

Dreams Realized: Expression and Polystylism in the Art Song Settings of Langston Hughes's "Dream Variation" by Florence Price and Margaret Bonds*

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KEYWORDS: Florence Price, Margaret Bonds, Langston Hughes, Signifyin(g), Harlem Renaissance, Chicago Renaissance.

ABSTRACT: This paper presents a side-by-side comparison of Florence Price's (1887–1953) and Margaret Bonds's (1913–1972) settings of Langston Hughes's (1902–1967) poem, "Dream Variation." Both composers completed advanced degrees in music and had remarkable careers in performance and composition despite facing numerous race- and gender-based social barriers. Crossing paths with many notable artists, writers, and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance and later the Chicago Renaissance, they both knew Langston Hughes personally and incorporated his texts into many of their art-song settings. Their settings of "Dream Variation" combine elements from their classical compositional training with characteristic features of African American musical traditions. Both songs, in turn, highlight Hughes's themes of toil and rest, day and night, and dreams of freedom and repose through the use of Signifyin'. As analysis reveals, the songs' key-area associations, pitch collections, and harmonies, as well as alterations of the original text, reflect the composers' expressive formal and phrase-structural choices for enhancing the poem's message.

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INTRODUCTION

[0.1] In a recent essay on Marion Anderson and Florence Price, Alisha Lola Jones invites listeners and scholars to "utter their names. . . sounding their signatures, like music to our ears, to undo with music what decades of sociopolitical inaudibility has done" (Jones 2019). Florence Price (1887–1953) and her student Margaret Bonds (1913–1972) both completed advanced music degrees; both, moreover, had notable careers in performance and composition despite facing numerous

race- and gender-based social barriers. Although both composers experienced professional successes during their lifetimes, many of their works were nearly lost, while others remain unpublished.⁽¹⁾ Analyses of their works are few in number.⁽²⁾ Crossing paths with many notable artists, writers, and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance and later the Chicago Renaissance, both Price and Bonds knew Langston Hughes (1902–1967) personally, and his poetry inspired many of their art songs.⁽³⁾ This essay presents a side-by-side comparison of Price’s and Bond’s settings of Hughes’s poem “Dream Variation,” exploring themes central to the Harlem Renaissance, and later the Chicago Renaissance, and inviting closer study of their compositional styles. We first provide historical and cultural context surrounding the themes central to the Harlem and Chicago Renaissance, bringing to life a rich and vibrant community where Price, Bonds, and Hughes met. We then discuss the themes central to Hughes’s poem “Dream Variation” and present close analyses of Price’s and Bonds’s settings of his text.

1. *Price, Bonds, and Hughes, and the Harlem and Chicago Renaissance*

[1.1] The Harlem Renaissance (1917–1935) and Chicago Renaissance (1935–1950)—both major aspects of the New Negro Movement—aimed to celebrate the uniqueness of African American culture (Floyd 1995, 100). “Black racial pride was quintessential” to this Renaissance. While they shared the same ideals, the movements were supported through different means: primarily through patronage during the Harlem Renaissance and through public and private funding during the Chicago Renaissance (Floyd 1990, 83; 1995, 117–118). During the Chicago Renaissance, works by Langston Hughes and others were “inextricably linked to the basic fabric of everyday life of black citizens” (Hine 2012, xxii). In the sphere of music, Samuel Floyd (1995, 110) indicates that “the idea was to produce extended forms such as symphonies and operas from the raw material of spirituals, ragtime, blues, and other folk genres.” Florence Price, William Grant Still, and William Dawson—whose symphonies were the first by African Americans to be performed by major American symphony orchestras—sought to elevate these Black folk music idioms in their concert compositions through the fusion of the neo-Romantic style with elements from their African American musical heritage (Brown 2020, 127).

[1.2] The support that Price and Bonds received during this Renaissance is a testament to the efforts of a wide circle of active musicians and advocates. As Samantha Ege notes:

Price’s generation of black female practitioners belonged to a vast, interconnected network; their activity reveals that the foundations of the Black Chicago Renaissance’s classical strand were established as far back as the 1910s. Contemporary figures such as Nora Holt, Estella Bonds, and Maude Roberts George utilized the *Chicago Defender*, National Association of Negro Musicians, and a network of homes and churches in the South Side for their organizing work. (2020a, 124)

Ege cautions against viewing Price (or Bonds, for that matter) as an “anomaly” in the sphere of (white) American classical composition, instead focusing on how she was the product of a “dynamic cultural movement” belonging to a “community of black practitioners that embedded racial uplift, gendered progress, and national identity in their craft” (2020a, 114; see also Ege 2020b). This is not to say that the two Black woman composers did not face challenges. As Ege notes, “There is a silent ‘male’ that precedes the word ‘composer’, . . . there is also a silent ‘white’ that usually precedes the word ‘women’ and, consequently, the phrase ‘women composers,’ particularly in US-centric discourse. The silent ‘white’ is inherent today in the commonly-used phrase ‘women and people of color’” (Ege 2021, 2–3). It is precisely this intersectionality of identities that Ege invites her readers to engage with: Price and Bonds did face sexism and racism, but they also benefited in other ways due to a vibrant and supportive community. It is within this network that Price, Bonds, and Hughes first met.

[1.3] Margaret Bonds first met Florence Price through her mother, Estella Bonds. Price taught Bonds piano and composition and later lived with the Bonds family in the early 1930s. Not long after moving in, both composers won prizes in the 1932 Wanamaker Foundation Awards. Price won the competition for her *Symphony in E minor* and another prize for her *Piano Sonata*, while

Bonds won first prize in the art song category for her song “Sea Ghost.”⁽⁴⁾ Price and Bonds both met Langston Hughes at the Bonds residence, and each would form long-term collaborative relationships with him, setting many of his poems and other texts to music (Brown 2020, 205).

[1.4] Florence Price composed in nearly every genre, including chamber works, choral works, symphonies, concertos (for piano and violin), and compositions for solo piano and organ, but she is perhaps best known for her art songs. In total, Price composed approximately one hundred songs during her lifetime: roughly seventy-five of these are art songs, thirteen are popular/commercial songs, and fourteen are arrangements of spirituals (Brown 2020, 221).⁽⁵⁾ The exact date of Price’s setting of “Dream Variation,” which she titled “My Dream,” is unknown; however, her archives contain a manuscript copy of the score dated April 26, 1935, and a concert program indicates that it was performed as early as June 1935.⁽⁶⁾ Price often combined features of the late-Romantic style with musical traits associated with her African American musical heritage. Although she did not always quote folk melodies directly, she frequently referenced distinct features of this musical tradition in her compositions. In fact, her *Symphony in E Minor* was the first to contain a movement based entirely on the rhythms of the juba, and these syncopated rhythms appear in many later works as well (Walker-Hill 2007, 26).⁽⁷⁾ Horace Maxile, Jr., points out that, due to the subtler manner in which she incorporated these features into her works, Price’s music was at times met with criticism by those advocating for more overt nods to African American culture:

While Price’s music garnered approval from critics during the 1930s, there were some who thought her musical conservatism did not fully embrace or, perhaps, advance certain progressive ideologies of contemporary African American writers and thinkers. Such critics [Maxile cites Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music*], likely seeking readily accessible cultural motifs, blues forms, or full quotations of folk or spiritual songs, did not fully appreciate (or even grasp) Price’s nuanced and affective uses of African American vernacular emblems as well as her skillful handling of Western forms and styles. During the 1930s, there was certainly enough of an African American musical tradition and practice from which themes and motives could be fashioned without the aid of direct quotation of pre-existing tunes. (Maxile 2022, 139–40)

Despite such criticism, Price clearly aimed to celebrate her African American heritage in both style and substance. Many of her songs set texts by African Americans, her favorites being Langston Hughes and Paul Laurence Dunbar. These same songs, according to Rae Linda Brown, “capture some of the most passionate poetry written during the Harlem and Chicago Renaissance” (Brown 2020, 221).

