Joe Thompson in his recordings like “Little Brown Jug” or “Soldier’s Joy.”¹¹² Justin’s rhythmic interpretation also obscures the beat at times through syncopation (**Figure 1.1**).

Figure 1.1 Transcribed excerpt from Hobart Smith’s version of “Dixie” compared to the same measures in the CCD’s rendition of the tune.¹¹³



Note the swung rhythm in Hobart Smith’s version and the increased syncopation in the CCD’s example (with five out of eight beats obscured in contrast with two out of eight in Smith’s rendition).

These rhythmic features ground Justin’s interpretation in an African aesthetic, as such rhythmic complexity is a noted characteristic present in African drumming as well as other sacred and secular African musics.¹¹⁴ In this way, even when playing “Dixie,” the CCD are still drawing on the heritage of black string band music in the South.

“Dixie” serves as an interesting introduction into the heritage work that the CCD accomplish through their music. Despite the racist connotations of the song, the CCD found a way to assert their voices as the most recent generation in a long line of black string band performers. The capacity of the band to do so lies in their instrumentation, stylistic sensibility, and innovation. Their ability to capture the sonic

¹¹¹ Hobart Smith, “Dixie,” Alan Lomax Collection, Rounder.

¹¹² Joe Thompson, “Little Brown Jug,” Classic Old-Time Fiddle from Smithsonian Folkways, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2007; Joe Thompson, “Soldier’s Joy,” Family Tradition, Rounder, 1999.

¹¹³ This transcription just notates the melody without double-stops on the fiddle or chordal accompaniment on the piano.

¹¹⁴ CCD, “Dixie,” Dona Got a Ramblin’ Mind, Music Maker Recordings; Dena Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977) 217; Tilford Brooks, America’s Black Musical Heritage (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984) 11.

quality of generations previous is due in large part to their investment in cultural heritage and their relationship with Joe Thompson. Though the performers learned from Joe Thompson in a similar manner to the apprenticeship model that white minstrels like Dan Emmett employed in order to gain repertoire for the minstrel stage, the result in the case of “Dixie” is radically different.¹¹⁵ I would argue that they are reclaiming and re-appropriating the string band sound and its heritage in the black community, in contrast to the appropriation that defined the musical interactions of minstrel performers and their black sources.

Piedmont Heritage

Yudhishtir Raj Isar, writing for the *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, defines heritage, specifically cultural heritage, as a “shorthand for the practices of conserving and transmitting traces from the past that are thought to represent the cultural identities of human groups and enshrine their ‘collective memories.’”¹¹⁶ It is clear that the music of the CCD falls under the category of heritage work as the music they conserve and transmit to audiences is imbued with black, Southern cultural meaning. The CCD prove the importance of heritage in their music as they rarely perform originals, seeking inspiration instead from songs of the past. Even when they perform songs they have written themselves, the liner notes indicate that the music is rooted in sounds and styles of previous generations.¹¹⁷ The title of the CCD’s second album—*Heritage*—pays homage to the preservation and reclamation work that the group is

¹¹⁵ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 85, 87.

¹¹⁶ Yudhishtir Raj Isar “Heritage,” *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, 2012, 790.

¹¹⁷ CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

invested in. If the title is not explicit enough, the opening pages of the album's liner notes clarify the band's commitment to the revival of the old-time musical heritage of Southern communities and the importance of such a revival:

“African American musical creators share with all imaginative spirits a tendency to keep their eyes fixed on the future, as the insatiable voraciousness of mainstream America urge them to move on down the road of invention... In the process, and even though their creativity was unconsciously fueled by their previous achievements, African Americans constantly failed to revisit their past, often under the pretext that it reminded them of bitter times... This phenomenon of repudiation has left the door open for others to appropriate their heritage... For the past fifty years, with precious few exceptions—Leon Bibb, Josh White and Taj Mahal come to mind—, African American musicians have paid very little attention to the formidable wealth of multiracial culture which permeated the South between the Civil war period and the Civil Rights era, at a crucial time when poor Blacks and poor Whites had every reason to share a similar vision of life.”

A quote from Justin Robinson follows this passage, in which Justin firmly asserts that the CCD's music is “a reclamation.” Justin proceeds to specify the source of this reclamation, stating that “although we have diverse backgrounds, we draw our musical heritage from the Piedmont foothills of North Carolina.”¹¹⁸

It is clear from this passage, the title of the album, and the nature of the music that the CCD play that heritage is an important inspiration for the CCD, and an especially important concept to them as black performers. This introduction to *Heritage* gives the impression that their historical excavation as musicians is made more important because the race of the players and the cultural heritage at stake. However, the CCD make a point to acknowledge that the heritage of Southern string band music is a multiracial one, because they learned many of their songs from

¹¹⁸ CCD, liner notes, Heritage, Dixiefrog Records, 2008.

recordings or in-person interactions with white performers.¹¹⁹ Dom Flemons asserts that the group acknowledges white musical influences, claiming that white performers have sometimes done a better job than black string band players of preserving the music.¹²⁰ Justin's statement that the CCD draw from the musical heritage of North Carolina's Piedmont is indicative of the multi-racial sources of string band music, as the Piedmont is known for white old-time musicians like Manly Reece and John Vestal Prevette as well as black fiddlers such as Harve Gaither and Albert Gray.¹²¹

Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, in an introduction to their anthology entitled *Music and the Racial Imagination*, point out that music "is a domain that different races...can potentially share, appropriate, and dominate."¹²² While some of the music that the CCD play has clearly been appropriated in the past, there is also distinct evidence that string band music of the dance variety was shared regularly at conventions and house parties North Carolina's Piedmont region, resulting in a specific heritage for the CCD to draw off of that involves white players as much as black performers.¹²³ As such, understanding and acknowledging the multiracial heritage that the group is drawing from becomes relevant and important. The cross-conversation of musical ideas in the area resulted in a shared repertoire though,

¹¹⁹ CCD, liner notes, *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records; CCD, "Cornbread and Butterbeans," *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records, 2008. CCD, "Last Chance," rec. 22 June 2013, *Performance at Minnesota Zoo*, perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, and Leyla McCalla, Weesner Amphitheater, Apple Valley, 22 June 2013 < https://archive.org/details/CarolinaChocolateDrops2013-06-22.MNZoo_Busman/>.

¹²⁰ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

¹²¹ Carlin, *String Bands* 15, 24, 38-39.

¹²² Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman, "Introduction: Music and Race, Their Past, Their Presence," *Music and the Racial Imagination*, ed. Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 8.

¹²³ Carlin, *String Bands* 32.

according to Bob Carlin, there were “stylistic differences separating each race’s interpretations.”¹²⁴ Cecelia Conway also noted that the black string band performers she encountered in the Piedmont had “an identifiable African-American aesthetic.”¹²⁵ Though Carlin describes the discrepancies between black and white styles of string band playing, he warns the reader “not to draw too drastic a distinction between musical styles, for all African American, like all Anglo-American, musicians do not sound the same.”¹²⁶ This warning is especially true in the context of the CCD, whose sound can be interpreted as experimental, Anglo-American, or unclassifiable in many ways. Despite the multicultural legacy of Carolinian string band performers, the CCD’s apprenticeship with Joe Thompson and their specific search for African American inspirations aligns much of their sound with the styles and interpretations of black string band musicians. While keeping the multiracial heritage of the CCD’s music in mind, I believe the African American string band roots of their music a relevant place to continue analysis of the group.

Joe Thompson and “Cindy Gal”

Dom Flemons, in describing the significance of learning from Joe Thompson in person, articulates the importance of being able to stop one’s teacher and ask a question, rather than relying solely on the information gleaned from a record or—in his words—“an artificial representation of [a] performance.”¹²⁷ As such, the CCD’s Thursday night “jams” with Joe Thompson proved more influential to the group than

¹²⁴ Carlin, *String Bands* 32.

¹²⁵ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 2.

¹²⁶ Carlin, *String Bands* 32.

¹²⁷ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

recordings.¹²⁸ They have expressed their indebtedness to Joe in concerts and interviews, claiming on their website's biography section that their initial desire to start the band "was mostly a tribute to Joe, a chance to bring his music back out of the house again and into dancehalls and public places."¹²⁹ This indebtedness is especially evident in the many ways that the CCD echo the black string band aesthetic of a fiddler who, before his death at age 93, was "the oldest living black Piedmont string-band master in North Carolina."¹³⁰ Joe Thompson comes from a family of string band players who were performing dance tunes at "frolics," or dances, in Mebane, North Carolina as early as the late 1800s.¹³¹ The CCD's collaboration with Joe Thompson enabled them to challenge the notion that string band music is and has historically been a white genre since their most significant model was a black performer rather than a white one.

Joe Thompson's influence is easily traceable on the album *Genuine Negro Jig*, as the CCD's performance of the dance tune "Cindy Gal" is similar in many ways to Joe Thompson's version of the song. One of the most noticeable similarities is Rhiannon's style of banjo playing in comparison with the style of Odell Thompson, Joe's cousin, in accompaniment with Joe on the album *Family Tradition*.¹³² Though Odell passed away in 1994 and was never able to mentor the CCD himself, it is

¹²⁸ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013; "About," Carolina Chocolate Drops, <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/brand/about.html>>.

¹²⁹ CCD and Joe Thompson, *CCD with Joe Thompson*, Music Maker Recordings; "A Good Old Time," *Arts and Culture*, Diane Silcox-Jarrett, September 2007, Our State, 14 March 2014 <<http://www.ourstate.com/a-good-old-time/>>; "About," Carolina Chocolate Drops, 02 October 2014 <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/brand/about.html>>.

¹³⁰ "Joe Thompson Dies at 93," Douglas Martin, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/arts/music/joe-thompson-dies-at-93-fiddler-of-string-band-legacy.html?_r=0>; "A Good Old Time," Diane Silcox-Jarrett, <<http://www.ourstate.com/a-good-old-time/>>.

¹³¹ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 2, 11.

¹³² Joe Thompson, *Family Tradition*, Rounder; CCD, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

evident that the group's interactions with Joe allowed Joe to pass along banjo techniques he learned from years of playing with Odell.¹³³ Dom Flemons noted in an interview that Joe instructed him on the claw-hammer banjo playing style during their first encounter at the Black Banjo Gathering, even though Joe was a fiddler by trade.¹³⁴ Joe's instruction evidently impacted the group sonically, as the similar techniques used by Odell and Rhiannon in these two recordings are reflective of the banjo styles typical of African American players chronicled by Conway in her fieldwork in the North Carolina Piedmont.

Conway, with the help of banjo player Tommy Thompson, divides banjo playing techniques along the lines of “downstroking” or “up-picking.”¹³⁵ Conway's research revealed that the up-picking style was less commonly employed among African American banjo players, though she does note that Odell Thompson as well as other regional players use the technique to “[provide] arpeggiated accompaniment for singing.”¹³⁶ This style—deemed “complementing” by John Snipes—is heard in both Odell and Rhiannon's playing in “Cindy Gal.”¹³⁷ In Odell's interpretation of the song, his complementing is especially apparent in the last line of each four-line verse sung by Joe in which he echoes his cousin's vocal melodic line in between arpeggiated figures. This technique is also noticeable during instrumental sections, when Odell's banjo line follows Joe's on the fiddle (**Figure 1.2a**). Odell's arpeggio

¹³³ “Joe Thompson Dies at 93,” Douglas Martin, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/arts/music/joe-thompson-dies-at-93-fiddler-of-string-band-legacy.html?_r=0>.

¹³⁴ “Discussion with Dom Flemons,” Chris Mateer, <<http://www.nodepression.com/profiles/blogs/interview-an-in-depth-discussion-with-dom-flemons-of-carolina>>.

¹³⁵ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 200.

¹³⁶ John Snipes cited in Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 201.

¹³⁷ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 201; Joe Thompson, “Cindy Gal,” *Family Tradition*, Rounder; CCD, “Cindy Gal,” *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

pattern during the second line of each verse further complements Joe’s vocals as it provides counterpoint to Joe’s melody.¹³⁸ This technique can be heard upon close-listening in the CCD’s version of “Cindy Gal” also, during which Rhiannon’s playing matches the melodic contour of Dom’s vocals in the third and fourth iterations of the original verse. More noticeably, Rhiannon’s banjo playing expands upon the complementing technique in the context of instrumental, rather than vocal accompaniment in a similar fashion to Odell. Rhiannon intersperses an arpeggiated pattern in between the fiddle melody she echoes during instrumental breaks, especially in the first eight bars of each instrumental section (**Figure 1.2b**).¹³⁹

Figure 1.2a Transcribed excerpt from an instrumental section of Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson’s “Cindy Gal” from Family Tradition. The notes in the higher octave denote the fiddle melody while the lower notes indicate the banjo part. Please note that both Figure 1.2a and 1.2b represent the fundamental notes played by both performers, rather a complete score.



Figure 1.2a Transcribed excerpt from the same instrumental section of “Cindy Gal” seen in Figure 1.2a, performed this time by the Carolina Chocolate Drops on Genuine Negro Jig. Again, the notes in the higher octave denote the fiddle melody while the lower notes indicate the banjo part.



In both versions, the banjo part closely mirrors the fiddle melody as is demonstrated by the parallel octave motion. The complementing technique is evident in both transcriptions as well, as arpeggiated rolls on the banjo provide syncopated accentuation.

¹³⁸ Joe Thompson, “Cindy Gal,” Family Tradition, Rounder.

¹³⁹ CCD, “Cindy Gal,” Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch.

This banjo-playing technique can also be heard in the instrumental sections of “Dona Got a Ramblin’ Mind,” another song that the CCD learned from Joe Thompson.¹⁴⁰ Rhiannon’s complimenting style during the verses of “Georgia Buck,” another song passed down from Joe, is also very similar to that of Odell’s on “Cindy Gal,” allowing Odell’s stylistic legacy to continue through the Drops.¹⁴¹

Another stylistic element characteristic of the black banjo community that both Odell and Rhiannon employ is what Conway identifies as “African-American emphasis upon the drone and its rhythmic complexities.”¹⁴² This identifiable characteristic of black banjo playing is part of the downstroking style that Conway determined as one of two methods of twentieth century folk banjo playing. She notes that this style of striking down on the strings and emphasizing a non-harmonic drone is a distinctive one that African Americans of the Piedmont region are especially known for.¹⁴³ Both Rhiannon and Odell use a drone note to enhance the syncopation of “Cindy Gal,” most noticeably during instrumental breaks. While Odell uses the drone to accentuate the offbeat in a fairly regular fashion, Rhiannon’s use of the drone note creates a more rhythmically complex syncopation, a phenomenon which is especially notable near the end of the song.¹⁴⁴

African Roots of a Black String Band

I. Banjo

¹⁴⁰ CCD, “Dona Got a Ramblin’ Mind,” *Dona Got a Ramblin’ Mind*, Music Maker Recordings.

¹⁴¹ CCD, “Georgia Buck,” *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records.

¹⁴² Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 203.

¹⁴³ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 200, 202-203.

¹⁴⁴ Joe Thompson, “Cindy Gal” *Family Tradition*, Rounder; CCD, “Cindy Gal,” *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

The syncopated style of Rhiannon's banjo playing not only reveals that the group is drawing from the heritage of the Thompson family and other black banjoists of the Piedmont region, but also a greater tradition of African music and its diasporic offshoots. While there is a danger of being reductive by characterizing the music of an entire continent, syncopation and rhythmic complexity are traits that many scholars identify as defining characteristics of much music from Africa.¹⁴⁵ Portia K. Maultsby asserts that "perhaps the most noticeable African feature in African American music is its rhythmic complexity," a statement which Tilford Brooks corroborates as he affirms that "one of the most characteristic qualities of Black music in the New World is its rhythm."¹⁴⁶ This rhythmic complexity is present in the form of polyrhythmic structures, but also in the form of syncopation, which Rhiannon employs throughout "Cindy Gal."¹⁴⁷ In the context of the African diaspora, syncopation is present in most musical movements within the African American community, from spirituals, to blues, jazz, and hip-hop.¹⁴⁸ As such, Rhiannon's playing is reflective of the African roots of string band music alongside African American music in general.

This is compounded by the fact that the syncopation is driven by the banjo, an instrument whose African roots the band consciously works to acknowledge thanks to the scholarship of Cecelia Conway. Dom noted in an interview that the CCD have

¹⁴⁵ Conway, African Banjo Echoes 25; Brooks, America's Black Musical Heritage 11; Portia K. Maultsby, "Africanisms in African American Music," Africanisms in American Culture, ed. Joseph Holloway (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005) 335.

