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**Scott Joplin – II**

**Lead: Having reached maturity as a composer and fully established as a ragtime musician, Scott Joplin produced what some consider the first great American opera.**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts**

**Content: By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Scott Joplin had become a celebrated composer and performer. His compositions were sold and played widely and his reputation as a performer was on the rise. During that decade he was also putting his hand toward his original opera,**

*Treemonisha* (1911). The themes of this work are loosely autobiographical though the story is unique. Living in a small rural community of former slaves, Monisha and Ted discover an abandoned infant under a tree and raise her as their own giving her the name memorialized in the opera. Like Joplin, her parents arrange for her to be educated by a white family in exchange for manual labor. The girl emerges from childhood to take a place of leadership in the community.

In the opera, Joplin develops themes that animated his life. He believed that education was the key to the emergence of the black community into the full embrace of their new-found liberty. He also was convinced that too many blacks were content with the “self-limiting roadblock of low expectations.” The philosophical insights of *Treemonisha* were not unlike those being

espoused by W.E.B. Dubois and other reformers in the African American community. Lacking funding, his opera was an initial failure being poorly produced and receiving no critical notice.

The end of Scott Joplin's life was particularly tragic. The failure of the opera was particularly disappointing and compounded an already deteriorating mental condition. He was committed to the New York State hospital and was diagnosed with "dementia paralytica-cerebral" caused by his contraction of syphilis. He died in April, 1917.

A most acute irony resulted in a second life for the music and influence of Scott Joplin. In the 1970s there was a revival of interest and appreciation of ragtime music and the era it symbolized. His work, particularly the rag "The Entertainer," was featured in the film *The Sting* (1973). In 1972

***Treemonisha* was produced in Atlanta to critical acclaim and four years later Joplin was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his contributions to American music.**

**Research assistance by Gaby Rosales, at the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.**

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