[1.5] Margaret Bonds’s *oeuvre* spans four decades. She wrote approximately 200 compositions, including works for musical theater (including *Shakespeare in Harlem* and *Romey and Julie*), choral works, art songs, and popular songs; she is best known for her numerous arrangements of spirituals, which were performed and recorded commercially by well-known singers like Betty Allen and Leontyne Price (Walker-Hill 2007, 158).⁽⁸⁾ In ways similar to Price, she often combined stylistic elements from her classical compositional training with features of Black vernacular music. Her art songs synthesize lush Romantic harmonies and forms; jazz and blues tonal idioms, chords, and scales; and rhythms and textures drawn directly from her African American musical heritage and contemporary surroundings. Bonds’s “Dream Variation” was published in 1959, after Price’s death. Although it is possible Bonds knew Price’s setting, we have not found any mention of “My Dream” by Bonds.

[1.6] Bonds and Hughes shared a remarkably close personal and professional relationship for several decades, evidenced by their prolific correspondence archived in the Margaret Bonds Papers (New York Public Library) and the Langston Hughes Papers (Yale University).⁽⁹⁾ Their correspondence suggests that Hughes was not trained musically, but nevertheless deeply valued his collaborations with Bonds and other composers. For instance, some of Bonds’s letters to Hughes imply that he did not read music notation and/or play a musical instrument: “Dear Lang, Here is ‘Joy.’ I forgot to play it for you in Detroit so someone will have to in California” (Bonds 1937). And in other moments she gives him pointed advice about his collaborative decisions: “I hope one day you’ll be very ‘choosy’ about what you accept from your composers. It’s really better business in

the end. Why don't you take a music course at U. of C. [University of Chicago]? They have several which would come under the heading of 'appreciation'" (Bonds 1949). Hughes's fondness for these collaborations is also evident, as in the following letter he wrote to Bonds:

Dear Margaret: Just a little note to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the wonderful program the other night which was certainly unique in my artistic career. It was the first time to my knowledge that an entire evening of my songs has even been given anywhere. So I am very grateful to you for this unusual experience and delightful tribute to my poetry through the medium of song. (Hughes 1958)

A number of specifically music-based themes from the Renaissance also appeared in Hughes's writing. Raymond Smith (2014, 85) notes: "The central element of importance is the affirmation of blackness. Everything that distinguished Hughes's poetry from the white avant-garde poets of the twenties revolved around this important affirmation. Musical idioms, jazz rhythms, Hughes's special brand of 'black-white' irony, and dialect were all dependent on the priority of black selfhood." Smith stresses a common theme in Hughes's poetry was the notion of the American dream and the "tension between the unrealized dream and the realities of the black experience in America. This tension between material and theme laid the groundwork for the irony which characterized Hughes's work at its best" (90). It is through this lens of black-white irony, text-music relationships, and formal-vernacular hybridity that we analyze Price's and Bonds's settings of "Dream Variation" by Langston Hughes.

2. Langston Hughes's "Dream Variation" (1926)

[2.1] Langston Hughes's first collection of poetry, *The Weary Blues* (1926) is partitioned into several sections; the second of these is "Dream Variations," which consists of six poems: "Dream Variation," "Winter Moon," "Poème d'Automne," "Fantasy in Purple," "March Moon," and "Joy."⁽¹⁰⁾ Many earlier reviewers note the "nomadic" quality of *The Weary Blues*. In contrast, William Hogan (2004, 8) proposes that one might view the collection as "deliberately arranged" to describe "a new kind of relation between black culture and its many geographical roots." According to Smith, "Hughes's efforts to create a poetry that truly evoked the spirit of black America involved a resolution of conflicts centering around the problem of identity. For Hughes, like W.E.B. Du Bois, saw the black man's situation in America as a question of dual consciousness" (Smith 2014, 83–84). The term "double-consciousness" was coined by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 2007, 3)

This double-consciousness is present in Hughes's poem "Dream Variation" as well. The poem is presented in **Example 1** along with an audio recording of Hughes reading it aloud. While listening to Hughes recite his own poem, the reader should take special note of the spoken rhythms, pauses, and changes of inflection. For instance, Hughes pauses briefly at the end of each line, ultimately increasing the durational value of the final word of each line of the text. In addition, he changes his vocal inflections before reciting "Rest at pale evening. . .", effectively setting apart the imagery of day and night. (He also changes the final line from "Black like me" to "Dark like me" in his recitation of the poem.) As our analyses will demonstrate, similar qualities emerge in the musical settings by Price and Bonds.

[2.2] Several scholars have written about Hughes's "Dream Variation" from literary, musicological, and psychological perspectives. The poem's two-part construction makes clear references to

white/day and dark/night imagery, and the second stanza's fragmentation of language from the first stanza is equally notable. In one interpretation, the first stanza's gentle and tender night reflects self-expression and affirmation of Black identity; the variations in the second stanza then suggest, in Philip Royster's words, a "peeling away of restraints and inhibitions" (1974, 78).⁽¹¹⁾ William Hogan analyzes the imagery of dark and night in similarly positive terms: "The night, so often associated with danger and fear, becomes in this poem a symbol of gentleness, of comfort. The 'darkness' of the night reassures the dark-skinned narrator. By inverting prevailing myths about darkness, Hughes dreams of a place that welcomes and nurtures people of color" (Hogan 2004, 18). This place is Harlem, according to Hogan, which Hughes views "as a promised land for African Americans. . . [I]t is poised to become stronger and more robust for the diverse community that seeks it out" (18). Hogan goes on to explain that in much of his work during the 1920s, Hughes treats Harlem as a "site of cultural convergence...defined and strengthened by cultural blendings." One of the "most prominent blendings he pursues is the commingling of folk and urban culture," which he achieves in part through the use of blues references (19).