¹⁴⁶ Brooks, America's Black Musical Heritage 11; Maultsby Africanisms in American Culture 335.

¹⁴⁷ Brooks, America's Black Musical Heritage 11, 13; CCD, "Cindy Gal," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch.

¹⁴⁸ Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals 217; Southern, Music of Black Americans 377.

been recognizing the African roots of the instrument since their first shows.¹⁴⁹ In an archived recording of the group's performance at the Minnesota Zoo in June of 2013, Rhiannon takes the time before the group plays "Briggs' Corn Shucking Jig/Camptown Hornpipe" to inform the audience that for "the first one-hundred years of its existence it [the banjo] was known only as a black instrument, until around the 1840s when white performers started to get a hold of it." The provision of this brief historical synopsis is common for the group.¹⁵⁰ The CCD's African influence is made explicitly evident in three songs from their albums *Leaving Eden* and *Heritage*: "Gambia," "Mahalla" and "Banjo Dreams/Jalidong." Rhiannon plays the akonting, an African lute and speculated precursor to the banjo, in "Gambia," a song which she learned from a Senegalese troupe while in West Africa in 2006.¹⁵¹ The group also represents the music of South Africa in their arrangement of "Mahalla," a song by Hannes Coetzee, a "teaspoon slide guitarist" from the Karoo region of South Africa.¹⁵² The melody of the song is played by Dom on four-string banjo, sonically reminding the listener of the banjo's presence in Africa's musical history.¹⁵³

The groups' African influence is also apparent in "Banjo Dreams/Jalidong," a song featuring the poetry that Lalenja Giddens Harrington, Rhiannon's sister, wrote for the Black Banjo Gathering.¹⁵⁴ The lyrics of the song help to establish the CCD as

¹⁴⁹ CCD, [Performance at the Rhythm and Roots Festival](#), 01 September 2013; CCD, [Performance at Neighborhood Theatre](#), perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, Malcolm Parson, Charlotte, NC, 15 December 2013; Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

¹⁵⁰ CCD, [Performance at Minnesota Zoo](#), 22 June 2013.

¹⁵¹ CCD, liner notes, [Heritage](#), Dixiefrog Records, 13; Carlin, [The Birth of the Banjo](#) 129.

¹⁵² CCD, liner notes, [Leaving Eden](#), Nonesuch; "Hannes Coetzee, Teaspoon Slide Guitarist," [Laughing Squid](#), Rusty Blazenhoff, 4 February 2013, [Laughing Squid](#), 14 February 2014 <<http://laughingsquid.com/hannes-coetzee-teaspoon-slide-guitarist/>>.

¹⁵³ CCD, "Mahalla," [Leaving Eden](#), Nonesuch; CCD, liner notes, [Leaving Eden](#), Nonesuch.

¹⁵⁴ CCD, liner notes, [Heritage](#), Dixiefrog Records, 13; "Lalenja Harrington Found Her Voice, Now Helps Others Find Theirs in Beyond Academics," [Campus Weekly](#), ed. Campus Weekly Staff, 05

a group invested in the reclamation of its African heritage, as the lyrics draw on themes of memory and African cultural tradition:

Some nights dreamtime brings me
tantalizing snatches of images and sound
weathered bands insistently drawing out life's beat
gourd song answering griot's call
speaking to the deepest parts of thoughts and memory
pulling my dreamer-like spider web threads
closer to the heart of memory's song

.....

and in my dream
with our own black hands
we play
we pluck
we sing
we embrace
what has always been ours to begin with
gourd song
griot's call
life's beat
banjo dreams¹⁵⁵

Lalenja's repeated reference to "griots" is especially telling of the group's desire to acknowledge the African musical heritage that they are drawing from. Griots are respected professional musicians in West Africa that often play lute instruments, some of which are considered precursors to the modern American banjo, to accompany their singing.¹⁵⁶ "Banjo Dreams/Jalidong" helps solidify the CCD as a group with strong ties to African history through the poem's language as well. Phrases such as "the heart of memory's song" and mentions of weathered bands—presumably on a musical instrument—that speak "to the dark parts of thoughts and

February 2013, University of North Carolina Greensboro, Greensboro, 14 February 2014
<<http://ure.uncg.edu/prod/cweekly/2013/02/05/lalenjaharrington/>>.

¹⁵⁵ CCD, liner notes, Heritage, Dixiefrog Records, 14-15.

¹⁵⁶ Conway, African Banjo Echoes 26-27.

memory” accentuate the music’s ties to the past, specifically the African past.¹⁵⁷ This connection is strengthened again by the reference to griots. The musicians are recognized in Africa as oral historians as much as musicians, memorizing lineages of families as well as traditional songs.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, the second half of the song—the “Jalidong” portion—is of West African origin, helping the CCD connect the banjo to its African origins yet again.¹⁵⁹

This poem also helps to solidify the fact that the CCD are making a unique reclamation of African musical history, as they are highlighting the centrality of the banjo in this musical heritage. Many African American poets use the music of Africa to conjure notions of their history and heritage, but music outside of percussive sounds is rarely used to achieve this imagery. Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen references “great drums throbbing through the air” as he discusses his relationship to Africa in the poem “Heritage” from 1925.¹⁶⁰ Likewise, Langston Hughes, perhaps the most recognized poet of the Harlem Renaissance era, uses toms to help establish the environment of an African dance in his 1922 poem “Danse Africaine.”¹⁶¹ African American cultural works beyond poetry also use percussion as an African signifier in discussions of heritage, as evidenced by an excerpt from W. E. B. Du Bois’ book *Black Reconstruction*. Written in 1935, the book contains a passage describing a metaphorical “new song,” the African elements of which were

¹⁵⁷ CCD, “Banjo Dreams/Jalidong,” *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records.

¹⁵⁸ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 26.

¹⁵⁹ Sankofa Strings, liner notes, *Carolina Chocolate Drops Presents Colored Aristocracy*, Music Maker Recordings, 2007.

¹⁶⁰ Countee Cullen, “Heritage,” *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996).

¹⁶¹ Langston Hughes, “Danse Africaine,” *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996).

described as a “dark throb and beat of that Ancient of Days.”¹⁶² The conflagration of Africa with percussion music alone in these writers’ reclamation of their African heritage ignores the rich history of lute-like instruments that predated the banjo that also constitute Africa’s musical landscape. While the CCD’s recognition of the banjo in their heritage-driven music is unique, it is an important element in the reclamation of their African roots.

II. Fiddle

The African roots of the CCD extend beyond their use of the banjo. This is especially notable in Justin Robinson’s fiddle playing during “Cindy Gal,” in which he employs a syncopated rhythmic aesthetic, a previously-noted continuity among most music of African origin. Both Joe Thompson’s and Justin’s fiddling style in their respective versions of “Cindy Gal” emphasizes the offbeat, especially at the beginning of each instrumental phrase. The two players utilize stress accents in order to draw attention to the first note of the instrumental phrases which begin on the upbeat. Justin and Joe lengthen the effect of the note by allowing the note to ring out uninterrupted until the next pitch is articulated. Joe’s playing in particular highlights the syncopation of the fiddle melody by imbuing his sound with a rougher and more complex timbre. This effect is not as audible in Justin’s playing, whose sound remains relatively clear and consistent throughout. Despite this difference, Justin’s playing contributes to the song’s syncopated feel, especially in his accompaniment of Dom’s singing. Though Joe doesn’t play fiddle while he sings, Justin’s fiddle part is

¹⁶² DuBois cited in Stephanie J. Shaw, W. E. B. Du Bois and the Souls of Black Folk, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013) epigraph.

highly syncopated during Dom's verses, often accenting three upbeats in a row.¹⁶³

Cecelia Conway notes that this attention to rhythmic accompaniment more than melodic line is a characteristic of the playing of many black fiddlers.¹⁶⁴

Other African American String Band Models

The CCD also make a point to draw on the music of other African American string band players, helping to further inform their listening audience of the broader reach of black string band music. *Genuine Negro Jig's* starting track, "Peace Behind the Bridge," is an Etta Baker and Wayne Martin tune and a testament to the rich tradition of African American old-time music in North Carolina.¹⁶⁵ Etta Baker is known as one of "the foremost practitioners of acoustic Piedmont guitar [and banjo] fingerpicking" and is sponsored by the Music Maker Relief Foundation.¹⁶⁶ Though Rhiannon's banjo-playing style on the CCD's version of "Peace Behind the Bridge" is not quite the same as Etta's accentuated, secco plucking on the Music Maker-released album *Banjo*, it is apparent that Rhiannon was influenced by Etta's distinctive playing style. Rhiannon's banjo part closely follows the fiddle melody, offering only brief arpeggiated interludes, in a similar manner to both Etta Baker's playing as well as that of Odell Thompson.¹⁶⁷ Rhiannon also mimics Etta's technique of jumping octaves in order to mimic the contour of the fiddle part throughout the

¹⁶³ Joe Thompson, "Cindy Gal" *Family Tradition*, Rounder; CCD, "Cindy Gal," *Genuine Negro Jig*.

¹⁶⁴ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 111.

¹⁶⁵ CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

¹⁶⁶ "Etta Baker," Music Maker Relief Foundation <<http://www.musicmaker.org/artists/etta-baker/>>.

¹⁶⁷ Etta Baker, "Peace Behind the Bridge," *Banjo*, Music Maker Recordings, 2009; CCD, "Peace Behind the Bridge," *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch; Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 201.

tune, with brief leaps that provide melodic contrast.¹⁶⁸ The CCD's version of "Peace Behind the Bridge" also differs from Etta Baker and Wayne Martin's rendition of the tune. The CCDs add bones to bolster the tune's accompaniment, as they do in many of the Joe Thompson songs in their repertoire.¹⁶⁹

The albums *Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind* and *Heritage* also highlight the African American string band musicians beyond Joe and Odell Thompson, as they both feature "Rickett's Hornpipe."¹⁷⁰ Justin learned the tune after Joe Thompson mentioned that his father used to play it, though Joe claimed it was "so old fashioned" that it was not part of his repertoire.¹⁷¹ The song "Po' Black Sheep," from the CCD's album *Leaving Eden*, can also be traced back to black string band sources. The Drops learned the tune from a recording of Nathan Frazier and Frank Patterson, two black string band musicians, on the album *Altamont*.¹⁷² The CCD's version is similar in many ways to that of Frazier and Patterson, including the rhythmic accompaniment style of the banjo and the similar melodic contour of the banjo and the fiddle during instrumental breaks.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Etta Baker "Peace Behind the Bridge" Banjo, Music Maker Recordings, CCD, "Peace Behind the Bridge," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch.

¹⁶⁹ Etta Baker "Peace Behind the Bridge" Banjo, Music Maker Recordings; CCD, "Peace Behind the Bridge," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; Joe Thompson, "Cindy Gal," Family Tradition, Rounder; Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson, "Pumpkin Pie," Going Down to Raleigh: Stringband Music in the North Carolina Piedmont, 1976-1998, PineCone-Piedmont Council of Traditional Music, 2009; Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson "John Henry," Community Audio, <<https://archive.org/details/JoeThompsonAndOdellThompson>>.

¹⁷⁰ CCD, Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind, Music Maker Recordings; CCD, Heritage, Dixiefrog Records.

¹⁷¹ CCD, liner notes, Heritage, Dixiefrog Records, 12.

¹⁷² CCD, liner notes, Leaving Eden, Nonesuch.

¹⁷³ Nathan Frazier and Frank Patterson, "Po' Black Sheep," Altamont: Black Stringband Music, Rounder, 1989; CCD, "Po' Black Sheep," Leaving Eden, Nonesuch.

Chapter 2: Other African American Roots

The Minstrel Stage

I. Bones

Though there are many similarities in the CCD's and Joe and Odell Thompson's versions of "Cindy Gal," proving that the sound of the CCD is rooted in the African American string band tradition, there are some notable differences in how the band interacts with black musical heritage. One discrepancy between Joe Thompson's versions of songs and the arrangements of the CCD is that the Drops' instrumentation often includes bones as percussion, whereas Joe's does not. This is the case for "Cindy Gal," as well as other songs from Joe Thompson's repertoire that the CCD perform live, such as "Pumpkin Pie."¹⁷⁴ Though this difference is perhaps due to the variance in personnel, as the CCD consist of a core group of three while Joe Thompson's recordings usually feature the duo of Joe and Odell, the addition of the bones reveals the CCD's ties to the minstrel tradition and other African American influences beyond string band music.

Though Hubby Jenkins of the CCD presents the bones as one of the world's oldest instruments in an interview, the presence of the bones in American music wasn't referenced in historical documents until the early 1800s.¹⁷⁵ The bones are a

¹⁷⁴ Joe Thompson, "Cindy Gal" Family Tradition, Rounder; CCD, "Cindy Gal," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson, "Pumpkin Pie," Going Down to Raleigh, PineCone-Pidemont; CCD, "Pumpkin Pie," rec. 05 September 2009, Performance at Cat's Cradle, perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Justin Robinson, Cat's Cradle, Carrboro, NC, 05 September 2009 <<https://archive.org/details/carolinachocolatedrops2009-09-05>>; Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson "John Henry," Community Audio, <<https://archive.org/details/JoeThompsonAndOdellThompson>>; CCD and Joe Thompson, "John," CCD with Joe Thompson, Music Maker Recordings.

¹⁷⁵ "Instrument Interview #3: Carolina Chocolate Drops," Sleepover Shows, 16 April 2012, Sleepover Shows, 12 January 2014, <<http://sleepovershows.com/carolina-chocolate-drops-instrument>>; Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals 53, 89.

percussive instrument that produce a bright clacking sound similar to castanets when two bones knock against each other.¹⁷⁶ This characteristic sound was used in African American folk music in the 1800s, serving as a substitution or replacement for African drums in North America, according to Dena Epstein.¹⁷⁷ The association of the instrument with Africa and its music resulted in its appropriation on the minstrel stage, when singer Frank Brower introduced the bones in accompaniment to Dan Emmett's banjo playing in 1840.¹⁷⁸ The combination of banjo, fiddle, tambourine, and bones became a standard in the minstrel show's caricature of black culture, though the bones remained an accompanying instrument in Irish and some African American folk musics as well.¹⁷⁹ Cecelia Conway notes that the combination of these four instruments is not common in North Carolinian string band music. In fact, old-time banjo player Dink Roberts saw the bones for the first time in his sixties.¹⁸⁰ As many African Americans performed minstrel music, the CCD's inclusion of the bones signifies the broader reach of the band's reclamation of African American music beyond Piedmont string band music alone.¹⁸¹

II. The Legacy of Black Minstrels

The influence of minstrel music on the sound of the CCD stretches beyond their incorporation of the bones in many of the songs they learned from Joe Thompson. As previously mentioned in the case of the song "Dixie," the influence of

¹⁷⁶ Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) 216.

¹⁷⁷ "Instrument Interview," *Sleepover Shows*, <<http://sleepovershows.com/carolina-chocolate-drops-instrument>>; Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals* 144.

¹⁷⁸ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 106.

¹⁷⁹ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 103; "Instrument Interview," *Sleepover Shows*, <<http://sleepovershows.com/carolina-chocolate-drops-instrument>>.

¹⁸⁰ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 112.

¹⁸¹ "Instrument Interview," *Sleepover Shows*, <<http://sleepovershows.com/carolina-chocolate-drops-instrument>>.

minstrel music on the group is not completely unsurprising. Though minstrel music is notoriously cited as a racist practice, with white performers in blackface using tunes to negatively caricature black performers, many black performers participated in the tradition as well. Some scholars speculate that the tradition itself is based on the antebellum practice of enslaved African Americans entertaining their masters with comedic routines and amusing songs, while others contend that the roots of minstrelsy can be traced back to the English theater and the “African” character pioneered in Shakespeare’s *Othello*.¹⁸² Regardless of the origins of the minstrel show, many black performers graced the minstrel stage, with troupes like the Extraordinary Seven Slaves active as early as the 1850s.¹⁸³ W. C. Handy, bluesman, vocalist, and brass performer with Mahara’s Minstrels, noted the widespread involvement of African American musicians in minstrelsy in his autobiography *Father of the Blues*, recalling that joining a minstrel troupe allowed him “an opportunity to rub elbows with the best Negro musicians of the day.”¹⁸⁴ Minstrel shows were also a good opportunity for black people to successfully assume management positions, as evidenced by the popularity of the Hicks and Sawyer Minstrels, Richard and Pringles Famous Georgia Minstrels, and the McCabe and Young Minstrels, the three largest black-managed minstrel troupes touring in the late 1800s.¹⁸⁵ The music of the minstrel show was extremely important to its success, aptly evidenced by minstrel performer Tom Fletcher’s assertion that “a colored man

¹⁸² Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 169; Tom Fletcher, *100 Years of the Negro in Show Business: the Tom Fletcher Story* (New York: Burdge, 1954) 19; Carlin, *Birth of the Banjo* 6.

