



Fisk University (TN) (College History Series)

Rodney T. Cohen

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In January of 1866, with the devastation of the Civil War far from

assuaged in the slowly recuperating South, Fisk University made its home

in abandoned Federal barracks near Nashville, Tennessee. The entire

region faced hardships after the conflict, but Southern blacks still

encountered what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles, even after the

emancipation of slaves. Within five years of its opening, Fisk was in such

a dire financial situation, many expected its closure; however, in an

effort to raise funds for the university, Professor George L. White and nine

students traveled the country performing in a musical ensemble known

as the Jubilee Singers. Their hard-won rise to fame led them to the White

House where they performed for President Ulysses S. Grant, and the

money they earned touring the country literally saved Fisk.

The spirit of the first Jubilee Singers lives on at Fisk today, but it is a

university much different than the one that opened in 1866. Today Fisk

is an institution fully equipped for the challenges of the future, noted

for its excellence in academics, and celebrated for the achievements of

its distinguished alumni. Whether in the classroom, on the playing field,

or on stage, Fisk students and faculty are torchbearers of achievement

in all areas of life. It is their unyielding determination that is celebrated

within these pages, as the university's history comes to life in vintage

photographs. Early classrooms, beloved professors, civic and social

organizations, sporting events, famed alumni, and the Jubilee Singers are

all included in this retrospective.

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