[2.3] Penelope Peters makes more direct comparisons between the day/night imagery and the experience of African American slaves. Here, the "'harsh' sunny day represents white society, and the lines 'to whirl and to dance, till the white day is done,' express the obligation to scurry and work until the whites' demands are met" (1995, 86). Peters also notes poignant times where historically African American slaves were *required* to dance:

Contemporaneous reports attest that ships' captains regularly required their captured cargo to dance and sing, in the belief that it would keep up their morale and prevent possible suicides during the difficult voyage. The second instance occurred on the slave dock, where African Americans were required to sing, dance, and perform for prospective buyers—yet another humiliating and bewildering ordeal. (86–87)

In contrast to the harshness of daytime, she interprets the night as "a magical time of dreams and freedom" when the African American slave was finished with their work and free to relax (86–87).⁽¹²⁾

[2.4] Kimberley Hoagwood's analysis centers on the dream imagery in the poem, suggesting the two stanzas can be viewed as Freudian representations of rational and irrational experiences of the same dream. She writes: "The poem's meaning includes these contrasts: first, the difference between what one wishes for, consciously, and what one actually experiences, while dreaming; and second, the unification of experience that is possible in certain mental states" (Hoagwood 1983, 16). Hoagwood notes how the rational experience of the first stanza is depicted by Hughes's use of infinitives and general imagery, and how, in its dream-like state, the second stanza fragments and intensifies this language: "To Whirl and to Dance" becomes "Dance! Whirl! Whirl!"; "Dark like me" becomes "Black like me"; and "Beneath a tall tree" becomes "A tall, slim tree." She interprets this last modification to mean the speaker is no longer sitting under a tree but *becomes* that tree, thus "exemplif[ying] this unification between subject and object" (18). Hogan observes a gravitation toward the imagery of landscapes in Hughes's early writing: "The landscapes Hughes imagines. . . try to envision a new kind of **rootedness** in a historical moment that through the Great Migration and a Jim Crow social structure in the post-emancipation South seemed intent upon uprooting African American communities" (2004, 3–4; emphasis added). Hogan references the notion of "rootedness" more generally here; nevertheless, the parallelism with Hoagwood's interpretation of the tree in "Dream Variation" is intriguing. All the foregoing interpretations of the poem inform our hermeneutic readings of Price's and Bonds's art-song settings.

3. Florence Price, "My Dream" (1935)

[3.1] "My Dream" is representative of Price's compositional style, fusing together Romantic-style harmonies with distinctive qualities of Black vernacular music.⁽¹³⁾ The song prominently features pentatonicism (a common component of African American spirituals) and strategically inserts a syncopated two-step dance rhythm at a critical moment to be discussed below. Price's setting maintains the two-part construction of the poem, but, as **Example 2** shows, she repositions the last

line of strophe 1 (“That is my dream!”) so that it appears instead at the beginning of the strophe 2. (14) As the annotated score in **Example 3** illustrates, there are no authentic cadences suggesting tonal closure to strophe 1; even so, Price’s text setting can be seen to strongly suggest the organization outlined in Example 2. (15) In addition to a vocal rest in m. 20, which aurally separates “Dark like me” from what follows, there is a tied note (on “Dream”) across mm. 21–22, which, in combination with a crescendo marking in m. 22, demands a musical connection between the lines “That is my dream” and “To fling my arms wide.” (16) These details make clear that Price wishes to group “That is my dream” with the second strophe of her song. Her modification of the text’s structure places greater emphasis on the unconscious dream-like state of the second strophe, while also strengthening the connection between the new closing lines: “Dark like me” and “Black like me.” Hughes uses indentation to set these lines apart in the original version of his poem; Price’s reorganization of the text is thus a fitting way to provide similar emphasis in her art-song setting.

[3.2] Price’s technique of connecting poetic imagery with pitches and key areas aligns with Hoagwood’s Freudian interpretation of the poem. In the first strophe, the two worlds of white/day and dark/night remain separate. Example 3 shows how mm. 3–7 introduce “place in the sun” and “white day” with a pentatonic vocal melody supported by tonic-dominant progressions in D major (I) and G major (IV) in the piano accompaniment. In m. 8, the B^b-major sonority (bVI) on the word “rest” marks a move from day to night for the protagonist. The harmonies ascend through a series of major triads separated by thirds, finally arriving on an A^b-major-added-sixth sonority on the word “evening” (m. 10). (17) The vocal line then articulates B-major pentatonic over a B-major arpeggiation in the left hand of the accompaniment (mm. 14–19) and ends by emphasizing G[#]4 (“dark like me” in mm. 17–19). (18) In this way, G[#]/A^b connects the images of “rest” (m. 9), “evening” (harmonized by A^b major in m. 10), and “dark like me” (mm. 17–18). Viewed through the lens of common-practice tonality, D and A^b/G[#] are as far apart as one could possibly get, creating a strong sense of “otherness” in line with the poem’s meaning. If the first strophe represents Hoagwood’s interpretation of the “rational” view of the dream, then the fact that these harmonic areas remain distinct and separate confirms the sense that the protagonist is not fully embraced by the “white/day.” (19)

[3.3] Price blends these identities together harmonically and texturally in the second strophe, invoking Hoagwood’s description of “unification of experience” during the irrational dream-like state. The unification of ideas is realized most literally in the final measures of the song, where the voice and piano trade pitch collections from the song’s opening. At the beginning, the vocal melody outlines a D-major pentatonic collection, which is supported by the piano accompaniment in D major with right-hand emphasis on F[#]4. At the conclusion (mm. 51–53), the vocal line sustains F[#]4, and the accompaniment projects a D-major pentatonic collection.

[3.4] Yet further intricate blendings of identity occur throughout the second strophe. Once the protagonist declares “That is my dream!”, the dream “to fling my arms wide in the face of the sun” is supported by a harmonic sequence that moves in thirds, with each third emphasized by an applied dominant. The sequence begins with D major (m. 23) and continues by tonicizing B minor (m. 24) and then G major (m. 25). The B-major sonority at the end of m. 25 seems as though it will follow the pattern, resolving as a secondary dominant to E minor (or perhaps E major). Price instead harmonizes the voice’s G[#]4 in m. 26 with an A^b-major triad in the accompaniment. (20) The word “Sun” is now associated with G[#]/A^b, the key of “dark” and “night.” As Example 3 illustrates, “rest” (m. 38), “night coming tenderly” (mm. 47–49), and “Black like me” (mm. 50–51) are now situated firmly within the key of D major, the key of “white” and “day.” If, as Hoagwood proposes, the second strophe represents an irrational, dream-like view and “unification of experience,” then Price’s setting seems to entertain the idea of a more complete intermingling between the two worlds.

[3.5] One of the most intriguing moments of the song occurs in mm. 27–31 in the accompaniment, where Price includes a distinctive topical reference to a syncopated two-step dance rhythm, coinciding with the protagonist’s dream “To Dance! Whirl! Whirl!” We suggest this reference carries with it a deeper meaning than mere text painting. Drawing from the work of Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.’s *The Power of Black Music* (1995) and Kofi Agawu’s *Playing with Signs* (1991), Horace

Maxile, Jr. demonstrates how the concept of “Signifyin(g)” can be combined with topic theory “to identify particular African-American cultural topics and consider how they function expressively in specific musical context” (2008, 127).⁽²¹⁾ Floyd defines Signifyin(g) as follows:

In the black vernacular, Signifyin(g) is figurative, implicative speech. It makes use of vernacular tropings. . . and other rhetorical devices. Signifyin(g) is a way of saying one thing and meaning another. . . all to achieve or reverse power, to improve situations, and to achieve pleasing results for the signifier. For in Signifyin(g), the emphasis is on the signifier, not the signified. (1995, 95)⁽²²⁾

Thus, Maxile notes:

One must be adept with both the signifier and the signified in order to discuss the referential richness of this process and to recognize varying levels of topical signification in structural and expressive domains. In other words, and with regard to certain works by black composers, one must be as comfortable with the blues as one is with Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms in order to shed light on this practice. (2008, 128)

Maxile further asserts that dances should be included among the ranks of African American cultural topics, noting them to be as rhythmically distinctive as a jig or an allemande (2008, 134).