¹⁸³ Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 259.

¹⁸⁴ W.C. Handy, *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography*, ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Collier Books, 1970) 35-36.

¹⁸⁵ Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 259.

with a banjo would draw almost as big a crowd as an elephant in a circus” in his book *100 Years of the Negro in Show Business*.¹⁸⁶ Even white performers such as Ben Cotton and Joel Walker Sweeney were said to have learned much of their music from black musicians, proving the African American roots of the minstrel song genre.¹⁸⁷

Thus, when the CCD draw on minstrel music as part of their repertoire, they are engaging with an aspect of African American musical heritage often obscured by the racist connotations of the minstrel stage. Dom Flemons has addressed this issue in many of his interviews, aptly explaining why the CCD continue playing minstrel music in an interview with Americana music magazine Turnstyled Junkpiled:

One of the things that’s important about minstrel music in general is that it is an important part of our history as a nation. That’s the main thing people need to take away from it. There’s beautiful music in it and there’s a lot of wonderful theatrical pieces in it, there’s a lot of comedy in it, sometimes it’s very racist, but it comes from a racist society, which we still live in – that’s one thing that people forget. To not talk about it and not show it, is to openly deny that it ever existed.¹⁸⁸

In this statement, Dom is clearly asserting that the CCD view minstrel music as a part of their cultural heritage despite its racist connotations due to the fact that, as mentioned before, many of the most talented black artists at the time were minstrel composers or performers. Dom also appears to be hinting at a twenty-first century, North American phenomenon of colorblind racism, defined by John Hartigan as a “form of racial thinking [that] foregoes the ostensible references to race for a more subtle series of practices that racially differentiate.”¹⁸⁹ This increasingly-common

¹⁸⁶ Fletcher, *Tom Fletcher Story* 10.

¹⁸⁷ Gura and Bollman, *America’s Instrument* 25.

¹⁸⁸ “Dom Flemons: At the Cross Roads of Sound,” *Features*, 11 June 2012, Turnstyled Junkpiled, 09 January 2014 <<http://turnstyledjunkpiled.com/2012/06/11/dom-flemons-at-the-crossroads-of-sound-the-tj-interview/>>.

¹⁸⁹ Hartigan, *Race in the 21st Century* 9.

mentality among a mostly Anglo-American population allows people to deny the importance of race despite the racial inequality of the United States, resulting in a mindset that eludes “charged conflicts over race linked to the open expression of racist beliefs and ideals in the public sphere.”¹⁹⁰

Rather than deny race and racism in the United States’ history, the CCD’s performance of minstrel music—despite its racially-charged past—serves as an interruption to the colorblind mentality. Further, it reminds the listener of the inequalities black performers faced and still face, rather than deny the existence of such racism in African American musical history. In the CCD’s foray into the theatrical world with their Chicago-based musical *Keep a Song in Your Soul: The Black Roots of Vaudeville*, the cast as a whole decided to appear in partial face masks during a minstrel-show section of the performance after some debate, rather than ignore the blackface element of the minstrel tradition completely.¹⁹¹ In a conversation with Dom Flemons, he elaborated on this choice as something “you can’t not get into...because it’s real.”¹⁹² This sentiment was echoed by a review in *Time Out Chicago*, as the journalist reported that “the performers don’t shy away from presenting this history as it was.”¹⁹³ Though lines of Lalenja Giddens Harrington’s poem featured in “Banjo Dreams” states that “in my dream there is no blackface, no misappropriation,” it is clear that the group isn’t asking for the erasure of minstrel music altogether. Music from *Keep a Song in Your Soul* as well as the

¹⁹⁰ Hartigan, *Race in the 21st Century* 9.

¹⁹¹ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013; “Review: Keep a Song in Your Soul,” *Theater*, April 2011, *TimeOut Chicago*, 13 January 2014, <<http://www.timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/theater/15012931/live-review-keep-a-song-in-your-soul-the-black-roots-of-vaudeville>>.

¹⁹² Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

¹⁹³ “Review: Keep a Song,” *Theater* <<http://www.timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/theater/15012931/live-review-keep-a-song-in-your-soul-the-black-roots-of-vaudeville>>.

CCD's discography feature the rich musical history of the minstrel stage.¹⁹⁴ Similar to Gwendolyn Bennett's poem "Heritage," in which she claims "I want to feel the surging / Of my sad people's soul / Hidden by a minstrel-smile," the CCD's choice to perform minstrel music is one driven by a reclamation and acknowledgement of this important aspect of African American culture, despite its problematic nature.¹⁹⁵ Beyond the group's ideological choice to pursue minstrel music, I think the band is driven most fervently to play songs from the minstrel repertoire because they "just like the music."¹⁹⁶

III. Minstrel Music in the Carolina Chocolate Drops' Repertoire

The CCD's affinity for minstrel music is apparent on the album *Genuine Negro Jig*, which features two songs whose lineage is intrinsically tied with the minstrel tradition. "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine" and "Snowden's Jig"—otherwise known as "Genuine Negro Jig"—are associated with minstrelsy in different ways and within different time periods.¹⁹⁷ Papa Charlie Jackson, known as the first performer to record the country blues, was a minstrel performer in vaudeville shows during the early 1900s and the original composer of "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine."¹⁹⁸ There are many ways in which the CCD pay homage to the minstrel tradition with this song, including the ways in which their version is similar to Jackson's. The most notable similarity between the two versions of the song is the

¹⁹⁴ CCD, liner notes, *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records, 14.

¹⁹⁵ Gwendolyn Bennett, "Heritage," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996).

¹⁹⁶ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

¹⁹⁷ CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

¹⁹⁸ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 400; David Monod, "Ev'rybody's Crazy 'Bout the Doggone Blues": Creating the Country Blues in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 19.2 (May 2007); CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

use of the four-string banjo as opposed to the more typical five-string by both Dom and Papa Charlie Jackson.¹⁹⁹ The four-string banjo ties both performers' sound to that of early minstrels, as the four-string version of the banjo was the most common on the minstrel stage in early years.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the strumming and chord-based style of banjo playing employed by Dom and Jackson is much more similar to the early jazz usage of the instrument than the complicated downstroking style of the banjo heard in North Carolinian string band music.²⁰¹ The humor of the minstrel stage is present in both Dom and Papa Charlie Jackson's vocals, as both performers imbue lines like "my baby know just what to do," "never has my baby put me outdoors," and the title line of "your baby ain't sweet like mine" with exaggerated theatrics.²⁰²

There are also ways in which the CCD's version differs from Papa Charlie Jackson's rendition that liken the groups' version to the minstrel music. Rhiannon's kazoo part—an addition not present in Jackson's version—is particularly animated and over-the-top, instilling the song with the same humor evoked by Dom and Jackson's vocal stylings.²⁰³ Kazoos themselves are considered by some to be playful instruments, "generally regarded as toys" in the present day, though they were an important fixture in ensembles during the jug-band era.²⁰⁴ Besides the sonically-

¹⁹⁹ CCD, "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; Papa Charlie Jackson, "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine," Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order, Vol. 2, Document Records, 2001.

²⁰⁰ Gura and Bollman, America's Instrument 5.

²⁰¹ Gura and Bollman, America's Instrument 245-246;

²⁰² CCD, "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; Papa Charlie Jackson, "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine," Complete Recorded Works, Document Records.

²⁰³ CCD, "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine," Genuine Negro Jig.

²⁰⁴ Paul Oliver, "Kazoo," Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Performance and Production, 2003 ed.

signified humor of the kazoo, Rhiannon’s visual performance of the song can be likened to the theatrics seen on a minstrel stage, proving the influence of the minstrel performance on the group’s sound and presentation style. During a show at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Rhiannon goes through two kazoos over the course of a performance, jokingly throwing the first over her shoulder mid-solo, while in a show in the Netherlands she uses animated hand gestures to heighten the entertainment of the kazoo solo.²⁰⁵ The group’s fuller ensemble—as opposed to Papa Charlie Jackson’s banjo and vocals combination—also adds to the recordings’ minstrel sound. Sule Greg Wilson, an original member of the Sankofa Strings project that predated the formation of the CCD and frequent collaborator, plays tambourine on the version of “Your Baby Ain’t Sweet Like Mine” that appeared on *Genuine Negro Jig*, incorporating another one of the four most common instruments in a standard minstrel ensemble.²⁰⁶

The other song on *Genuine Negro Jig* with ties to minstrel music is “Snowden’s Jig,” a tune first transcribed by white minstrel Dan Emmett. As is the case with “Dixie,” there is evidence that the roots of “Snowden’s Jig”—referred to as “Genuine Negro Jig” prior to the CCD’s purposeful renaming—lie with Thomas Snowden, patriarch of the Snowden Family of Mount Vernon, Ohio.²⁰⁷ The song was presented to the group by Bob Winans and Greg Adams, two scholars whose focus is early-era and minstrel banjoes, solidifying the roots of the tune in the minstrel

²⁰⁵ CCD, “Your Baby Ain’t Sweet Like Mine,” *Performance Live at Mass MoCA*, perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, and Justin Robinson, Mass MoCA, 29 May 2014. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjyw-nW0D90>>; CCD, “Your Baby Ain’t Sweet Like Mine,” *Performance at Tivoli*, perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, and Hubby Jenkins, Tivoli, Utrecht, 20 October 2012 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQNC0aLVNzs>>.

²⁰⁶ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 103.

²⁰⁷ CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch; Sacks and Sacks, *Way Up North in Dixie* 155.

tradition.²⁰⁸ The influence of minstrel music is clear on other CCD albums as well. *Heritage* features “Bye-Bye Policeman,” a song with humorous lyrics and high entertainment value learned from Jim Jackson’s recording on *Good for What Ails You*, an album of medicine show tunes.²⁰⁹ Jim Jackson was a traveling entertainer in both medicine shows and minstrel shows with Red Rose, Silas Green, and Rabbit’s Foot Minstrel companies.²¹⁰

The CCD also play a song from Thomas F. Briggs’ 1855 *Briggs’ Banjo Instructor* entitled “Briggs’ Corn Shucking Jig/Camptown Hornpipe” on the group’s most recent album *Leaving Eden*.²¹¹ Thomas Briggs, known on-stage as Tom Briggs, was noted as “one of the earliest and greatest banjo players in minstrelsy,” though his career ended shortly due to his untimely death in 1854.²¹² His banjo instructor allowed him to continue this legacy, a legacy which, in the preface to his instructor, Briggs reveals is due in part to enslaved Africans. The forward of the book references the influence of black musicians as the publisher’s note states that the instructor “contains many choice plantation melodies which the author learned when at the south from negroes, which have never been published before.”²¹³ In performance, the CCD often introduce “Briggs’ Corn Shucking Jig/Camptown Hornpipe” by acknowledging the influence of African American banjo players as

²⁰⁸ “Winan’s Banjo,” Home, Robert B. Winans, 1994, University of Illinois, 31 March 2014 <<https://sites.google.com/a/wildblue.net/winansbanjo/>>; Gred Adams’s Page, ed. Greg Adams, 30 March 2014, Minstrel Banjo, 31 March 2014 <<http://minstrelbanjo.ning.com/profile/GregAdams>>.

²⁰⁹ CCD, liner notes, Heritage, Dixiefrog Records 12.

²¹⁰ “Jim Jackson,” Biography, 2014, AllMusic, 12 February 2014 <<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/jim-jackson-mn0000288104/biography>>.

²¹¹ Gura and Bollman, America’s Instrument 38; CCD, liner notes, Leaving Eden, Nonesuch.

²¹² *Boston Daily Evening Voice* cited in Gura and Bollman, America’s Instrument 38; Carlin, Birth of a Banjo 80.

²¹³ Briggs’ Banjo Instructor cited in Gura and Bollman, America’s Instrument 25.

well as minstrel music on the band's sound. The Drops' reclamation of minstrel music is strengthened by the fact that Rhiannon plays the tunes on a 1860s-era minstrel-style banjo replica crafted by Jim Hartel, a fact which she also mentions to audiences.²¹⁴

Analysis of the CCD's live performance of the medley further reveals the influence of minstrel-era music on the group's sound. Rhiannon's banjo playing is similar to that of Bob Winans and other minstrel-style banjo players on Rounder Records' compilation album *Minstrel Banjo Style*.²¹⁵ Rhiannon's accompaniment to Dom and Hubby's bones consists mostly of plucked melody notes, in the sparse style of minstrel-era banjo playing.²¹⁶ Dom and Hubby's performance on bones also reveals the group's desire to engage with the heritage of African Americans in minstrel performance. Their motions in a live performance setting are often expansive, with their arms extended out or bent away from the body as they play complex rhythms. The changing of their arm formations is often synchronized with the music in a dance-like and entertaining fashion.²¹⁷ Dom and Hubby explain in an interview with the Sleepover Shows organization that though they learned to play with concise wrist movements close to the body, they were indeed influenced by the more theatrical style of bones playing seen on minstrel stages in the nineteenth

²¹⁴ CCD, [Performance at Neighborhood Theatre](#), 15 December 2013; CCD, [Performance at Minnesota Zoo](#), 22 June 2013.

²¹⁵ Joe Ayers, Clarke Buehling, Bob Carlin, Bob Flesher, Tony Trischka, and Bob Winans, [Minstrel Banjo Style](#), Rounder, 1994; CCD, "Briggs' Corn Shucking Jig/Camptown Hornpipe," [Leaving Eden](#), Nonesuch.

²¹⁶ CCD, "Briggs' Corn Shucking Jig/Camptown Hornpipe," [Leaving Eden](#), Nonesuch.

²¹⁷ CCD, [Performance at the Rhythm and Roots Festival](#), 01 September 2013; CCD, [Performance at Neighborhood Theatre](#), 15 December 2013; CCD, "Briggs' Corn Shucking Jig," [Performance at the Barrymore Theatre](#), perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, and Adam Matta, Barrymore Theatre, Madison, WI, 08 June 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QKcsge6zuE>>.

century. Dom notes that he was inspired when he began researching the minstrel show and “started seeing these pictures of these guys with their arms hanging way out wide,” causing him “to just experiment with the space that you can reach.”²¹⁸ Both Dom and Hubby also employ humor in their expansive movements by positioning themselves as if to play a particularly difficult passage only to perform a few notes or performing a caricatured flamenco dance in time with their solos.²¹⁹ The influence of minstrel music on Dom and Hubby’s performance in this set of tunes translates to at least some of the Drops’ audience members. Alfred Hickling noted in *The Guardian* that the “loose-limbed bones duet” contained a “combination of rhythmic dexterity and visual comedy link directly back to the minstrel era.”²²⁰ The CCD’s interaction with the heritage of minstrel-era tunes is heightened by Dom’s self-proclaimed label as the “American Songster.”²²¹ Though songsters were originally defined as a black performer of any musical genre, the label for the most part has evolved to connote black performers in minstrel troupes and medicine shows.²²² Dom’s use of this label, as well as the CCD’s inclusion of minstrel tunes in their repertoire allows the group to reclaim a part of America’s cultural history that has long been pushed aside and unavailable for African American performers to engage with.

²¹⁸ Instrument Interview,” [Sleepover Shows](http://sleepovershows.com/carolina-chocolate-drops-instrument), <<http://sleepovershows.com/carolina-chocolate-drops-instrument>>.

²¹⁹ CCD, [Performance at Neighborhood Theatre](#), 15 December 2013; CCD, [Performance at the Rhythm and Roots Festival](#), 01 September 2013; CCD, “Briggs’ Corn Shucking Jig,” [Performance at the Barrymore Theatre](#), 08 June 2011.

²²⁰ “Carolina Chocolate Drops: Saturday Night Femur,” [Music](#), Alfred Hickling, 19 February 2012, *The Guardian*, 08 December 2013 <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/feb/19/carolina-chocolate-drops-playing-bones>>.

²²¹ “About,” [Dom Flemons, the American Songster](#), ed. Dom Flemons, 2013, Dom Flemons, 10 December 2013 <<http://www.domflemons.com/about.html>>.

²²² Paul Oliver, “Songster,” [Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Performance and Production](#), 2003 ed.

