

## The Fisk Jubilee Singers Tour Germany (1877–78)

### Abstract

The Fisk Jubilee Singers were an African-American musical ensemble who traveled to Germany between 1877 and 1878 to raise money for Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. The Fisk Jubilee Singers are credited with being the means by which African-American folk music, spirituals above all, were adapted into concert pieces to be appreciated as high culture, and they became world-famous after multiple tours around the globe, including to Germany. Frederick J. Loudin (1836–1904) joined the group in 1874 and quickly became a leading spokesman and promoter. He was also a political radical who hoped to use the Singers' growing international profile to draw attention to the struggle against American racism and raise funds to combat it. We can see the range of responses to their arrival in these two images: the first from the satirical journal *Kladderadatsch* (1877) and the second from the Protestant Christian family magazine *Daheim* (1878). The first reduces the performers to racialized caricatures that deny any individuality, while the second's more naturalistic portrayal emphasizes the performers' humanity and dignity and even—through the sidelong gaze of one of the singers—agency. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were so popular during their stay in Germany in 1877 that they published a songbook for audiences to purchase. Meant to be sung in the comfort of one's home, the songbook featured popular spirituals and other hymns translated into German for German consumers.

### Source