[3.6] In order to appropriately interpret the dance topic in Price’s song, then, one must first identify the dance and consider the cultural implications associated with this syncopated two-step rhythm. Syncopation is a notable feature of several related dance types such as the juba, cakewalk, and ragtime. The rhythms can be traced to “hand-clapping accompaniments to African songs,” their extensive influence on dances in the Caribbean and Latin America, and their interaction with European social dance music (Floyd and Reisser 1984, 24 and 27; see also Berlin 1980, 115).⁽²³⁾ While the juba and cakewalk also feature syncopated rhythms, the excerpt from Price’s song is most accurately described as ragtime, which was influenced by these earlier genres (Floyd and Reisser 1984). A notable difference between cakewalk and ragtime, according to Edward Berlin (1980, 193), is that cakewalk typically features untied syncopation, whereas ragtime increasingly utilized tied syncopations as the genre developed.⁽²⁴⁾ Floyd and Reisser further explain that the most salient features of ragtime were a “sectional design, the straight bass, multimeteric pentatonic-like melodies, polyrhythms, and treble/bass polarity” (Floyd and Reisser 1984, 35; see also 1980, 172–173).

[3.7] While the excerpt (Example 3, mm. 27–31) is too brief to argue for it exhibiting “sectional design,” many other features of ragtime are present in Price’s dance reference. First, the left hand of the piano part incorporates features of a “straight bass,” emphasizing an eighth-note pulse with a low bass and added chords in the middle register; second, absence of $\hat{7}$ in the right-hand melody gives it a pentatonic-like quality, particularly with the ascending $\hat{6}$ – $\hat{1}$ motions in mm. 27, 29, and 30; third, there are additive rhythms present in the syncopations of the right-hand piano part, as can be seen in the alternating duple and triple rhythmic groupings, and last, treble/bass polarity is apparent in the contrary motion between left- and right-hand parts. While the larger progression traverses multiple third-related keys, internally each section articulates a local I–I $\hat{6}$ –ii–V progression, which—along with occasional secondary dominants and subdominants—comprises the “basic harmonic vocabulary of classic ragtime music” (Floyd and Reisser 1984, 41).⁽²⁵⁾

[3.8] Understanding the cultural context from which ragtime developed is equally important for interpreting Price’s topical reference. In tracing the development of ragtime, Floyd and Reisser note its roots in both “Euro-American social dance music and Afro-American folk music” (1984, 51). “The custom of black slave and free musicians performing for the dancing and entertainment of white persons is an old one; it is a practice that ensured a meeting and some measure of accommodation that was to result in the creation of a unique genre that contained traits of both traditions” (Floyd and Reisser 1984, 23; see also Peters 1995, 86–87). Thus, with origins in slavery and minstrelsy, this music in its earliest stages of development, culturally speaking, played a role of supplying white entertainment.

[3.9] We can conclude from these details that the signified object is the ragtime dance topic, but as Maxile and Floyd note, the focus is on the signifier, not the signified. Surely Price could have invoked any dance type if her aim was mere text painting. For instance, the song is in $\frac{6}{8}$ meter up to this point, and the left-hand gestures in mm. 23–26 are more suggestive of a waltz topic. There was no real need for her to change meters and invoke the ragtime topic were text painting the only goal; however, Brown (2020, 131) indicates: “For Price, the rhythmic element in Afro-American music was eminently important.” An additional explanation for Price’s compositional decision may be found in Floyd’s rationale for why Signifyin(g) was developed:

I believe that Signifyin(g) was developed in response to the black cultural apostasy that resulted from the onset of modernism, which itself was fed by factors such as the prohibitions instituted by exclusionary lawmaking after Reconstruction, the loss of the communal ethos of black culture, and the continued ill-treatment of African Americans throughout the United States. But another and different response to—or perhaps even a cause of—this apostasy was the **determination of elite and middle-class African Americans to “elevate the race” by producing within it the artistic and intellectual resources and excellence that would prove them to be the intellectual and social equals of white Americans. They would accomplish this not by denying the value of their racial heritage, but by reaffirming and asserting it.** This spirit of “renaissancism” (Baker’s [1987] term) was pervasive all across the United States, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic world at the time. But in New York City, renaissancism sank its roots early and deep and flowered as the Harlem Renaissance; later, a Chicago flowering would develop.” (Floyd 1995, 98; emphasis added)

The bolded part of the quotation above seems most relevant to Price’s setting of Hughes’s poem, especially in light of the fact that the two opposing keys of the song—D major and A \flat major—serve as a harmonic frame for Price’s ragtime topic. Maxile stresses that it is not only important to identify what is being signified, but how (2008, 124). The marked opposition between the keys of D major and A \flat major—keys clearly associated with white/day and black/night imagery—thus invite the analyst to assign even deeper meaning at this moment in the song. Allowing for the fact that interpretation is subjective, we offer the following interpretation for this striking moment in Price’s song. Situating the start of the ragtime topic in the key of D major might invoke a literal interpretation of the poem, of the protagonist’s dream of deeper integration between worlds. But one might also view the harmonic trajectory toward A \flat major as a sign that the protagonist cannot resist the desire to be their true self in this moment, and perhaps the turn toward A \flat major symbolizes re-claiming ownership of a dance rhythm often appropriated for white entertainment. However one wishes to assign meaning to this passage, the protagonist’s excitement is unarguably reflected in the shortened F-major statement (m. 29), interrupted by an early arrival on A \flat major. (26)

[3.10] As the second strophe unfolds, the music gradually shifts away from A \flat /G \sharp and toward greater emphasis on D major. Similar to how Hughes recites the poem, Price takes care to set apart the line “Rest at pale evening” in m. 38. She achieves this through a *ritardando* in the accompaniment (m. 37) followed by a *tempo primo* marking and a return to a D-major-added-sixth sonority in m. 38. As the reduction illustrates (Example 3), mm. 38–46 are held together almost entirely by a sustained common tone D. (The dotted half notes in the bass are not in the score; they are included here to highlight the sustained D throughout this passage).⁽²⁷⁾ A \flat s transform into G \sharp s over the course of this passage (primarily in the piano’s right-hand part), and they disappear upon the return to D major in m. 47. As a result of this harmonic transformation, the words “rest” (m. 38), “night coming tenderly” (mm. 47–49), and “Black like me” (mm. 50–51)—moments that were previously associated with A \flat /G \sharp in strophe 1—are now situated firmly in the key of D major, representing a full integration of ideas and “unification of experience” at the conclusion of the song.