The Blues

If there ever was a reason that African American string bands disappeared from the public consciousness, the blues just might be it. Though black performers were driven away from banjo playing due to the negative stereotypes that appeared on the minstrel stage, they were also drawn to the blues, a music that would more accurately express their frustrations with the racist society the minstrel show was born of.²²³ Tilford Brooks, claims that “the failure of Blacks to gain true freedom created the psychological milieu in which the blues was developed.”²²⁴ Tony Thomas, in his essay “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down,” substantiates this point, explaining that African Americans’ predilection for the blues emerged because country music was no longer able to respond to “developments of black life” in the same way that blues music was.²²⁵ Many people, including W. C. Handy—who refers to the blues as “the music of my race”—claim that blues music “represents the full racial expression of the Negro.”²²⁶ Such was the popularity of the blues that string band music was largely forgotten as a black art form. Books such as Brooks’ *America’s Black Musical Heritage* and Harold Courlander’s *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* that claim to trace the history of black music in America overlook black involvement in string band music while highlighting the importance of the blues.²²⁷ Though the CCD make a point to increase awareness of string band music as a black

²²³ Brooks, *America’s Black Musical Heritage* 51-52; Tony Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down,” *Hidden in the Mix*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) 144.

²²⁴ Brooks, *America’s Black Musical Heritage* 52.

²²⁵ Tony Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down,” *Hidden in the Mix* 144.

²²⁶ William Christopher Handy, “The Heart of the Blues,” *Readings in Black American Music*, ed. Eileen Southern (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983) 202-203; Brooks, *America’s Black Musical Heritage* 51.

²²⁷ Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*; Brooks, *America’s Black Musical Heritage*.

art form, they still play blues numbers, proving that they engage with a variety of African American musical heritages. While I have used the example of minstrel music to establish the broader reach of the group's heritage work, it is important to note that minstrel music is tied to the string band genre. Minstrel-era repertoire often arose as white performers caricatured black string band sounds.²²⁸ The groups' inclusion of the blues in their set lists is particularly notable in this context because, unlike minstrel music, the blues appears in opposition with string band music. Blues music was marketed as "race records" in contrast to white "hillbilly music" in the 1920s.²²⁹ Though the CCD are billed as a "traditional African-American string band," a substantial number of their songs are of blues origin.²³⁰

Analysis of the CCD's music demonstrates the influence of the genre. Rhiannon's vocals in "Why Don't You Do Right" on the album *Genuine Negro Jig* exemplify the impact of the blues on the CCD's sound. The liner notes cite many sources of the song, from the Harlem Hamfats to Lil' Green and Peggy Lee, all of whom were blues performers.²³¹ Rhiannon's slow glissandi and wide vocal range, especially during the song's coda, are characteristic of Alan Lomax's definition of blues singing.²³² Another blues and gospel vocal theorist, Jo Estill, also points to the sweet-sounding "cry" timbre as characteristic of blues vocals among performers like Bessie Smith, a quality which can be heard in Rhiannon's cloying rendition of the

²²⁸ Gura and Bollman, *America's Instrument* 25.

²²⁹ Patrick Huber, "Black Hillbillies," *Hidden in the Mix* 22.

²³⁰ "About," Carolina Chocolate Drops, <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/brand/about.html>>.

²³¹ CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

²³² Lomax cited in Barb Jungr, "Vocal Expression in the Blues and Gospel," *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music*, ed. Allan Moore (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 104.

song.²³³ Rhiannon’s vocals on “Wayward Gal” are particularly idiomatic of the blues as she echoes Lottie Kimbrough-Beam’s original use of blue notes, often recognized as “flexible melodic pitches,” on the third and seventh degrees of the scale, common placement for such pitch inflections.²³⁴ The instrumentation choices of the group also reveals their blues aesthetic. This is apparent in their rendition of “Why Don’t You Do Right?” in which Dom trades his typical banjo for guitar. In fact, this is one of three tracks on *Genuine Negro Jig* in which the guitar appears, and the only one in which the guitar is the focal rather than accompanying instrument.²³⁵ Sule Greg Wilson’s “leg” percussion constitutes the only instrumental element uncommon in the blues tradition.²³⁶ In other songs that the CCD cover with roots in blues music, such as Ethel Water’s “No Man’s Mama,” also prominently feature guitar and blues-based vocal techniques.²³⁷ The CCD embrace the blues aesthetic, even when covering blues numbers with instrumentation besides guitar accompaniment. The Mississippi Sheiks version of “Sittin’ on Top of the World,” a blues standard, features fiddle harmonization as well as supplementary guitar. The Drops echo this choice in instrumentation, employing the slow glissandi of the Mississippi Sheiks’ fiddle part and the offbeat accentuation of the Sheiks’ guitar line.²³⁸

²³³ Jo Estill cited in Jungr “Vocal Expression,” *Blues and Gospel* 105-106.

²³⁴ CCD, “Wayward Gal,” *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records; Lottie Kimbrough-Beam, “Wayward Girl Blues,” 25 September 2013, YouTube, 13 February 2014 < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8heyirtj0>>; Graeme M. Boone, “Twelve Key Recordings,” *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music*, ed. Allan Moore (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 63.

²³⁵ CCD, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

²³⁶ CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

²³⁷ CCD, “No Man’s Mama” *Leaving Eden*, Nonesuch.

²³⁸ CCD, “Sittin’ on Top of the World,” *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records; Mississippi Sheiks, “Sittin’ on Top of the World,” rec. 1930, *Mississippi Sheiks, Vol. 1*, Document Records, 1991.

Other CCD songs from the blues tradition escape the binary of blues or string band music, as the Drops employ their eclecticism as revivalists in their interpretation of the tunes. Ma Rainey's "Black Eye Blues," which the CCD cover on their 2007 album *Heritage*, is a prime example of the group's inventive approach to the blues.²³⁹ The Drops assert their string band perspective by substituting the banjo for the electric guitar and piano parts on Ma Rainey's original version.²⁴⁰ The timbre of the acoustic banjo alone roots the song in the string band sound, especially in comparison with the typical blues accompaniment of the guitar. Dom also plays jug, another musical element which departs from standard blues instrumentation. Historically, the jug was used in jug bands as the "bass rhythm instrument," anchoring jug ensembles that were popularized in Louisville, Kentucky and Memphis, Tennessee in the early 1900s.²⁴¹ Though jug bands draw from a blues aesthetic, the sound is also rooted in early jazz and old-time music.²⁴² As such, the jug's inclusion in the CCD's version of a blues song is indicative of their "atypical way of articulating their own artistic feelings."²⁴³

Though the instrumentation of the CCD's ensemble differs from that of a standard blues ensemble, there are elements of the group's version of "Black Eye Blues" which allow the song recognition within the blues genre. Rhiannon's vocals can again be classified within the confines of blues-singing techniques. Another

²³⁹ CCD, "Black Eye Blues," *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records.

²⁴⁰ Ma Rainey, "Black Eye Blues," rec. 1928, *Ma Rainey*, Document Records, 1994; "Black Eye Blues," CCD, *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records.

²⁴¹ Paul Oliver, "Jug Band," *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Performance and Production*, 2003 ed.

²⁴² Richardson, *African Americans in Old-Time Music* 49.

²⁴³ "CCD," *Dixiefrog*, 2013, Bluesweb.com, 14 March 2014 <http://www.bluesweb.com/p_disque.php3?id_article=1311>.

aspect of Alan Lomax's discussion of blues singers is vibrato, something which is rare for some but common in rapid form over sustained notes for performers like Bessie Smith. Rhiannon's version of "Black Eye Blues" features this vibrato style, as well as a "glottal shake" technique which Lomax claims is uncommon but still evident in the vocals of select blues vocalists.²⁴⁴ Also, both accompanying instruments—the banjo in the CCD's version and the guitar in Ma Rainey's—take an improvisatory solo prior to the final iteration of the chorus.²⁴⁵

Other Black Folk Influences

Dom notes that his inspiration in combining different musical elements within a single song, as they do with a number of their blues covers, lies with Mike Seeger, of the New Lost City Ramblers fame. Dom's reflections on Mike Seeger's album *Solo: Old-time Country Music* reveal Mike's influence:

When I purchased the album I read the notes and the premise that Mike had written, which was something to the effect of "After having played all of these different styles of music over many years, I am now making this record and putting different styles of old-time music together that make sense musically." What a concept! From that point on, I've tried to use that sentiment on everything I do. If it were possible and in good taste...I try to use different styles of old-time music to elevate the ones I am playing.²⁴⁶

In Dom's description of his musical aesthetic within the CCD, he situates himself as a revivalist, following in the footsteps of Mike Seeger. In Hill and Bithell's

²⁴⁴ CCD, "Black Eye Blues," Heritage, Dixiefrog Records; Lomax cited in Jungr, "Vocal Expression," Blues and Gospel, 105.

²⁴⁵ Ma Rainey, "Black Eye Blues," Ma Rainey, Document Records; CCD, "Black Eye Blues," Heritage, Dixiefrog Records.

²⁴⁶ "Discussion with Dom Flemons," Chris Mateer <<http://www.nodepression.com/profiles/blogs/interview-an-in-depth-discussion-with-dom-flemons-of-carolina>>.

introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Music Revivals*, they note that combining different styles in this manner is characteristic of many revivalists, as “new converts inevitably adapt the music they discover to their own stylistic preferences and performance conventions.” The CCD have garnered criticism for their revivalist practice of “[incorporating] further influences from other sources” with the result of “new hybrid styles.”²⁴⁷ In Thomas Richardson’s thesis on African Americans in old-time music, he notes that many members of the Bloomington, Indiana old-time community perceived the labeling of the CCD as an “old-time band” a misnomer, as they have an eclectic approach to the string band genre.²⁴⁸ Regardless of the group’s reception, the Drops’ particular approach to African American musical heritage is interesting because it moves beyond conservation work. Their music is a living and breathing thing, with innovations and varying aesthetics combined songs and styles of the past.

Their choice of repertoire, as well as their ability to combine different musical styles within one tune, is especially indicative of this phenomenon. Though this thesis has already detailed the ways in which the CCD engage with African American string band music, minstrel music, and blues, the group performs select songs from other black folk traditions. The album *Heritage* features two songs adapted from a 1940s-era Alan Lomax recording in Livingston, Alabama. Both “Another Man Done Gone” and “Po’ Lazarus” are prison songs of the chain gang period performed by African American folk singer Vera Hall.²⁴⁹ The persistent foot tapping in “Po’

²⁴⁷ Hill and Bithell, “Introduction to Music Revival,” *Oxford Handbook of Music Revival* 13.

²⁴⁸ Richardson, *African Americans in Old Time Music*, 68.

²⁴⁹ CCD, liner notes *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records, 9, 12.

Lazarus” as well as Rhiannon’s repetitive but expressive singing in the two songs draw from the African American work song sound, allowing the CCD a repertoire broadly rooted in African American roots music.²⁵⁰ On *Leaving Eden*, the band engages with African American folk music from the Georgia Sea Islands in their version of the Georgia Sea Island Singers’ “Read ’Em John.”²⁵¹ The Georgia Sea Island Singers are an especially interesting folk group because they consist of descendants of enslaved Africans on the Georgia Sea Islands, developing a musical culture in relative isolation from the rest of the United States due to geographic limitations.²⁵² In their rendition of the Georgia Sea Islands Singers’ “Read ’Em John,” the CCD engage with yet another aspect of African American folk music outside of the string band tradition.²⁵³

Dance

Another way in which the CCD engage with African American cultural heritage is through dance. Rhiannon Giddens’ interest in old-time music was actually sparked by her participation in contra dancing. She stated in an interview that after she heard the claw-hammer banjo in a dance-band setting she was “completely hooked.”²⁵⁴ Contra dancing is a folk style of dancing descended from English line

²⁵⁰ CCD, “Po’ Lazarus” and “Another Man Done Gone” *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records; Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U. S. A.* 98, 107-108.

²⁵¹ CCD, liner notes, *Leaving Eden*, Nonesuch.

²⁵² Adrienn Mendonca, “Georgia Sea Island Singers,” *Arts and Culture* 21 August 2013 *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Georgia Humanities Council, 31 March 2014
<<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/georgia-sea-island-singers>>.

²⁵³ Georgia Sea Island Singers, rec. 11 April 1960, *Southern Journey, Vol. 13: Earliest Times-Georgia Sea Island Songs for Everyday Life*, Rounder, 1998.

²⁵⁴ “CCD: Old-Time Sounds,” *Music Interviews*, NPR

<<http://www.npr.org/2012/03/10/148300894/carolina-chocolate-drops-hooked-on-old-time-sounds>>.

dancing, without many roots in the African American dancing community.²⁵⁵

However, many of the songs that Joe Thompson taught the founding members of the CCD were tunes that accompanied dancing in a house-party setting. Dance band repertoire of this sort was shared amongst both black and white string band musicians.²⁵⁶ The CCD pay homage to the dance-band roots of this music by including “calls” or instructions for dancers such as “grab your partner if you got ’em” and “promenade all the way around” in songs learned from Joe Thompsons like “Cindy Gal” and “Pumpkin Pie.”²⁵⁷ Besides drawing from a repertoire of music used to accompany dance, the CCD also feature dancing in their live performances. Rhiannon often performs a style of dancing entitled flat-footing or buck dancing on-stage or in old-time jam sessions.²⁵⁸

Rhiannon’s dancing is especially notable given the implications of dancing in the African American community. Along with music, dancing was one of the few mediums in the time of slavery in which African Americans could “[reclaim] their bodies as their own, outside the tannery or the white employer’s kitchen.”²⁵⁹ In a society in which the personal expression of African Americans was stifled or

²⁵⁵ Richard Carlin, “Yuppies Invaded My Tradition at Midnight,” Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America’s Southeast and Beyond, ed. Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995) 233.

²⁵⁶ Conway, African Banjo Echoes 2, 11.

²⁵⁷ CCD, “Cindy Gal,” Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; CCD, “Pumpkin Pie,” Performance at Cat’s Cradle, 05 September 2009 <<https://archive.org/details/carolinachocolatedrops2009-09-05>>.

²⁵⁸ “Barefootin’ to Some Drum and Fife Music,” CCD, 11 June 2010, YouTube, 13 February 2014 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyDRNhkaEY8>>; Rhiannon Giddens, Performance at Banjo Workshop, perf. Rhiannon Giddens and Fred Coon, Picking in the Pines Old Time and Bluegrass Music Festival, Flagstaff, Arizona, 15 September 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQVAkU5tOTk>>; “Review: Carolina Chocolate Drops 2011,” OK Mozart Festival, Tim Hudson, 26 April 2012, OK Mozart, 13 February 2014 <<http://okmozart.com/2013-in-review/carolina-chocolate-drops/>>.

²⁵⁹ Hunter cited in Michelle R. Scott, Blues Empress in Black Chattanooga: Bessie Smith and the Emerging Urban South (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008) 111.

undervalued, dancing proved to be a powerful assertion of individual worth. This is especially important in the flat-footing style, as it is a style specifically “designed to encourage individualism and improvisation,” allowing the individual performer autonomy and freedom.²⁶⁰ Flat-footing or buck dancing is a style of dancing that Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside note came “from cultures that have been denigrated by others in mainstream society.” Thus, the affirmation on the part of these marginalized cultures “that they have traditional art forms worthy of respect is important to self-esteem.”²⁶¹ As such, Rhiannon’s dancing at live shows is perhaps a more meaningful reclamation of an African American cultural art form than a casual observer might initially perceive. As is the case with the CCD’s performance of African American string band music, the group makes a point to highlight cultural practices rarely seen on international stages, which is true in the case of Rhiannon’s performance of buck dancing.

Buck dancing has roots in the African American community dating back to the times of slavery, when Northern soldiers in the Civil War depicted the dance style in words and drawings upon returning from the South.²⁶² Buck dancing also transitioned from the plantation to the minstrel stage, as performers utilized the style to imitate black folk life and achieve high entertainment value.²⁶³ The dance itself is defined by “scuffing” and “sliding” movements that take place close to the ground,

²⁶⁰ Ted Olson, Blue Ridge Folk Life (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992) 126.

²⁶¹ Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside, “Continuity and Change,” Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America’s Southeast and Beyond, ed. Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995) 8.

²⁶² Barbara Glass, African American Dance: An Illustrated History (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2007) 120.

²⁶³ Glass, African American Dance 120, 145.

“often with audible taps.”²⁶⁴ Some communities define flat-footing or buck dancing by the distance the feet are to the floor, with the requirement that six inches be the maximum distance the feet are from the ground lest the movements be mistaken for clogging, a descendant of flat-footing.²⁶⁵ The percussive aspect of the dance is also important, with residents of Fancy Gap, Virginia defining the dance as one of “rhythm-making with the feet.”²⁶⁶ This rhythmic dancing is often accompanied by the banjo, usually joined by fiddle, guitar or French harp.²⁶⁷ While the rhythmic aspect of the dance is propelled by movement from the hips down, African American dance scholar Barbara Glass notes that the stance of the dance is still distinctly “Africanist.”²⁶⁸

It is important to note that though the tradition of buck dancing has strong ties to the African American community, it was performed by white dancers as well. Bess Lomax Hawes, Alan Lomax’s sister and producer of the film *Buck Dancer*, noted that the dance form was “a southern dance of male virtuosity engaged in by both black and white frontiersmen.”²⁶⁹ Many sources also contend that flat-footing and buck dancing are a result of West African, Northern European and Native American influences.²⁷⁰ The multicultural nature of buck dancing and flat footing is similar to the roots of string band music. Thus, when the CCD perform, they are

²⁶⁴ Glass, *African American Dance* 120-121.

²⁶⁵ Jane Harris Woodside, “Clogging is Country,” *Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America’s Southeast and Beyond*, ed. Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995) 133.

²⁶⁶ Susan Eike Spalding, “Frolics, Hoedowns, and Four-Handed Reels,” *Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America’s Southeast and Beyond*, ed. Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995) 25.

²⁶⁷ Spalding, “Frolics,” *Communities in Motion* 16.

²⁶⁸ Glass, *African American Dance* 121.

²⁶⁹ Hawes cited in Glass, *African American Dance* 121.

²⁷⁰ Olson, *Blue Ridge Folk Life* 126; Emily Kate Oleson, *Vaudevival: Old is the New New*, diss. University of Maryland, College Park, 2012, ProQuest (UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2012) 73.

engaging with African American cultural traditions from the South, as well as art forms common among southern whites. While we have discussed the CCD's engagement with various African American cultural productions, the ways in which the CCD's style adapts when playing string band music associated with a white community is worth exploring as well.

Chapter 3: What Race Sounds Like

In a conversation with Dom Flemons, Dom noted that the CCD make a point “to mention that [they] learned from some white people too,” because, in his mind, white musicians have done a good job preserving the tradition of string band music when black musicians shied away from the genre.²⁷¹ The liner notes of *Genuine Negro Jig* are indicative of the influence of white string band groups on the CCD’s repertoire. Both “Trouble in Your Mind” and “Cornbread and Butterbeans” were learned from white musicians based out of North Carolina: Frank Blevins & the Tarheel Rattlers and The Carolina Sunshine Trio, respectively.²⁷² Even songs on the album with acknowledged African American influences reveal the cross-racial musical sharing that is inherent to the string band genre. Though the liner notes of *Genuine Negro Jig* recognize that the roots of “Snowden’s Jig” most likely lie with the black Snowden family, the song—like many others—has been passed back and forth between black and white players, as it was first popularized by white minstrel Dan Emmett.²⁷³ Despite the fact that scholars of the string band genre note the shared repertoire of white and black musicians, distinctions are often made in terms of playing style based on the race of the string band performer. These distinctions merit an exploration of the differences between white and black string band music, beyond the racial category to which the performer belongs. Both the CCD’s website as well as many media outlets covering the band draw attention to the blackness of the group’s members, implying a division between their group and groups of white

²⁷¹ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

²⁷² CCD, liner notes, [Genuine Negro Jig](#), Nonesuch.

²⁷³ CCD, liner notes, [Genuine Negro Jig](#), Nonesuch.

performers of a similar caliber.²⁷⁴ Though I believe the CCD to indeed be unique due to their performative engagement with African American musical and cultural heritage as well as their continuous efforts to inform their audiences of this heritage, it is worthwhile to spend time uncovering what is actually different about their sound and how much of that uniqueness can be tied to the black identity of the band members. In many cases I find that the American listener's compulsion to parse sounds along racial lines is more telling of America's musical culture than the differences or similarities in string band music performed by white and black artists.

Sounding White

I. Hearing the Racial Other

Radano and Bohlman, in the introduction to *Music and Racial Imagination*, operate within the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Hegel's framework of Self and Other in order to explain how people imagine music racially:

The longstanding metaphysical properties associated with music enhance the imagination of racial difference: race contributes fundamentally to the issues of belonging and ownership that music articulates. At individual, group, and broader social levels alike, few deny that one type of music can be possessed and claimed as one's own, while there are other musics that belong to someone else.²⁷⁵

The conceptualization of music in terms of self and non-self is especially telling in the context of American music, as race is such an important aspect of self-identification in American society. As many Americans define belonging in terms of

²⁷⁴ "About," Carolina Chocolate Drops, <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/band>>; "CCD Cross Divide," [Knoxville.com](http://www.knoxville.com), Wayne Bledsoe, 25 April 2010, Scripps Interactive Newspaper Group, 12 November 2014 <<http://www.knoxville.com/news/2010/apr/25/carolina-chocolate-drops-cross-divide/>>.

²⁷⁵ Radano and Bohlman, "Introduction," *Music and the Racial Imagination* 6.

their race it is thus understandable that one could define a type of music in concordance with or in opposition to their racial identity. The CCD pose an interruption to this mode of establishing racial categories for musical genres. Dom Flemons noted that the group first performed for “rural white Southerners that loved bluegrass music” and received feedback from the audience that they “do the old-timey music just like it should be.”²⁷⁶ The group’s authenticity from the perspective of a white audience complicates Radano and Bohlman’s observation that the racial association of a music is often defined relationally to one’s own racial identity. In the case of the CCD, they are identified as idiomatically performing in a genre perceived as a white one, though they themselves identify as black. Perhaps the best way to explore the ways in race is constructed, complicated, and perceived musically in the case of the CCD is to analyze the music the group plays in relation to the earlier versions of the songs performed by white groups.

The first song from *Genuine Negro Jig* of white string band origin is “Trouble in Your Mind,” a song learned from a recording of Frank Blevins and His Tar Heel Rattlers—a group from Ashe County North Carolina—in the early 1900s.²⁷⁷ Though the instrumentation on both tracks consists of fiddle, guitar, banjo and vocals, there are discrepancies between the version pioneered by Frank Blevins and the CCD’s take on the song. Perhaps the most notable difference is the increased attention the banjo receives in the CCD’s arrangement. In Frank Blevins’ rendition, the instrument is almost imperceptible due to its low level in the mix and its low note density

²⁷⁶ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

²⁷⁷ CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch; Liner Notes, rec. 1927-1931, *Music from the Lost Provinces: Old-Time Stringbands from Ashe County, North Carolina and Vicinity, 1927-1931*, Old Hat Enterprises, 1997, 10-11.

whereas its presence is accentuated by chordal strums and sixteenth rolls throughout the CCD's recording of the song.²⁷⁸ Additionally, the Drops' accompaniment technique is highly syncopated, with an off-beat guitar part and banjo strums. In contrast, Ed Blevins, the guitarist in Frank Blevins and His Tar Heel Rattlers, accompanies the vocals and fiddle with a straight eighth note rhythmic pattern throughout, a movement echoed often in instrumental breaks by Fred Miller on the banjo.²⁷⁹ The increased syncopation and attention to the banjo is even more pronounced in the CCD's version of the Carolina Sunshine Trio's "Cornbread and Butterbeans."²⁸⁰ The banjo in particular plays a much larger role in the Drops' version due to the fact that the only accompanying instrumentation in the Carolina Sunshine Trio's rendition is a guitar part. The CCD also imbue the song with a more syncopated feel than the Carolina Sunshine Trio did, especially in the vocal line of the chorus, as evidenced below (**Figure 3.1**).

Figure 3.1 Transcribed excerpts from "Cornbread and Butterbeans," as performed by the Carolina Sunshine Trio and the CCD.

"Cornbread and Butterbeans," The Carolina Sunshine Trio, Live from WPAQ

Hoe-in' corn & cot-ton too & when the day is o-ver ride the mule the cra-zy fool & love a-gain all o-ver

"Cornbread and Butterbeans," Carolina Chocolate Drops, Genuine Negro Jig

Hoe-in_ corn_ & cot-ton too_ & when the day is o-ver ride the mule & cut the fool_ & love a-gain all o-ver

²⁷⁸ CCD, "Trouble in Your Mind," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch ; Frank Blevins and His Tar Heel Rattlers "Don't Get Trouble In Your Mind" Music from the Lost Provinces, Old Hat Enterprises.

²⁷⁹ CCD, "Trouble in Your Mind," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch ; Blevins "Don't Get Trouble In Your Mind" Music from the Lost Provinces, Old Hat Enterprises. Liner notes, Music from the Lost Provinces, Old Hat Enterprises.

²⁸⁰ CCD, "Cornbread and Butterbeans" Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; CCD, "Cornbread and Butterbeans" CCD with Joe Thompson, Music Maker Recordings; Carolina Sunshine Trio, "Cornbread and Butterbeans," Performance on WPAQ, WPAQ studio, Mount Airy, NC, 1947-1950 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHpbDPWR7S8>>.

The prominence of the banjo and syncopated rhythmic features in the CCD's renderings of string band music originally performed by white string bands on *Genuine Negro Jig* demonstrate the group's alignment with an African American string band aesthetic. Banjo is importantly featured in the music of Joe Thompson, the band's mentor, as well as in the repertoire of Etta Baker, Nathan Frazier and Frank Patterson, and the group's other black string band models.²⁸¹ The banjo is an instrument of importance in the greater African American string band tradition as well, with "negro jigs" appearing in James S. Kerr's 1870 banjo songbook *Kerr's Collection of Merry Melodies*.²⁸² Seminal recordings of black string bands such as *Altamont: Black Stringband Music, Violin, Sing the Blues for Me (1926-1949)* and *String Bands (1926-1929)* also demonstrate the banjo's significance in the genre, exemplified by the common fiddle and banjo combination on many of the tracks.²⁸³ Cecelia Conway, Bob Carlin, Patrick Huber, and Thomas Richardson's scholarly work chronicling the importance of the banjo in the black string band community of North Carolina's Piedmont and beyond further suggests that the CCD's inclusion of the banjo in their renditions of "Trouble in Your Mind" and "Cornbread and Butterbeans" allows them to engage with the heritage of African American string band music.²⁸⁴ Their adherence to a syncopated rhythmic feel furthers their

²⁸¹ *Altamont*, Rounder; Etta Baker "West End Blues" and "Peace Behind the Bridge," *Banjo*, Music Maker Recordings; Joe Thompson, *Classic Old-Time Fiddle*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings; Joe Thompson, *Family Tradition*, Rounder, 1999; Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson, *Going Down to Raleigh*, PineCone-Piedmont; Various artists, rec. 1926-1949, *Violin, Sing the Blues for Me (1926-1949)*, Old Hat Enterprises, 1999; Various artists, rec. 1926, *String Bands (1926-1929)*, Document Records, 1926.

²⁸² CCD, liner notes, *Leaving Eden*, Nonesuch.

²⁸³ *Altamont*, Rounder; *String Bands*, Document Records.

²⁸⁴ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*; Carlin, "African Americans and String Band Music," *String Bands*, 31-42; Richardson *African Americans in Old Time Music*; Patrick Huber, "Black Hillbillies" *Hidden in the Mix*, 19-81.

engagement with African American string music, as it is an aforementioned characteristic common in African diasporic musics.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, syncopation can be heard consistently in the music of the previous generation of African American string band performers. The fiddle and banjo duos of Joe and Odell Thompson and Nathan Frazier with Frank Patterson often use syncopation to create contrast between a song's vocals and accompanying features.²⁸⁶

II. Fiddling Similarities

Though there are compelling differences between the CCD's interpretations of white string band songs and the source recordings the Drops are drawing from, it would be overly simplistic to say that their music is easily recognized as black string band music. Though phenotypic indicators generate a perception that the CCD are a different than the white performers that usually grace stages like the Grand Ole Opry or Merlefest and there are sonic differences between the Drops and other white string band sources, there are also ways in which the CCD sound similar to white string bands. Using "Trouble in Your Mind" as an example, it is clear that the group's style of fiddle playing may have been influenced by recordings of white performers or, perhaps, the band members' previous classical training.²⁸⁷ Though Joe Thompson served as the group's mentor, there is a distinct timbral difference between Justin Robinson's fiddle playing and that of Joe when comparing the CCD's recording of "Trouble in Your Mind" to Joe and Odell's "John Henry" from *Black Banjo Songsters*. Justin and Rhiannon's style of fiddle playing is distinctly smoother and

²⁸⁵ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 25; Brooks, *America's Black Musical Heritage* 11; Maultsby, *Africanisms in American Culture* 335.

²⁸⁶ *Altamont*, Rounder; Joe Thompson, *Family Tradition*, Rounder.

²⁸⁷ CCD, "Trouble in Your Mind," *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch; McGrath, *Making Notes* 128.

connected in comparison to the rougher, more complex tone of Joe's fiddle playing, similar in some ways to the lyrical playing style of Frank Blevins in his band's version of "Trouble in Your Mind."²⁸⁸

This similarity is conceivably due to Justin and Rhiannon's classical upbringing as well as the influence of white string band recordings. While Rhiannon pursued opera before turning to string band music, Justin began playing the violin at age eight and played in a string quartet with his mother at a young age.²⁸⁹ Giovanni Battista Viotti, a leading composer-performer in the 1700s, pioneered a "modern" style of violin playing notable for "sustained lyricism and cantabile," similar to the "bel canto" tradition popularized in Italian opera, potentially explaining the playing style favored by Rhiannon and Justin.²⁹⁰ Despite the unique formal training the CCD received from Joe Thompson in the folk idiom, their sounds are not entirely similar. Joe Thompson's tendency towards a rough sonic texture can be perceived as African in character in the context of Tilford Brooks' categorization of black American music and its African roots. A "foggy, rough, or raucous singing voice" is a "characteristic vocal timbre found in both the African and American Black traditions," in contrast to the "'smooth' and 'sweet' qualities so highly regarded in the European idiom."²⁹¹ Carlin confirms this timbral characteristic of black music in the string band realm as well, noting that one can "characterize black fiddling and banjo playing as rougher

²⁸⁸ CCD, "Trouble in Your Mind," Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; Joe Thompson, "John Henry," Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1998; Blevins, "Trouble in Your Mind," Music From the Lost Provinces, Old Hat Enterprises.

²⁸⁹ "Bio," Justin Robinson, 2012, Justin Robinson and the Mary Annettes, 05 April 2014 <<http://justinrobinsonandthemaryannettes.com/bio.php>>.

²⁹⁰ P. Baines, "Violin," Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850, 2003 ed.; "Opera," Macmillan Encyclopedia, 2003 ed.

²⁹¹ Brooks, America's Black Musical Heritage 18-19.

and more rhythmic than the fiddling and banjo playing of their white American counterparts.”²⁹²

Though it is important to be aware that all black string band musicians do not sound the same as each other, nor do white musicians in the genre, the fiddling style of Frank Blevins in comparison to that of Joe Thompson provides sonic evidence of the stylistic divide between white and black performers. The comparison further enforces the idea that the CCD were influenced, at least in part, by white string band playing styles. The legato, smooth, and even-toned style of Frank Blevins’ fiddle playing in “Trouble in Your Mind” contrasts with Joe Thompson’s rough and, at times, disconnected or choppy bowing technique.²⁹³ In songs such as “Georgia Buck” and “Lights in the Valley,” Joe utilizes raspy fiddle slides throughout, while Frank Blevins maintains a clear tone, even while executing similar melodic embellishments.²⁹⁴ Though Justin and Rhiannon’s fiddle playing in the group is not without similarities to Joe’s and other black string band fiddlers, the players’ sound definitely tends towards the smooth and clear timbre like that of Frank Blevins. In the CCD’s rendition of “Trouble in Your Mind” Justin’s fiddle playing is characterized by even, resonant bowing, similar to that of Blevins.²⁹⁵ Justin’s fiddle playing in songs such as “Short Life of Trouble” or “Cornbread and Butterbeans” is also demonstrative of this style.²⁹⁶ Rhiannon’s fiddling is perhaps even more

²⁹² Carlin, *String Bands* 32.

²⁹³ Joe Thompson “John Henry” *Black Banjo Songsters*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings; Blevins, “Trouble in Your Mind,” *Music from the Lost Provinces*, Old Hat Enterprises.

²⁹⁴ Joe Thompson, *Going Down to Raleigh*, PineCone-Piedmont; Blevins, “Trouble in Your Mind,” *Music from the Lost Provinces*, Old Hat Enterprises.