[3.11] Price also uses motives to link parallel lines of text in each strophe, with her manipulation of these motives further contributing to the dream-like state of strophe 2. As shown in Example 3, the first strophe finds the words “rest” (m. 9) and “me” (mm. 18–19) being sung over the same pitches (G \sharp and B), outlining an ascending third (+3). This gesture is answered by a descending third (–3)

on the word “rest” (m. 38) in strophe 2. Elsewhere in the first strophe, the melody that supports “While night comes on gently” (mm. 14–16) outlines a descending stepwise third (D \sharp –C \sharp –B), while in strophe 2 the text (“Night coming tenderly” in mm. 47–48) is supported by an ascending stepwise sixth. Viewing these motivic transformations through the lens of a dream state, the inverted motives evoke a sense of disorientation in which the familiar is unfamiliar and where reality is turned upside-down. A third voice-leading motion is introduced as an upper-neighbor motion on B–C–B in mm. 9–13, and later appears in strophe 2 (mm. 40–41) as a chromatic ascent on A–B \flat –B \natural . (Note that this rising motive, A–B \flat –B \natural , occurs once more in the left hand of the piano part in m. 47–48.) Neighbor motion, by design, brings a musical shape back to its starting point, in contrast to the chromatic ascents, which imply forward momentum. It thus seems reasonable to interpret the “neighboring” version of this motive as representing a sense of stasis in strophe 1, while in strophe 2, the “rising” version represents motion toward something, or perhaps expression of hope.

[3.12] Taking all of these observations together, we interpret the beginning of strophe 2 as the actual dream state: the protagonist here is completely carried away, in terms of the fragmented text, the co-mingling between day/night pitches and harmonies, and an out-of-place ragtime topic. Beginning in m. 38, the sustained common-tone D begins working to ground the protagonist, pulling them back to reality and eventually to the home key of D major. The return to D major (and the D-major pentatonic collection) accompanied by inverted forms of the opening motives contributes to the listener’s sense of waking from a dream. Familiar materials return, although they no longer feel the same as they did at the opening of the song. In the end, it is not entirely clear whether this dream has been fully realized, but in her musical choices, we find a glimmer of optimism in Price’s setting.

4. Margaret Bonds, “Dream Variation” (1959)

[4.1] In Margaret Bonds’s setting of “Dream Variation,” harmonic and melodic ideas that are introduced and developed over the course of the song converge on the culminating moment, the promise of a dream achieved.⁽²⁸⁾ Like Price, Bonds employs structural and tonal means to evoke the rational and irrational elements within the poem’s text, while effectively fusing together a number of twentieth-century art-song techniques. According to Helen Walker-Hill:

The trademarks of [Bonds’s] musical language included extended and doubled ‘tall’ chords—quartal chords, ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths—and parallel chord progressions, cadences of roots moving by thirds (III–I, VI–I, etc.) instead of the traditional V–I, chords on modal degrees of the lowered second and lowered sixth, modal ambiguity (major, minor, and other modes), and syncopated rhythms, all of which are found in jazz. She combines these ingredients with classical principles: balance and proportion, traditional forms, contrapuntal textures, and careful notation. (2007, 60)

Bonds’s “Dream Variation” includes common-tone progressions, pentatonicism, and extended jazz harmonies combined with flashes of whole-tone sonorities, along with quartal and quintal harmonies and voicings. It is important to note that this particular setting does not exhibit a topical reference as distinct as the ragtime topic in Price’s song. As such, the following analysis will highlight how Bonds relies instead upon subtler stylistic markers to reflect the meaning of the text.

[4.2] Bonds’s “Dream Variation” is a modified strophic form. As shown in **Example 4**, she does not rearrange Hughes’s text as in Price’s setting, but instead chooses to repeat the last two lines of the poem: “Night coming tenderly / Black like me.” (The repeated text is shown in italics in Example 4.) Repeating the final line of text in strophe 2 helps to balance it with strophe 1, which in Hughes’s poem already contains one additional line, “That is my dream!” Within each strophe, Bonds stretches musical time to highlight the differences between day and night. Both halves of the song begin with a pair of two-measure units: the first two measures of each strophe (mm. 5–6 and 17–18, respectively) feature an ascending gesture emphasizing the text “To fling my arms wide in some place of the sun.” This is answered with a series of leaps that shape mm. 7–8 and 19–20 (marked *a*

in Example 4), conveying the image of the protagonist whirling and dancing to complete the white day. These two-measure phrase units are then broken at the point where the text shifts toward “rest” and “evening.” In contrast to Hughes’s consistent poetic meter, Bonds stretches lines 5 and 6 (in mm. 9–11 and 21–23, respectively) across three measures each instead of two. These are the only two moments in the song (marked *b* in Example 4) that subvert the otherwise wholly duple grouping in the text setting. Though not an obvious musical topic like the one used in Price’s setting, the added measures produce a similar expressive effect; the protagonist seems to temporarily lose a sense of time as they imagine a state of repose and the possibility of their dream coming to fruition.

[4.3] Bonds also relies on pitch and key area associations, both locally and over the span of the entire song, to reflect the text. As the annotated score in **Example 5** illustrates, there are no emphatic cadential gestures in this song. Strophe 1 closes with an IAC (m. 14), which elides with the piano interlude that begins the second strophe, and there is no authentic cadence at the close of strophe 2. Bonds is nonetheless able to maintain a sense of rootedness in the tonic key of C# major throughout the piece. In lieu of authentic root motion (V–I), C# is maintained as a common anchor across the song’s harmonic landscape, present in all but a few of the many seventh chords and stacked, quartal/quintal sonorities. Each strophe begins and ends by emphasizing C# major, particularly in the piano accompaniment. The vocal melody articulates A major/F# minor pentatonic and then outlines F# major in mm. 10–11 (“evening beneath a tall tree”) and mm. 21–23 (“rest at pale evening / A tall, slim tree”).⁽²⁹⁾ This plagal turn reflects a moment of repose before the song returns to its C# pitch center in mm. 12 and 25, respectively. But while both strophes project the same general plan of starting and ending in C# major with emphasis on “rest” in F# major, there is a subtle teleology at play between the strophes. The means by which pitch collections, harmony, and motive contribute to the sense of strophe 2 completing strophe 1 will be discussed in detail below.

[4.4] In addition to surface appearances of C# major and F# major pentatonic, these pitch collections unfold more subtly over the course of the entire song. Bonds’s vocal rhythms model Hughes’s recitation of the poem quite closely, emphasizing the final word of each line of the poem with longer rhythmic values. **Example 6** summarizes the pitches and associated text that are stressed both through durational emphasis and agogic accent. As Walker-Hill notes, “On each of the long vocal notes, the piano fills in with word painting or imitation of the previous vocal line” (2007, 169), and thus the interconnection between voice and accompaniment draws even greater attention to these moments. Upon closer examination one can observe a gradual outline, and subsequent completion of, pitch collections that carry significance in the song as a whole. Strophe 1 gradually introduces new pitches (C#5–D#5, then G#4–A#4), finally completing an F# major-pentatonic collection at the arrival of the word “rest” in m. 9. Bonds continues to expand the collection in strophe 2: after retracing the F# major-pentatonic collection (completed in m. 21, again at the word “rest”), she augments the rhythms in m. 23 to accentuate the E#5 at the end of the line, “A tall, slim tree. . .” producing a 6-note diatonic subset of C# major. E#4 then appears later to end the word “tenderly” (mm. 24 and 26) signaling a temporary shift to the minor mode. Finally, B#4 coincides with the last statement of “black like me” (m. 27) completing the C#-major diatonic collection. While B#4 occurs earlier (m. 25), m. 27 is the first time it receives durational and metric stress. This leading-tone pitch also happens to be the final note of the vocal melody and it is left gloriously unresolved, transforming the closing tonic to a major seventh sonority. While the completion of the pentatonic and diatonic collections may not be immediately discernible to the listener, the fact that these pitches are stressed through rhythmic duration and agogic accent is unmistakable. When examined in totality, one observes how the collections are subtly initiated (strophe 1) and then gradually completed (strophe 2), further strengthening their role as significant key areas in the song.

[4.5] Moments of polytonality and tonal ambiguity are equally important mechanisms for telegraphing important manifestations of the song’s meaning. For instance, in the brief piano interjection in m. 8 (Example 5), the right- and left-hand parts outline a series of parallel sevenths—the left-hand part begins on E#3 and the right-hand part on D#5, creating a sonority that might best

be interpreted as BM7 over C#M. D# and E# are significant pitches in the song, and their harmonic juxtaposition here seems intentional. Similarly, it may be clearer to view extended sonorities like those in m. 12 as a combination of two harmonies, C#m and DM in this instance.

[4.6] A particularly striking long-range harmonic connection occurs between events in strophes 1 and 2. As noted above, F# becomes an important marker for the nighttime imagery: the F# major-pentatonic collection, completed subtly beneath the surface of the music, occurs at the arrival of the word “rest” in both strophes. The following text, “rest at cool / pale evening / beneath a tall tree,” is further highlighted with an F#-major arpeggio in the vocal line, supported first by DM9 (m. 9) and finally by F#M7 (m. 11) in the accompaniment. At the song’s climax in strophe 2, Bonds presents a progression of minor-mode harmonies arranged as ascending chromatic thirds (mm. 21–22), followed by major-mode sonorities in successive descending thirds (m. 23). This progression converges on a simultaneity of F#-minor and D-major triads, accompanying the word “tree” at the end of m. 23. Conflicting editorial markings in the printed editions of this song have often led performers to question whether there is an A#4 or A#4 in the right-hand part of the piano accompaniment in m. 23.3.⁽³⁰⁾ While one could simply analyze this sonority as a DM7, the poetic connections invite us to interpret this moment as a climactic polymodal synthesis: F# minor over D major, connected through a common tone of A#4. The harmonies in strophe 1 dictate greater separation in these moments, with DM9 supporting the word “rest” (m. 9) and F#M9 supporting “evening” and “tree” (mm. 10–11). Critically, in strophe 2, Bonds harmonizes the word “rest” with F#m7 (m. 21), while “tree” appears to be supported by both F# minor and D major combined (m. 23). Bonds’s decision to combine these harmonies at the final declamation of the word “tree” seems intentional, and aligns with Hoagwood’s analysis of the second strophe. The protagonist is no longer resting near the tree; in fact, the protagonist and the tree are now one and the same.

[4.7] Hoagwood’s reading of “unification of experience” at the end of the poem is, last, suggested through long-range motivic connection. Bonds’s approach involves introducing separate motivic ideas and later fusing them at the end of the song. For instance, an ascending third (C#–D#–E#) occurs at various moments throughout the song; these are labeled in Example 5. This shape first occurs in the piano introduction: assuming an implied C#4 on the downbeat of m. 1, it appears in the right hand of the accompaniment in mm. 1–2, and is then followed by a descending third (E#3–D#3–C#3) in the left-hand part in m. 4. When the voice enters, rising step motion (C#5 to D#5 and then G#4 to A#4) is echoed by upper-neighbor motion in the accompaniment, until the rising stepwise figure is finally interrupted by the exhortation to “rest at cool/pale evening.” These ascents in the voice might be interpreted as unfulfilled attempts to complete the rising third motion initiated in the piano introduction; a hope not yet achieved. Example 5 also foregrounds a second motive that recurs throughout the song, primarily in the vocal line. This motive is introduced at the end of m. 10, where “a tall tree” is assigned a distinctive melodic pattern characterized by the leap of an ascending seventh followed by descending third (labeled +7th/–3rd on the score). This is repeated immediately in strophe 1 on the text “dark like me” (m. 12), and the motive accompanies the same text in strophe 2 with slight variations (see mm. 23, 25, and 27). These two motivic ideas remain separate until they are joined together in the final measure of the song: a modified version of the “rising seventh” motive in the vocal melody (now +6th/–4th), supported by the rising-third pattern (C#4–D#–E#) in the accompaniment. The polymodal synthesis in m. 23, immediately followed by the completion of the C#-major diatonic collection and a fusion of motives at the culmination of the song, creates a different, yet equally artful realization of the dream articulated in Hughes’s poem.

Conclusion

[5.1] Florence Price’s and Margaret Bonds’s art-song settings of Langston Hughes’s poem “Dream Variation” highlight the connections between Hughes, Price, and Bonds on many levels. Not only did these three artists know each other personally and interact regularly, but their works also highlight important ideals of the Harlem and Chicago Renaissances. Hughes’s poem centers on the affirmation of Black identity, of the dream and promise for full integration with white society; Price and Bonds fuse together elements from their classical compositional training with clear nods to

African American musical idioms, all the while creating artful interpretations of Hughes's poetry with notable harmonic, rhythmic, textural, and motivic gestures that emphasize the meaning of the text. The foregoing analyses shine a light on two composers whose careers also reflect the double consciousness resonant in Hughes's poem: they faced numerous professional and social barriers both as Black composers and as women, but in spite of these frustrations they also found support through a rich and thriving community of artists who were active during the Harlem and Chicago Renaissances. Their lived experiences undoubtedly informed the beautiful, subtle ways each composer enhanced the meaning of Hughes's poetry in their songs.

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Footnotes

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1. Large volumes of both composers' works were, at various points, at risk of being lost entirely. Numerous manuscripts and other documents belonging to Price were found by a couple planning to renovate an abandoned house in Illinois in 2009. The house was in serious disrepair, and they found "piles of musical manuscripts, books, personal papers, and other documents" in a part of the home that had remained dry. After consultation with archivists at the University of Arkansas, they confirmed that these were indeed works by Florence Price ([Ross 2018](#)). Schirmer obtained the worldwide rights to her catalog ([Cooper 2018](#)), later including additional manuscripts from a private collector in 2019 ([Roberts 2020](#)). A similar fate befell Bonds' manuscripts. One part of her archive was found in a storage locker belonging to her only child, and neither Margaret Bonds nor her daughter had a will; the other part of her archive was found in a cardboard box next to a dumpster following a book fair. These materials eventually found their way to the library at Georgetown where one of the Margaret Bonds' archives is now held ([Midgette 2017](#); [Lauritzen 2024](#)). Manuscripts, correspondence and other materials for Florence Price are archived in the Special Collections division of the University of Arkansas Libraries; those for Margaret Bonds can be found at the Booth Family Center for Special Collections at Georgetown University and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division of the New York Public Library.