²⁹⁵ CCD, “Trouble in Your Mind,” *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch; Blevins, “Trouble in Your Mind,” *Music from the Lost Provinces*, Old Hat Enterprises.

²⁹⁶ CCD, “Short Life of Trouble,” *Dona Got a Ramblin’ Mind*, Music Maker Recordings; CCD, “Cornbread and Butterbeans,” *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

reminiscent of white fiddler players such as Blevins, as demonstrated in the clear and smooth timbre of the instrument in her performances of “Snowden’s Jig (Genuine Negro Jig)” and “Country Girl,” to name a few.²⁹⁷

III. Attention to Lyrics

Another aspect of the CCD’s stylistic similarity to white string bands is the group’s attention to lyrics. Alan Lomax, in categorizing the differences between white and black folk music in his article “Folk Song Style” notes that “texts normally dominate the song” in white folk music, while the texts in black folk songs are usually “fragmentary,” often “consisting of one new line per stanza with extensive refrains.”²⁹⁸ Though Lomax’s analysis as a whole is slightly reductive, as he introduces differences as absolute rather than general tendencies, there is merit in his analysis if one understands the limitations of generalizing a racial group’s musical style within the broad genre of folk music. In fact, many scholars have noted the importance of exact lyrics for white folk performers, particularly in the realm of spiritual folk music.²⁹⁹ While many white congregations would use the same tune for many sets of psalm-based lyrics, the melody of spirituals received more focus in black performances. Simple refrains served as text for many different melodic compositions and the “lining out system” of repeated, call-and-response lyrics persisted in the black community long after it had faded from common practice in white circles.³⁰⁰ The inclusion of extensive and detailed lyrics in “Cornbread and

²⁹⁷ CCD, “Snowden’s Jig (Genuine Negro Jig),” Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; CCD, “Country Girl,” Leaving Eden, Nonesuch.

²⁹⁸ Alan Lomax, “Folk Song Style,” American Anthropologist 61.6 (1959): 931.

²⁹⁹ Brooks, America’s Black Musical Heritage 34; Maultsby, Africanism in American Culture 335, 341.

³⁰⁰ Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals 202; William Dargan Lining Out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006) 1.

Butterbeans” exemplifies the CCD’s ability and desire to adhere to a white folk music norm. Rather than alter the length and detail of verses to fit within the refrain-based style of black string band, the CCD’s version of “Cornbread and Butterbeans” includes a text-driven refrain as well as three elaborate verses depicting travels around the world, the faults of women, and the downfalls of wealth and stature, just as the Carolina Sunshine Trio’s recording does.³⁰¹ Importantly, in one of the few originals by the CCD, “Country Girl,” lyrics also play a large role, depicting in detail the joys of Rhiannon’s experience growing up in North Carolina.³⁰²

Part of the continuity between the CCD’s use of lyrics in comparison to text-driven songs performed by white string bands depends on the CCD’s choice of repertoire. The group preserves the dense lyrics of white string bands songs while maintaining lyric simplicity in refrain-driven black string band tracks. However, their preservation of text in lyric-heavy music also signifies that they are willing to subscribe to a white string band aesthetic. It is important to note, however, that the group chooses to do so on their own terms. When covering Johnny and June Carter Cash’s “Jackson,” Rhiannon continually interjects after the lyric “go comb your hair,” offering a lyrical alternative for black listeners such as “pick it” or “jheri curl it,” rather than allow that all audience members have the same hair texture.”³⁰³

Regardless of such alterations, the CCD preserve complex lyrics rather than shorten

³⁰¹ CCD, “Cornbread and Butterbeans,” Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; Carolina Sunshine Trio, “Cornbread and Butterbeans,” <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHpbdPWR7S8>>.

³⁰² CCD “Country Girl,” Leaving Eden, Nonesuch.

³⁰³ CCD, Performance at the Rhythm and Roots Festival, 01 September 2013; CCD, “Jackson,” We Walk the Line-A Celebration of the Music of Johnny Cash (Live), Blackbird Production Partners, LLC., 2012.

or simplify phrases, even when the word density is such that lines struggle to fit within the verse.

This stylistic choice is apparent within the six-bar verse structure of “I Truly Understand That You Love Another Man,” which appeared in the repertoire of the New Lost City Ramblers and the Strange Creek Singers.³⁰⁴ This lyric-heavy style is indeed characteristic of white string band music, if one compares it to the repertoire of black string band performers such as Joe and Odell Thompson or Nathan Frazier and Frank Patterson. Most of Joe Thompson’s songs that the CCD perform feature sparse lyrics with extended instrumental breaks in-between verses or refrains. Often, as is the case with “Georgia Buck,” “Cindy Gal,” and many other songs passed on from Joe Thompson, these refrains are highly repetitive.³⁰⁵ If one compares the CCD’s performance of these songs to earlier Joe Thompson songs it is evident that their lyric style is rooted in the black string band community, as the CCD’s interpretations are clearly based on the more simplistic lyric style of Thompson.³⁰⁶ “Po Black Sheep” and “Corrine,” two songs performed by Nathan Frazier and Frank Patterson on *Altamont*, also demonstrate the common practice of repetitive refrains among black string band musicians.³⁰⁷ Though the CCD cover black string band tunes, keeping the lyrical style intact, they are not tied to short and repetitive refrains, as is clear from the way in which they interpret songs learned from white musicians or recordings thereof.

³⁰⁴ CCD, “I Truly Understand That You Love Another Man,” Leaving Eden, Nonesuch; CCD, liner notes, Leaving Eden, Nonesuch.

³⁰⁵ CCD, “Cindy Gal,” Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; CCD, “Georgia Buck,” Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch; CCD, “Riro’s House,” Leaving Eden, Nonesuch.

³⁰⁶ Joe Thompson, “Georgia Buck” Going Down to Raleigh, PineCone-Piedmont; Joe Thompson, “Cindy Gal,” Family Tradition, Rounder.

³⁰⁷ Frazier and Patterson, “Po’ Black Sheep,” and “Corrine,” Altamont, Rounder.

III. Dialect and Racial Meaning

A significant way in which the CCD can be perceived as white upon listening to their music, especially in comparison to performers like Joe Thompson or Nathan Frazier, is in the group's dialect. In the world of sound and recordings, dialect, rather than phenotypic cues, becomes an important aspect of the listener's conception of the performer's race. Y. S. Nathan, writing in 1885, remarked on both the similarity of European American and African American folk songs as well as the significance of dialect as a mark of racial difference in entry that appeared in *Putnam's Monthly*. He urges the reader to "let the words peculiarly Scottish in Hynd Horn...or in almost any other ancient ballad be literally translated into the African dialect, and we have at once a plantation song."³⁰⁸ This observation was echoed in practice on the minstrel stage, as white performers used an African American dialect, known more commonly by linguists as Black English, to give credence to their caricature of a black entertainer.³⁰⁹ Scholars establish that this difference between white and black dialects is not just imagined but is, rather, quantifiable in studies of language in America. William Labov asserts that "Black English Vernacular is a subsystem of English with a different set of phonological and syntactic rules" and is "quite different from other dialects of English."³¹⁰

Thus, the differences in Joe Thompson's and the CCD's speech patterns meaning are heavily tied to the performer's racial identity. If one compares Joe

³⁰⁸ Nathanson cited in Radano, *Lying Up a Nation* 173.

³⁰⁹ Guy Bailey, "A Perspective on African-American English," *American Dialect Research*, ed. Dennis Richard Preston (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1993) 287; Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 14.

³¹⁰ William Labov cited in Guy Bailey, *American Dialect Research* 287-288.

Thompson's version of "Georgie Buck" to the CCD's, the dialectical difference are such that the CCD "sound white" in comparison.³¹¹ The issue of comparison is worth noting, as the CCD occupy some sort of middle space between white and black vernacular. They don't sound quite like either racial group, but the more prominently identifiable differences between the CCD's dialect and the speech patterns of other black string band performers establishes their belonging in a white musical space. A particularly interesting point of comparison is Dom's dialect in "Po' Black Sheep" in relation to that of Nathan Frazier and Frank Patterson in the same song. Though Dom pronounces the word "poor" as "po'," as is characteristic of Black English, there is a discernable difference between Dom's dialect and the dialects of the previous generation of black string band performers throughout the rest of the song.³¹² The listener's perception of the CCD's dialect as primarily white rather than black is especially evident in Rhiannon's performance of "Pretty Bird," which sounds similar to a southern white dialect like that of the Carolina Sunshine Trio's singers.³¹³

Eclecticism

The CCD's sonic similarity to both black and white string band groups stems from the fact that they are influenced by a number of musical styles and communities. Though their apprenticeship relationship with Joe Thompson distinctively shaped the group's style, the accessibility of musical recordings in the digital age is such that the

³¹¹ CCD, "Georgie Buck," Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind, Music Maker Recordings; Joe Thompson "Georgia Buck," Going Down to Raleigh, PineCone-Piedmont.

³¹² CCD, "Po' Black Sheep," Leaving Eden, Nonesuch; Frazier and Patterson, "Po Black Sheep," Altamont, Rounder.

³¹³ CCD, "Pretty Bird," Leaving Eden, Nonesuch; Carolina Sunshine Trio, "Cornbread and Butterbeans," <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHpbPWR7S8>>.

Drops can easily be influenced by white string band musicians with whom they have not come into contact. The term “eclectic” could easily be applied to the CCD and their music due to the multiplicity of the group’s influences. While the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides an insightful definition of eclectic, as that which “borrows or is borrowed from diverse sources” and is “broad, not exclusive, in matters of taste,” ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin unpacks eclecticism in relation to music by exploring how eclecticism can be inherent, implicit, imposed, and strategic.³¹⁴ The CCD’s eclecticism is inherent because the CCD performed and were influenced by a variety of genres from a young age. It is also imposed as they decided themselves that “it is important to preserve...types of musical diversity,” including minstrel music, black and white string band music, blues and other folk music forms. The CCD’s efforts to achieve an eclectic sound can certainly be considered strategic as well, as their music is used to both “make a point” that black and white string band songs can exist on a stage together as they have done throughout history as well as to “build a career” making exciting and interesting folk music.

However, the most useful aspect of eclecticism in explaining the music of the CCD is perhaps Slobin’s discussion of implicit eclecticism, in the sense that “certain kinds of music must by nature be multiform.” Though Slobin elaborates on the ways in which music can be determined as implicitly eclectic from the perspective of the music’s audience and marketers, I believe the implicit eclecticism of the CCD’s music is driven by the band’s desire to engage with both black and white string band

³¹⁴ Oxford English dictionary cited in Mark Slobin, “Musical Multiplicity: Emerging Thoughts,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 39 (2007) 15.

musics, as well as the nature of American music itself.³¹⁵ The CCD's music contains many similarities to both black and white string band music due to the nature of musical exchange among black and white performers in America. As previously mentioned, many black and white string band musicians performed together, sharing musical ideas and repertoire in the North Carolina Piedmont.³¹⁶ Thus, the idea that the CCD "sound white" in their rendition of white string band songs like "Trouble in Your Mind" actually involves them "sounding black" as well, due to the black roots of much string band music as well as the cross-conversation amongst performers of both black and white communities.

The eclecticism of the CCD stretches even further beyond their exploration of both black and white string band music as well as related genres such as minstrel music. In fact, the band often makes surprising choices as string band musicians that push the boundaries of their genre. On *Genuine Negro Jig*, Dom employs Tuvan throat singing, a technique that he learned from a recording, during the instrumental breaks of the song.³¹⁷ This method of singing is noted to be a way for Tuvans of Central Asia to "create their national identity and their relationship to landscape."³¹⁸ In this context, the CCD's inclusion of the technique in "Trouble in Your Mind" is a rather unusual choice for an American band, particularly a band of the string band tradition like the CCD, to make. A more understandable element of the group's eclecticism is the varied genres of the tunes that the group chooses to play. On

³¹⁵ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013; Slobin, "Musical Multiplicity" 15-16.

³¹⁶ Carlin, *String Bands* 32.

³¹⁷ CCD, liner notes, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

³¹⁸ A. J. Haywood, *Siberia: A Cultural History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 234.

Genuine Negro Jig alone the group explores genres outside of the string band milieu, ranging from English folk singing to rock to R&B.³¹⁹ Perhaps the most popular song from the group's Grammy-award winning album is their cover of Blu Cantrell's "Hit 'Em Up Style," an R&B song from 2001. Though the multiplicity of the group's sound is apparent in this recording, due to Rhiannon's soulful singing and Justin's beatboxing, the CCD assert their string band roots through Rhiannon's idiomatic fiddle playing and the prominent presence of the banjo, rather than the electronic backtrack which appeared in Cantrell's version.³²⁰

In reference to the group's cover of "Hit 'Em Up Style," Dom asserts that he's "okay with parodying, interpreting and changing stuff around" as long as one is conscious of the rules and characteristics of the string band genre while doing so.³²¹ Dom's commitment to this sentiment is apparent in his interpretation of Franz Schubert's composition for voice and piano of "Erlkönig" on *Heritage*.³²² Dom maintains the string band style in his rendition of this classical piece through a banjo part similar in style to that of Hobart Smith and Odell Thompson.³²³ His straightforward delivery of the haunting melody is also rooted in the folk tradition, comparable to the vocals of Christine and Katherine Shipp in their rendition of "Sea Lion" on a recording for the Library of Congress.³²⁴ Dom's ability to mediate

³¹⁹ CCD, *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

³²⁰ Blu Cantrell, "Hit 'Em Up Style (Oops!)" *Bittersweet*, Arista Records, Inc., 2003; CCD, "Hit 'Em Up Style," *Genuine Negro Jig*, Nonesuch.

³²¹ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

³²² CCD, liner notes, *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records; CCD, "Earl King," *Heritage*, Dixiefrog Records.

³²³ Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson, "Old Corn Liquor," *Black Banjo Songsters*, Rounder; Hobart Smith, "Last Chance," *Portraits*, Rounder; Hobart Smith, "Black Annie," *Southern Journey, Vol. 2: Ballads and Breakdowns*, Rounder, 1997.

³²⁴ Christine Shipp and Katherine Shipp, "Sea Lion Woman," *Library of Congress-A Treasury of Field Recordings*, Rounder, 1997.

between two such disparate genres is unsurprising, given his self-proclaimed status as a “songster,” a performer in medicine shows long associated with eclectic repertoires.³²⁵ The CCD demonstrates their eclectic ethos in their collaborations with other artists, such as the Chieftains and Luminescent Orchestrii. The CCD perform “Pretty Little Girl” with the Chieftains on the Chieftain’s 50-year anniversary album, which features many different artists performing alongside the traditional Irish super group.³²⁶ In “Pretty Little Girl,” the CCD’s sound is fixed in the Irish idiom though it was popularly performed as a string band tune by Doug Wallin on the album *Classic Old-Time Fiddle from Smithsonian Folkways*.³²⁷

The CCD engage with the musical traditions of Western Europe on their own as well, adding a song sung in Scottish Gaelic that they learned while touring abroad to their repertoire.³²⁸ The CCD’s eclectic tendencies are especially apparent in their collaboration with the Luminescent Orchestrii. The groups’ four-song EP consists of widely-varying musical elements. Though string-band style fiddling is featured throughout, it is often paired with common components of hip-hop and R&B, such as rapping and beat-boxing. World music ethos are also evoked as the song “Escoutas (Diga Diga Diga)” is performed in Spanish.³²⁹ The CCD’s musical multiplicity is a feature often observed in revival musicians. Many such performers incorporate

³²⁵ Oliver, “Songster,” *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music*.

³²⁶ The Chieftains and CCD, “Pretty Little Girl,” *Voice of Ages*, Blackrock Records, LLC, 2012.

³²⁷ Chieftains and CCD, “Pretty Little Girl,” *Voice of Ages*, Blackrock Records, LLC; Doug Wallin, “Pretty Little Girl with the Blue Dress On,” *Classic Old-Time Fiddle*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

³²⁸ CCD, *Performance at Neighborhood Theatre*, 15 December 2013; CCD, *Performance at the Rhythm and Roots Festival*, 01 September 2013; CCD, “Gaelic Songs by CCD,” *Performance at the Paramount Center for the Arts*, perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, and Leyla McCalla, Paramount Center for the Arts, Bristol, TN, 15 July 2012 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kohl8qms0EU>>.