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2. Until recently, few professional scholars have devoted analytical attention to works by Price and Bonds; the number of studies, however, is steadily growing. Extant studies provide analyses of Price's *Sonata E Minor* ([Ege 2020a](#); [Maxile 2022](#); [Hutchinson 2023](#)); *Symphony in E minor* ([Ege 2020b](#); [Brown 2020](#); [Farrah 2007](#)); *Fantasia Negre* and *Chicago* ([Ege 2021](#)); and *Piano Concerto in One Movement* ([Brown 1993](#); [Hill 2022](#)). There are likewise essays on Bonds's spirituals ([Walker-Hill 2007](#)); complete or isolated components of her *Spiritual Suite* for solo piano ([Yuhasz 1970](#); [Spillman 1994](#); [Walker-Hill 2007](#); [Hisama 2018](#)); *Three Dream Portraits* ([Peters 1995](#); [Patterson 1996](#)); "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" ([Patterson 1996](#)); and *Credo* for chorus, soprano and baritone soloists, and

orchestra (Walker-Hill 2007). In a chapter of her edited collection, Melissa Hoag (2022) discusses Bonds's setting "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and Price's setting of "Songs to the Dark Virgin," both texts by Langston Hughes. Other recent publications explore the songs discussed in the present essay, although from different perspectives. On Bonds's "Dream Variation," see Peters 1995 and Hannaford 2021; Price's "My Dream" is discussed in VanHandel 2022; and both songs are discussed together in a (forthcoming) essay by Rachel Lumsden. Given the number of recent performance-related studies by Master's and DMA students, there is clear interest in learning more about Price's and Bonds's work in the music field more broadly (see, for instance, Heape 1995, Moham 1997, Peebles 2008, Mashego 2010, Statler 2023, Harding 2023, Zhou 2023), and we anticipate a growing number of publications dedicated to the works of these two composers in the coming years.

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3. Further resources for readers interested in learning more about Langston Hughes include Royster (1974), Rampersad (1986–88), and Miller (2013). Because many of Price's and Bonds's compositions are unpublished, it is difficult to determine precisely how much of their work includes texts by Hughes. An added complication, as noted by Walker-Hill, is the fact that Bonds did not keep very good track of her manuscripts; she was in the habit of giving her music to the people for whom she wrote it, so many works survive only in the personal libraries of the recipients (Walker-Hill 2007, 158). Select compositions by both Price and Bonds do appear in edited collections, but it is not clear whether the song selections are representative of their poetic preferences as a whole, the only works available at the time, or if they were simply preferred by the editors of each collection. For instance, a well-known collection of works by Florence Price, *44 Art Songs and Spirituals by Florence B. Price*, edited by Richard Heard, features five settings of texts by Langston Hughes but it is not clear what criteria Heard used when selecting these specific works for his edited collection (2015). Similarly, a collection of works by Margaret Bonds was published by Classical Vocal Reprints, *Rediscovering Margaret Bonds: Art Songs, Spirituals, Musical Theater and Popular Songs*, and edited by Louise Toppin (2021). Of the 43 songs and spirituals included in this collection, eight are settings of texts by Hughes.

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4. Rodman Wanamaker founded the competition in 1927 "to create a platform that exclusively elevated black composers. The contest attracted a great number of submissions country wide and strongly encouraged classical scores that engaged black musical idioms" (Ege 2020b, 20; see also Walker-Hill 2007, 147).

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5. Rae Linda Brown notes that many of Price's songs fall within the years 1935–1945 (2020, 263). She reasons that Price likely composed primarily chamber works and songs during this time because the Great Depression and World War made it difficult for composers to have large orchestral works performed (Brown 2020, 221).

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6. MC 988, Box 1, Folder 5, Item 2, program, Florence Price Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, <https://digitalcollections.uark.edu/digital/collection/p17212coll3> [Accessed 08 December 2022].

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7. Walker-Hill explains that "the third movement of [Price's] *Symphony in E Minor* is called "Juba Dance," and her *Dances in the Canebrakes* carries the inscription 'based on authentic Negro rhythms' (2007, 26). She goes on to define the "juba" as "an African-derived dance . . . [that] was widespread in the United States; it involved various combinations of foot tapping, hand clapping, and thigh slapping in precise and lively rhythm" (Walker-Hill 2007, 45).

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8. Bonds was actively composing and publishing within many genres, but she struggled to publish art songs, and lacked support for other "serious" genres, such as opera and symphonic works, throughout her career. "Her association with Hughes and setting of his texts allowed her to break

into the art song market, but for the most part she could only interest publishers in popular song and spiritual settings. No wonder she was accused of not being 'original' enough; no one rewarded her for experimenting" (Martin 2019, 33). Nevertheless, Bonds worked consistently and took the act of composing art song seriously.

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9. Letters between Langston Hughes and Margaret Bonds are archived in the Langston Hughes Papers, James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (<https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/11/resources/969>, Accessed December 08, 2022) and Margaret Bonds papers, Sc MG 873, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library (<https://archives.nypl.org/scm/24664>, Accessed December 08, 2022).

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10. "Dream Variation" did appear in print at least one year earlier (March 1925) with other select poems in a magazine, *Survey Graphic*, under the title "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro" (Hogan 2004, 17).

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11. Philip Royster (1974, 78) goes on to observe how "[in the second stanza] the speaker emphasizes his desires by dropping prepositions to create commanding verbs, using repetition and exclamation, becoming more concrete, and by the climaxing intensity of his final analogy."

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12. "The night was a true time of freedom for the slaves; indeed, numerous accounts relate that slaves, who were believed to be sleeping, in fact travelled for miles under the cover of darkness to attend dances, religious assemblies, or meetings where they planned escape routes" (Peters 1995, 87).

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13. "My Dream" is published as a stand-alone song in Vivian Taylor, ed., *Art Songs & Spirituals by African-American Women Composers*, Hildegard Publishing Company (1995). Most recently, the song has been published by Schirmer as part of *Four Songs from the Weary Blues* (2015), edited by John Michael Cooper. In a foreword to the Schirmer edition, Cooper notes that two autograph copies of this collection survive: one in the Marian Anderson Collection and one in the Florence Price Papers at the University of Arkansas. The copy sent to Anderson is dated on the first page "April 26, 1935." The title "Four Songs from the Weary Blues" is editorial, not authorial, but they are printed in the same order listed by Price on her cover page. Cooper concludes that "these features make clear that the songs were conceived as an integral whole, not individual compositions." Based on a study of her concert programs, it does not seem that Anderson ever performed all four songs, but she often performed "Songs to a Dark Virgin." The present analysis was completed while referencing Taylor's edition of the song as well as the original manuscript (Florence Price, "My Dream," music manuscript, solo voice with piano, Florence Beatrice Smith Price Collection (MC 988a 2), box 14, folder 11, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville).

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14. Sullivan (2023) notes a similar rearrangement of the text in Price's setting of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "Sympathy."

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15. Due to copyright concerns, the piano part is represented by a harmonic reduction in Example 3. Isolated passages of the accompaniment are included when those details are central to the analytical discussion so that the reader can reference these passages easily. The same format is followed for Bonds's setting later in the essay (Example 5).

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16. In the manuscript, the first line of the poem is crossed out and rearranged as "To fling *wide my arms*." We have not found any supporting documents to explain the reasons for this modification.

Schirmer's 2021 edition prints the text as it appears originally in Hughes's poem. (The Schirmer edition also has a typo in the vocal line in m. 8: the final vocal pitch in m. 8 should be a G, not an F \sharp .)

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17. Leigh VanHandel (2022) discusses this passage, along with several other moments where ascending and descending third sequences occur in Price's song. She demonstrates ways to promote analytical discussion of these passages in the undergraduate theory classroom: analysis can be achieved through application of Neo-Riemannian transformations if students are familiar with these, or by simply identifying the third-relationships and common tones between the harmonies in each progression.