³²⁹ CCD and Luminescent Orchestrii, *CCD/Luminescent Orchestrii*, EP, Nonesuch, 2011.

sounds from other genres and styles to create their own unique sound, resulting in what Ellen Stekert terms a “new aesthetic.”³³⁰

Music and the Racial Binary

Despite the multi-faceted, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic nature of the CCD’s music, they are often described solely as black string band musicians. This label is one both intrinsically arrived-upon and externally given. The group’s website, a key space for self-promotion, describes the group as a “traditional African-American string band,” a description which appears on their label’s website as well.³³¹ While their Facebook page doesn’t openly identify them as black artists, their three-sentence group description notes that they met at the Black Banjo Gathering and that their mentor, Joe Thompson, was a black fiddler.³³² These racial identity markers can be observed in media concerning the group as well. Much attention is given to their race as the first group in the unique position of being a high-profile black string band, similar to the unusual fame of black country star Charley Pride.³³³ After their appearance on the Grand Ole Opry stage, the CCD were significantly cited as the “first black string band to play at Nashville’s Grand Ole Opry.”³³⁴ Similarly, other media outlets introduce the group as a “trio of young black musicians,” a “black

³³⁰ Ellen Stekert (1966) cited in Hill and Bithell, “Introduction to Music Revival,” Oxford Handbook of Music Revival 13.

³³¹ “About,” Carolina Chocolate Drops, <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/band>>; “CCD,” Nonesuch, <<http://www.nonesuch.com/artists/carolina-chocolate-drops>>.

³³² “About,” CCD, ed. CCD members, 2014, Facebook, 14 March 2014 <<https://www.facebook.com/CarolinaChocolateDrops/info>>.

³³³ Malone, Country Music, U.S.A. 313.

³³⁴ Dom Flemons, Rhiannon Giddens and Justin Robinson, Carolina Chocolate Drops Songbook: Twelve Songs to Sing and to Play (NC: The Music Maker Press) 2.

string-band revivalist group,” and “the country’s premier black string band.”³³⁵

These labels have surfaced despite the fact that both Dom and Rhiannon—the two musicians who have spent the most time in the group—identify as mixed-race, a fact mentioned multiple times in a one-on-one conversation between Dom and myself.³³⁶

While I have made a point to categorize the ways in which the CCD’s music and performance purposefully highlights and engages with the African American roots of string band and other folk musics, I think there are more structural societal reasons why they are labeled as a black string band group. Though the group promotes their black identity through marketing materials and musical choices, I think that their variety of musical influences and mixed-race identity are salient features of the group’s identity that go unrecognized due in large part to the pervasiveness of the racial binary in American society. The dichotomous aspect of identity in America is observable in many different facets of the country’s lived experience. Perhaps the most-cited example of the United States’ racial construction is the “one-drop rule,” also referred to as the “one black ancestor rule,” which delineates that “any person who can be demonstrated to possess a single ‘drop’ of ‘black blood’ is ipso facto a black person.”³³⁷

³³⁵ “Chocolate Drops Revive String-Band Sound,” NPR, <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7054539>>; “CCD Preserve Traditional Black String-Band Sound,” Calendars and Events, John Wirt, 24 March 2014, The Advocate, Baton Rouge, LA, 25 March 2014 <<http://theadvocate.com/entertainment/calendarsevents/8351540-123/carolina-chocolate-drops-preserve-traditional>>; “CCD, the Country’s Premier Black String Band, Expand Their Sound—And Their Crowd,” Music Feature, Spencer Griffith, 31 March 2010, Indy Week, Raleigh, Cary, Durham, and Chapel Hill, NC, 14 March 2014 <<http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/carolina-chocolate-drops-the-countrys-premier-black-string-band-expand-their-soundandmdashand-their-crowd/Content?oid=1346670>>.

³³⁶ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013.

³³⁷ Christopher Waterman, “The Excluded Middle of the American Racial Imagination,” Music and the Racial Imagination, ed. Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 200n4.

This polarizing logic has made its way into American cultural production, and is particularly apparent in the wealth of passing novels that surfaced during the Harlem Renaissance, including James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, *Plum Bun* by Jessie Redmon Faucet, and Nella Larsen's novella titled *Passing* in honor of the phenomenon.³³⁸ Though the protagonists of these novels are biracial, the option to occupy the middle ground of mixed race is not seen as an option. Rather, the characters must decide whether to pass as white or to assert their African American identity.³³⁹ More recently, Latino and Asian-American immigrants residing in the United States—defined as key members of the racial middle by sociologist Eileen O'Brien—experience marginalization as they “defy simplistic categorization in a society that has insisted upon operating along such dichotomous lines for the greater part of its history.”³⁴⁰ Thus, both American literature and sociology attest to the inescapability of the black-white binary in America's racial order.

The racial binary has implications in the realm of music as well, where there is a tendency to construct genres along unified racial lines, not allowing for visibility of racial variations within genres perceived as “white” or “black.” According to Christopher Waterman, “performers, genres...and practices not consonant with dominant conceptions of racial difference have as a result often been elided from academic, journalistic, and popular representations of the history of American

³³⁸ Nella Larsen, *Passing* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003); Jessie Redmon Faucet, *Plum Bun* (London and Boston: Pandora Press, 1985); James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Auckland, New Zealand: Floating Press, 2009).

³³⁹ Larsen, *Passing*; Faucet, *Plum Bun*; Johnson, *Autobiography*.

³⁴⁰ Eileen O'Brien cited in John Hartigan, Jr., *Race in the 21st Century* 159.

music.”³⁴¹ This phenomenon helps explain the unaccounted-for presence of black musicians within the string band genre, and the current perception of the CCD as an anomalous entity. In order to maintain the racially dichotomous nature of genres, groups that would allow for a racially ambiguous genre classification like Nathan Frazier or Joe Thompson often go unrecognized in the public sphere. Though the CCD are unique in the attention they are garner as black string band performers, they are still situated within the framework of America’s racial binary. As they are clearly a racial other in juxtaposition to the white performers usually seen in string band circles, their African American identity is perhaps over-emphasized in the context of their eclectic sound. This is a common element of racial construction, according to John Hartigan, who draws attention to the theory that “blackness is construed relationally to whiteness as a form of otherness.”³⁴² The identification of the CCD as African American performers who perform music from that racial community is also perhaps aided by the unremarkable nature of a white racial identity. Hartigan notes that “whites generally have the advantage of appearing racially *unmarked*, or ‘normal,’” a conception that undoubtedly plays a part in the weight given to the blackness of the CCD.³⁴³ As they fall distinctly outside of the realm of normality as Grammy-winning black string band performers, the prevalence of the racial binary helps promote an understanding of the group as black. The “one-drop rule” seems to be applied to the CCD’s music in which songs like the Irish ballad “Reynadine” are

³⁴¹ Waterman, “The Excluded Middle,” Music and the Racial Imagination 167.

³⁴² John Hartigan, Race in the 21st Century 119.

³⁴³ John Hartigan Race in the 21st Century 86.

overlooked in favor of “Pumpkin Pie” and other tunes learned from Joe Thompson and additional African American string band sources.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ CCD, Genuine Negro Jig, Nonesuch.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

On the 15th of December, 2013, I had the pleasure of attending a CCD concert at the Neighborhood Theatre in Charlotte, NC, about two hours away from where the group first met in Boone, NC. A lot has changed since Rhiannon, Dom, and Justin met Joe Thompson at the Black Banjo Gathering in 2005.³⁴⁵ The group has traveled extensively, garnered a significant number of awards, and changed in personnel multiple times. However, this particular concert was of special importance because it was the last concert that the group played before Dom left to pursue a solo career. Though Justin left the group in 2011, Dom's exit marks the first time that the group touring under the name CCD consists of more new members than founding ones.³⁴⁶ While there were many bittersweet moments throughout the night—with stories of Joe and the moment Dom and Rhiannon first met—the concert ended on a positive note. Rhiannon informed the audience that “the Chocolate Drops are a family,” and that Dom's leaving just means that there is “twice as much music to get out there...twice as much education.”³⁴⁷ Dom affirmed that he would continue performing black string band and roots music in a personal interview, which the touring schedule on his personal website confirms.³⁴⁸

The growing number of touring black string bands, though still small, gives hope to any scholar that has observed the underrepresentation of African American

³⁴⁵ Richardson, *African Americans in Old Time Music* 98-99.

³⁴⁶ “About,” Carolina Chocolate Drops, <<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/band>>.

³⁴⁷ CCD, *Performance at Neighborhood Theatre*, 15 December 2013.

³⁴⁸ Dom Flemons, personal interview, 15 December 2013; “Shows,” *Dom Flemons, the American Songster*, ed. Dom Flemons, 2013, Dom Flemons, 10 March 2014 <<http://www.domflemons.com/shows/>>.

string band musicians throughout history. While the CCD are unique due to the level of attention they have received from a national audience, there are other black string band musicians that work to acknowledge the roots of the genre in America's musical history. Otis Taylor, a black multi-instrumentalist has an album entitled *Recapturing the Banjo*, which features a quartet of banjos throughout.³⁴⁹ The Ebony Hillbillies also engage with string band heritage work, as the outfit—which consists of a bones player, a fiddler, a banjo player, and washboard percussionist—perform throughout New York City and the surrounding area.³⁵⁰ Black musicians outside of the string band idiom help overturn the stereotype of string band music as a white music by reclaiming the banjo. Leyla McCalla, another former member of the CCD that toured with the group throughout 2013, just released an album featuring renditions of Haitian folk songs and originals, performed on both cello and banjo.³⁵¹ The banjo can also be heard in the music of Al Caldwell and the Travelling Hillbillies, whose music lies distinctly outside of the string band genre.³⁵² These groups and the various ways in which they engage with black string band sounds perhaps suggests a trend in the resurgence and revival of African American string band music.

Though it might be naïve to propose that the increased presence of African American string band musicians will change the way Americans in general conceptualize black cultural production and the classification of string band music as a white genre, these groups and their music are not without significance. The CCD in

³⁴⁹ Otis Taylor, *Recapturing the Banjo*, Telarc International, 2008.

³⁵⁰ “The Ebony Hillbillies,” *Ebony Hillbillies*, 2014, EH, 05 March 2014 <<http://www.ebonyhillbillies.com/>>.

³⁵¹ Leyla McCalla, *Vari-Colored Songs*, Music Maker Recordings, 2014.

³⁵²³⁵² Al Caldwell and the Traveling Hillbillies, *GOOD LIVIN'*, Baby Al Music, 2004.

particular have destabilized what it means to sound identifiably white or black. Further, they have served as an interruption to racially-based genres and the marketing schemes behind them by consciously reminding their audiences of the black roots of string band music. While the group's anomalous position as black old-time musicians influenced by an eclectic mix of musical styles reveals the recalcitrant nature with which the American population clings to dichotomous definitions of race, the group's international recognition proves the group's success despite reductive classifications. Though the CCD are moving in a new direction, the contributions they have made in years past as inventive revivalists, passionate educators, and talented musicians have already pushed the boundaries of the string band genre and American music in general.

Bibliography

Recordings

- The Americus Brass Band. "Dixie." More Songs and Music from Gettysburg. Turner Pictures, Inc., 1993.
- Ayers, Joe, Clarke Buehling, Bob Carlin, Bob Flesher, Tony Trischka, and Bob Winans. Minstrel Banjo Style. Rounder, 1994.
- Baker, Etta. Banjo. Music Maker Recordings, 2009.
- Caldwell, Al and the Traveling Hillbillies. GOOD LIVIN'. Baby Al Music, 2004.
- Cantrell, Blu. "Hit 'Em Up Style (Oops!)." Bittersweet. Arista Records, Inc., 2003.
- Carolina Sunshine Trio. "Cornbread and Butterbeans." Performance on WPAQ. Rec. 1947. WPAQ studio, Mount Airy, NC
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHpbdPWR7S8>>.
- CCD. Dona Got a Ramblin' Mind. Music Maker Recordings, 2006.
- CCD. Genuine Negro Jig. Nonesuch, 2010.
- CCD. Heritage. Dixiefrog Records, 2008.
- CCD. "Jackson." We Walk the Line-A Celebration of the Music of Johnny Cash (Live). Blackbird Production Partners, LLC., 2012.
- CCD. Leaving Eden. Nonesuch, 2012.
- CCD and Joe Thompson. CCD with Joe Thompson. Rec. 1 March 2009. Music Maker Recordings, 2009.
- CCD and Luminescent Orchestrii. CCD/Luminescent Orchestrii. EP. Nonesuch, 2011.
- The Chieftains and CCD. "Pretty Little Girl." Voice of Ages. Blackrock Records, LLC, 2012.
- Frazier, Nathan and Frank Patterson. Altamont: Black Stringband Music. Rounder, 1989.
- Georgia Sea Island Singers. Southern Journey, Vol .13: Earliest Times-Georgia Sea Island Songs for Everyday Life. Rec. 11 April 1960. Rounder, 1998.

- Hill Bowen Orchestra. "Dixie." Reader's Digest Music: God Bless America-Patriotic Favorites Vol. 1. The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 2007.
- Jackson, Papa Charlie. "Your Baby Ain't Sweet Like Mine." Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order, Vol. 2. Document Records, 2001.
- Ma Rainey. "Black Eye Blues." Ma Rainey. Rec. 1928. Document Records, 1994.
- McCalla, Leyla. Vari-Colored Songs. Music Maker Recordings, 2014.
- Mississippi Sheiks. "Sittin' on Top of the World." Mississippi Sheiks, Vol. 1. Rec. 1930. Document Records, 1991.
- Music from the Lost Provinces: Old-Time Stringbands from Ashe County, North Carolina and Vicinity, 1927-1931. Rec. 1927-1931. Old Hat Enterprises, 1997.
- Sankofa Strings. Carolina Chocolate Drops Presents Colored Aristocracy. Music Maker Recordings, 2007.
- Shipp, Christine and Katherine Shipp. "Sea Lion Woman." Library of Congress-A Treasury of Field Recordings. Rounder, 1997.
- Smith, Hobart. The Alan Lomax Collection: Portraits-Blue Ridge Legacy. Rounder, 2001.
- Smith, Hobart. "Black Annie." Southern Journey, Vol. 2: Ballads and Breakdowns. Rounder, 1997.
- String Bands (1926-1929). Document Records, 1926.
- Taylor, Otis. Recapturing the Banjo. Telarc International, 2008.
- Thompson, Joe. "Little Brown Jug." Classic Old-Time Fiddle from Smithsonian Folkways. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2007.
- Thompson, Joe. Family Tradition. Rounder, 1999.
- Thompson, Joe and Odell Thompson. Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1998.
- Thompson, Joe and Odell Thompson. Going Down to Raleigh: Stringband Music in the North Carolina Piedmont, 1976-1998. PineCone-Piedmont Council of Traditional Music, 2009.

Violin, Sing the Blues for Me (1926-1949). Rec. 1926-1949. Old Hat Enterprises, 1999.

Wallin, Doug. "Pretty Little Girl with the Blue Dress On." Classic Old-Time Fiddle from Smithsonian Folkways. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

References

"About." CCD. Ed. CCD members. 2014. Facebook. 14 March 2014 <<https://www.facebook.com/CarolinaChocolateDrops/info>>.

"About." Dom Flemons, the American Songster. Ed. Dom Flemons. 2013. Dom Flemons. 10 December 2013 <<http://www.domflemons.com/about.html>>.

"About Medicine Shows." Black Entertainers and the Medicine Show. Ed. Brooks McNamara. 2005. Folkstreams.net. 24 March 2014 <<http://www.folkstreams.net/context,136>>.

Agnew, Jeremy. Entertainment in the Old West: Theater, Music, Circuses, Medicine Shows, Prizefighting, and Other Popular Amusements. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011.

Bailey, Guy. "A Perspective on African-American English." American Dialect Research. Ed. Dennis Richard Preston. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1993.

Baines, P. "Violin." Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850. 2003.

"Barefootin' to Some Drum and Fife Music." CCD. 11 June 2010. YouTube. 13 February 2014 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyDRNhkaEY8>>.

Bennett, Gwendolyn. "Heritage." Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996.

"Bio." Justin Robinson. 2012. Justin Robinson and the Mary Annettes. 05 April 2014 <<http://justinrobinsonandthemaryannettes.com/bio.php>>.

Blazenhoff, Rusty. "Hannes Coetzee, Teaspoon Slide Guitarist." Laughing Squid. 04 February 2013. Laughing Squid. 14 February 2014 <<http://laughingsquid.com/hannes-coetzee-teaspoon-slide-guitarist/>>.

Bledsoe, Wayne. "CCD Cross Divide." Knoxville. 25 April 2010. 12 November 2014 <<http://www.knoxville.com/news/2010/apr/25/carolina-chocolate-drops-cross-divide/>>.