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18. When referring to specific pitches in our analysis, we use American Standard Pitch Notation (ASPN) as designated by the Acoustical Society of America.

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19. The juxtaposition of D major and A \flat major also implies interaction with the octatonic collection (OCT_{0,2}). VanHandel illustrates how the pitch collections in the song can be explained through a mixed use of octatonic collections OCT_{1,2} and OCT_{0,2} (2022, 235). Although we take a different approach in our analysis, either interpretation can support the text-music interpretations presented here.

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20. Maxile notes a similar unexpected resolution at the conclusion of a sequence in the first movement of Price's Piano Sonata in E minor (2022, 158).

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21. Both Maxile 2008 and Floyd 1995 note that the concept of Signifyin(g) comes from the work of African American literary critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1988).

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22. Floyd goes on to explain: "During the Negro Renaissance, spirituals, ragtime, blues, jazz, and gospel music would undergo significant development, and Signifyin(g) would play a role: the musicians would become signifiers par excellence—musical tricksters who would help define the music and the culture of the United States" (1995, 98).

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23. "Through minstrelsy the juba dance, or rather its later manifestation, the cakewalk, became popular in Europe in the 1880s and 1890s . . . Claude Debussy was one of the first composers to make use of this new music that developed into ragtime" (Brown 2020, 131).

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24. Floyd and Reisser also note that the presence of additive rhythms and multimeter distinguish ragtime from the cakewalk. They argue that "the additive patterns of classic ragtime came by way of Latin America . . . and entered the genre directly from the music of black banjo players" (Floyd and Reisser 1984, 32–34). They suggest the syncopated rhythms juxtaposed with a "straight bass" we often associate with ragtime can also be traced back to the "practice of patting juba," spirituals and folk songs, and the cakewalk (Floyd and Reisser 1984, 27).

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25. Some listeners might be inclined to observe a slower harmonic rhythm in this passage, one chord per measure, resulting in (I–V) motion. However, there are two reasons why we suggest an implied quarter-note harmonic rhythm (I–I $\hat{6}$ –ii–V). First, at the start of m. 28 and m. 31, the accompaniment articulates only a single pitch ($\hat{2}$) for the first eighth note. Hearing the lowest bass register progress from $\hat{2}$ to $\hat{5}$ in these measures implies ii–V harmonic support. Second, in the two-measure groups (excluding m. 29 which presents only half of the pattern), there are three distinctive strong beats that are emphasized: m. 27.1 (left hand), m. 28.1 (left hand), and m. 28.2

(right hand). The same beats are stressed in the next two-measure group (m. 30.1, m. 31.1, and m. 31.2). These stressed beats stand out in a texture where everything else is syncopated; they are so aurally prominent, that we suggest there is an implied quarter-note harmonic rhythm underlying this passage. Although several left-hand tones are metrically displaced at the musical surface, the registral contrast between the low bass pitches and the inner-voice chords lends greater weight to the bass tones, implying a tonic-predominant-dominant framework (none of the groups return to the local tonic).

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26. Readers may also be interested to read more about the ideas of “markedness” and “opposition” as they relate to musical semiotics. For a helpful overview of these concepts, we recommend the introduction of Robert Hatten’s *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (2004).

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27. The voice-leading reduction normalizes register to clarify the underlying voice leading of this passage. Nevertheless, D4 is sustained—either in the piano or voice—until m. 43. In m. 43, D5 appears at the top of the piano left-hand chord, and then D3 is activated in the bass in mm. 44–45. The final 9–8 motion over C#7 in m. 46 occurs as notated on D4 and C#4.

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28. “Dream Variation” is part of a trilogy of songs by Bonds titled *Three Dream Portraits*. It is bookended by the poems “Minstrel Man” and “I, Too.” For this study, we primarily consulted two published versions of the song: in *Anthology of Art Songs by Black American Composers* compiled by Willis C. Patterson (1977), and *Art Songs and Spirituals by African-American Women Composers*, edited by Vivian Taylor (1995). Helen Walker-Hill notes that Bonds composed the first song as early as 1955, with the trilogy first being published in 1959 (2007, 35). Although the three poems were printed in Hughes’s *The Dream Keepers and Other Poems* (1932), “Dream Variation” had already been published in Hughes’s earlier book of poetry *The Weary Blues* (1926), along with several other poems Bonds set to music as early as the late 1930s. In a letter to Hughes, which is excerpted above, she indicates having set many of other poems from “Dream Variations” to music, so she clearly knew the poetry as early as the 1930s: “Here is ‘Joy.’ I forgot to play it for you in Detroit so someone will have to in California. I took it to a publisher here and he wrote me a nice comment but isn’t publishing any songs. When you were in Chicago last year did I give you copies of ‘Winter Moon,’ ‘The Negro Speaks of Rivers,’ and ‘Poème d’ Automne?’” (Bonds 1937).

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29. The topic of pendular thirds in other works by Florence Price has been discussed by both Horace Maxile, Jr. (2022) and Kyle Hutchinson (2023).

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30. We thank Russell Miller (1960–2023) of the Eastman School of Music for bringing this performance question to our attention. In the edition compiled by Willis C. Patterson (1977), the C’s are cancelled out and spelled as C# in m. 23.2, but there are no accidentals modifying the A# in the right-hand chords; the left-hand part in m. 23.3 is marked with D# and A#. This notation points toward a polytonal combination of both F# major and D major. The version edited by Vivian Taylor (1995), on the other hand, supplies a cautionary A# in the right-hand in m. 23.3, which instead alludes to a DM7 sonority (or, as we discuss above, a combination of D-major and F#-minor triads). A more recent edition of the song was published by Classical Vocal Reprints, edited by Louise Toppin (2021). Although printed in a high key (E major) the added accidentals in m. 23 agree with Vivian Taylor’s edition. Based on manuscript copies of the song, it seems that Bonds intended this sonority to have A#s in both the left- and right-hand parts of the accompaniment. We wish to thank to Rachel Lumsden (Florida State University) for sharing this detail with us. Voice-leading motions also support this interpretation: the right-hand part in m. 23 presents octave shifts from C* to C# from beats 1 to 2; one could easily accept a similar voice-leading motion from A#4 to A#4 from beats 2 to 3, otherwise maintaining common tones while the left-hand chords descend by thirds. This passage may also be viewed through the lens of climactic multiplicity using Neo-

Riemannian analysis: mm. 21–22 feature a PL transformation as F# minor moves to A# minor; Bonds breaks this pattern with a P transformation on the downbeat of m. 23, restating A# as the root of a major triad; she then shifts back to PL in a move to F# major (m. 23.2). By continuing the pattern of descending-third motion in the left-hand part, while moving only a single pitch in the right hand, Bonds simultaneously provides a PL transformation in the left hand (F# major to D major) while supplying only a P transformation in the right hand (F# major to F# minor). Whether one views these combined transformations through a Neo-Riemannian lens similar to VanHandel's analysis of Price's "My Dream" (2022), or as a type of poly-modal synthesis, the end result is the same; there is an unmistakable moment of coalescence when we arrive on this sonority in m. 23.

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