- Boone, Graeme M. "Twelve Key Recordings." The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music. Ed. Allan Moore. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 61-88.
- Brooks, Tilford. America's Black Musical Heritage. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984.
- Calemine, James. "Tim Duffy: Music Maker Relief Foundation." Swampland.com. March 2007. Swampland Inc. 22 January 2014 <http://swampland.com/articles/view/title:tim_duffy_music_maker_relief_foundation>.
- Cantwell, Robert. Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Carley, Marika. "Libba Cotton's Guitar." Smithsonian Magazine October 2000. 24 March 2014 <<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/libba-cottens-guitar-32846747/?no-ist>>.
- Carlin, Bob. The Birth of the Banjo: Joel Walker Sweeney and Early Minstrelsy. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007.
- Carlin, Bob. String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont. Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004.
- Carlin, Richard. "Yuppies Invaded My Tradition at Midnight." Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America's Southeast and Beyond. Ed. Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995. 221-236.
- "CCD." Artists. February 2014. Nonesuch. 28 March 2014 <<http://www.nonesuch.com/artists/carolina-chocolate-drops>>.
- CCD. "Briggs' Corn Shucking Jig." Performance at the Barrymore Theatre. Concert Recording. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, and Adam Matta. Barrymore Theatre, Madison, WI. 08 June 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QKcsge6zuE>>.
- "CCD." Dixiefrog. 2013. Bluesweb.com. 14 March 2014 <http://www.bluesweb.com/p_disque.php3?id_article=1311>.
- CCD. "Gaelic Songs by CCD." Performance at the Paramount Center for the Arts. Concert Recording. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, and Leyla McCalla. Paramount Center for the Arts, Bristol, TN. 15 July 2012 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kohl8qms0EU>>.

- “CCD: Hooked On Old-Time Sounds.” National Public Radio. Ed. NPR Staff. 09 March 2012. 25 March 2014
<<http://www.npr.org/2012/03/10/148300894/carolina-chocolate-drops-hooked-on-old-time-sounds>>.
- “CCD.” Music Maker Relief Foundation. Ed. Tim Duffy and Denise Duffy. 2012. Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc. 28 January 2014
<<http://www.musicmaker.org/artists/carolina-chocolate-drops/>>.
- CCD, Performance at Neighborhood Theatre. Concert. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, Malcolm Parson. Charlotte, NC. 15 December 2013.
- CCD. Performance at Minnesota Zoo. Concert Recording. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, and Leyla McCalla. Weesner Amphitheater, Apple Valley, Minnesota. 22 June 2013
<https://archive.org/details/CarolinaChocolateDrops2013-06-22.MNZoo_Busman>.
- CCD. Performance at the Rhythm and Roots Festival. Concert. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Hubby Jenkins, and Leyla McCalla, Ninigret Park, Charlestown, RI. 01 September 2013.
- CCD. “Pumpkin Pie.” Performance at Cat’s Cradle. Concert Recording. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Justin Robinson. Cat’s Cradle, Carrboro, NC. 05 September 2009
<<https://archive.org/details/carolinachocolatedrops2009-09-05>>.
- CCD. “Your Baby Ain’t Sweet Like Mine.” Performance at Tivoli. Concert Recording. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, and Hubby Jenkins. Tivoli, Utrecht. 20 October 2012
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQNC0aLVNzs>>.
- CCD. “Your Baby Ain’t Sweet Like Mine.” Performance Live at Mass MoCA. Concert Recording. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, and Justin Robinson. Mass MoCA. 29 May 2014
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjyw-nW0D90>>.
- Cohen, Norm. Folk Music: A Regional Exploration. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005.
- Conway, Cecelia. African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995.
- Cornelius, Steven H. Music of the Civil War Era. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004.

- Courlander, Harold. Negro Folk Music, U.S.A. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.
- Cullen, Countee. "Heritage." Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996.
- Dargan, William. Lining Out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006.
- "Dom Flemons: At the Cross Roads of Sound." Turnstyled Junkpiled. 11 June 2012. 09 January 2014 <<http://turnstyledjunkpiled.com/2012/06/11/dom-flemons-at-the-crossroads-of-sound-the-tj-interview/>>.
- "The Ebony Hillbillies." Ebony Hillbillies. 2014. EH. 05 March 2014 <<http://www.ebonyhillbillies.com/>>.
- Epstein, Dena. Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
- "Etta Baker." Music Maker Relief Foundation. Ed. Tim Duffy and Denise Duffy. 2012. Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc. 28 January 2014 <<http://www.musicmaker.org/artists/etta-baker/>>.
- "Faculty Expert: Cecelia Conway." Faculty and Staff Experts Directory. 2014. Appalachian State University. 03 March 2014 <<http://facultyexperts.appstate.edu/expert-profile/faculty-expert-cecelia-conway>>.
- Farmelo, Allen. "Another History of Bluegrass: The Segregation of Popular Music in the United States, 1820-1900." Popular Music and Society 25:1-2 (2001): 179-203.
- Faucet, Jessie Redmon. Plum Bun. London and Boston: Pandora Press, 1985.
- Flemons, Dom. Personal interview. 15 December 2013.
- Flemons, Dom, Rhiannon Giddens and Justin Robinson. Carolina Chocolate Drops Songbook: Twelve Songs to Sing and to Play. NC: The Music Maker Press.
- Fletcher, Tom. 100 Years of the Negro in Show Business: the Tom Fletcher Story. New York: Burdge, 1954.
- Forret, Jeff. Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.

- Giddens, Rhiannon. Performance at Banjo Workshop. Concert Recording. Perf. Rhiannon Giddens and Fred Coon. Picking in the Pines Old Time and Bluegrass Music Festival, Flagstaff, Arizona. 15 September 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQVAkU5tOTk>>.
- Give Me the Banjo. Dir. by Marc Fields. Knockout Media LLC, 2011.
- Glass, Barbara. African American Dance: An Illustrated History. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2007.
- “Goin’ Across the Mountain.” WNCW. Ed. Brad Watson and Dennis Jones. 2014. WNCW. 04 March 2014 <<http://wncw.org/programs/goin-across-mountain>>.
- Goldsmith, Melissa Ursula Dawn. “Odetta.” Musicians and Composers of the 20th Century. 2009.
- Goodman, Imogen. “A Folk Revival.” Varsity November 2010. 24 March 2014, <<http://www.varsity.co.uk/comment/2921>>.
- Gred Adams’s Page. Ed. Greg Adams. 30 March 2014. Minstrel Banjo. 31 March 2014 <<http://minstrelbanjo.ning.com/profile/GregAdams>>.
- Griffith, Spencer. “CCD, the Country’s Premier Black String Band, Expand Their Sound—And Their Crowd.” Indy Week. 31 March 2010. 14 March 2014 <<http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/carolina-chocolate-drops-the-countrys-premier-black-string-band-expand-their-soundandmdashand-their-crowd/Content?oid=1346670>>.
- Gura, Philip F. and James F. Bollman. America’s Instrument: The Banjo in the Nineteenth Century. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Handy, W. C. Father of the Blues: An Autobiography. Ed. Arna Bontemps. New York: Collier Books, 1970.
- Handy, William Christopher. “The Heart of the Blues.” Readings in Black American Music. Ed. Eileen Southern. New York: W. W. Norton, 1983.
- Hartigan, Jr., John. Race in the 21st Century: Ethnographic Approaches. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Haywood, A. J. Siberia: A Cultural History. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- “Heritage.” Encyclopedia of Global Studies. 2012.

- Hickling, Alfred. "Carolina Chocolate Drops: Saturday Night Femur." The Guardian. 19 February 2012. 08 December 2013
<<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/feb/19/carolina-chocolate-drops-playing-bones>>.
- Hill, Juniper and Caroline Bithell, "An Introduction to Music Revival as Concept, Cultural Process, and Medium of Change." Oxford Handbook of Music Revival. Ed. Juniper Hill and Caroline Bithell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Hill, Michael. "About." Band. 2014. Carolina Chocolate Drops. 25 March 2014
<<http://www.carolinachocolatedrops.com/band>>.
- Hudson, Tim. "Review: Carolina Chocolate Drops 2011." OK Mozart Festival. 26 April 2012. OK Mozart. 13 February 2014 <<http://okmozart.com/2013-in-review/carolina-chocolate-drops/>>.
- Hughes, Langston. "Danse Africaine." Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996.
- "Instrument Interview #3: Carolina Chocolate Drops." Sleepover Shows. 16 April 2012. Sleepover Shows. 12 January 2014
<<http://sleepovershows.com/carolina-chocolate-drops-instrument>>.
- "Jim Jackson." Biography. 2014. AllMusic. 12 February 2014
<<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/jim-jackson-mn0000288104/biography>>.
- Johnson, James Weldon. The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man. Auckland, New Zealand: Floating Press, 2009.
- Jungr, Barb. "Vocal Expression in the Blues and Gospel." The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music. Ed. Allan Moore. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 102-115.
- Kimbrough-Beam, Lottie. "Wayward Girl Blues." 25 September 2013. YouTube. 13 February 2014 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8he-yirtj0>>.
- "Lalenja Harrington Found Her Voice, Now Helps Others Find Theirs in Beyond Academics." UNCG Campus Weekly, Ed. Campus Weekly Staff. 05 February 2013. 14 February 2014
<<http://ure.uncg.edu/prod/cweekly/2013/02/05/lalenharrington/>>.
- Larsen, Nella. Passing. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Lewis, George. "Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives." Black Music Research Journal 16 (1996): 91-122.

- Lomax, Alan. "Folk Song Style." American Anthropologist 61.6 (1959): 927-954.
- Lott, Eric. "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy." Representations 39 (1992): 23-50.
- Malone, Bill C. Country Music, U.S.A.. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Martin, Douglas. "Joe Thompson Dies at 93; Helped Preserve the Black String Band." New York Times 01 March 2012. 22 January 2014
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/arts/music/joe-thompson-dies-at-93-fiddler-of-string-band-legacy.html?_r=0>.
- Mateer, Chris. "Interview: An In-Depth Discussion with Dom Flemons of CCD." No Depression: The Roots Music Authority 28 February 2012. 13 January 2014
<<http://www.nodepression.com/profiles/blogs/interview-an-in-depth-discussion-with-dom-flemons-of-carolina>>.
- Maultsby, Portia K. "Africanisms in African American Music." Africanisms in American Culture. Ed. Joseph Holloway. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- McGrath, Mark. "CCD." Making Notes: Music of the Carolinas. Ed. Ann Wicker. Charlotte, NC: Novello Festival Press, 2008. 128-129.
- Mendonca, Adrienn. "Georgia Sea Island Singers." New Georgia Encyclopedia. 21 August 2013. Georgia Humanities Council. 31 March 2014
<<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/georgia-sea-island-singers>>.
- Michel, Karen. "Chocolate Drops Revive String-Band Sound." National Public Radio 28 January 2007. 25 March 2014
<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7054539>>.
- Monod, David. "'Ev'rybody's Crazy 'Bout the Doggone Blues:' Creating the Country Blues in the Early Twentieth Century." Journal of Popular Music Studies 19 (May 2007): 179-214.
- "Music Maker Artists." Music Maker Relief Foundation. Ed. Tim Duffy and Denise Duffy. 2012. Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc. 28 January 2014,
<<http://www.musicmaker.org/artists/>>.
- Noonan, Jeffrey. The Guitar in America: Victorian Era to Jazz Age. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

- North, Michael. The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Oleson, Emily Kate. Vaudevival: Old is the New New. Diss. University of Maryland, College Park, 2012. College Park: UMI 2012. ProQuest.
- Oliver, Paul. "Jug Band." Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Performance and Production. 2003.
- Oliver, Paul. "Kazoo." Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Performance and Production. 2003.
- Oliver, Paul. "Songster." Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Performance and Production. 2003.
- Oliver, Paul. "White, Josh." Grove Music Online January 2001. 08 February 2014 <<http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.41395>>.
- Olson, Ted. Blue Ridge Folk Life. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s-1990s. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- "Opera," Macmillan Encyclopedia, 2003 ed.
- Pearson, Barry Lea. "Appalachian Blues." Black Music Research Journal 23 (2003): 23-51.
- Pecknold, Diane, ed. Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.
- Perry, Andrew. "CCD: 21st Century Banjo Revivalists." The Telegraph 27 February 2012. 22 January 2014 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/worldfolkandjazz/9070073/Carolina-Chocolate-Drops-21st-century-banjo-revivalists.html>>.
- Radano, Ronald and Philip Bohlman. "Introduction: Music and Race, Their Past, Their Presence." Music and the Racial Imagination. Ed. Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Radano, Ronald. Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

- Ratliff, Ben. "Styles of Southern Black Music, Shouting Included." New York Times 03 May 2010. 25 March 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/04/arts/music/04carolina.html>>.
- Reaney, James. "Young String Band Draws on Nearly Forgotten Tradition." LF Press 03 May 2010. 25 March 2014 <<http://www.lfpress.com/entertainment/music/2010/05/03/13802926.html>>.
- "Review: Keep a Song in Your Soul." TimeOut Chicago. April 2011. 13 January 2014 <<http://www.timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/theater/15012931/live-review-keep-a-song-in-your-soul-the-black-roots-of-vaudeville>>.
- Richardson, Thomas. African Americans in Old Time Music: Past and Present. Diss. Indiana University, 2012. Bloomington: UMI, 2012.
- Richardson, Thomas. "Review." Ethnomusicology 54 (2010): 537-540.
- Rosenberg, Neil. Bluegrass: A History. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.
- Ruehl, Kim. "Interview with CCD's Dom Flemons." Artists and Styles. 2014. About.com. 22 January 2014 <<http://folkmusic.about.com/od/artistsaj/a/ChocolateDrops.htm>>.
- Sacks, Howard L. and Judith Rose Sacks. Way Up North in Dixie: A Black Family's Claim to the Confederate Anthem. Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993.
- Sanders, Paul ed. Lyrics and Borrowed Tunes of the American Temperance Movement. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006.
- Scott, Michelle R. Blues Empress in Black Chattanooga: Bessie Smith and the Emerging Urban South. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- "See That My Grave is Kept Clean." Bob Dylan Roots. Ed. Manfred Helfert. January 2011. 24 March 2014 <<http://bobdylanroots.com/see.html>>.
- Shaw, Stephanie J. W. E. B. Du Bois and the Souls of Black Folk. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
- "Shows." Dom Flemons, the American Songster, Ed. Dom Flemons. 2013. Dom Flemons, 10 March 2014 <<http://www.domflemons.com/shows/>>.
- Silcox-Jarrett. "A Good Old Time." Our State September 2007. 14 March 2014 <<http://www.ourstate.com/a-good-old-time/>>.

- Slobin, Mark. "Musical Multiplicity: Emerging Thoughts." Yearbook for Traditional Music 39 (2007): 1-17.
- Southern, Eileen. The Music of Black Americans: A History. New York: Norton, 1997.
- Spalding, Susan Eike and Jane Harris Woodside. "Continuity and Change." Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America's Southeast and Beyond. Ed. Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995. 5-9.
- Strang, Veronica and Mark Busse. Ownership and Appropriation. Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers, 2011.
- "This Southbound Train." WESU. Ed. Mary Barrett. 2014. Spinitron. 04 March 2014 <<http://spinitron.com/radio/playlist.php?station=wesu&ptype=n&showid=794#here>>.
- Thompson, Joe and Odell Thompson. "John Henry." Recording. Community Audio, <<https://archive.org/details/JoeThompsonAndOdellThompson>>.
- Waterman, Christopher. "The Excluded Middle of the American Racial Imagination." Music and the Racial Imagination. Ed. Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- "Winan's Banjo." Home. Ed. Robert B. Winans. 1994. University of Illinois. 31 March 2014 <<https://sites.google.com/a/wildblue.net/winansbanjo/>>.
- Winant, Howard. "White Racial Projects." The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness Ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen et. al. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Wirt, John. "CCD Preserve Traditional Black String-Band Sound." The Advocate. 24 March 2014. 25 March 2014 <<http://theadvocate.com/entertainment/calendarsevents/8351540-123/carolina-chocolate-drops-preserve-traditional>>.
- Woodside, Jane Harris. "Clogging is Country." Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America's Southeast and Beyond. Ed. Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995. 133-136.
- "2014 Artist Lineup." MerleFest. 2013. Wilkes Community College Endowment Association. 04 March 2014 <<http://www.merlefest.org/content.aspx?id=56&cb1=8896&spnsr=6606>>.