

Ragtime and respectability

- There was a constant struggle for ragtime music to gain respectability, even at the height of its popularity
- After all, many ragtime piano players worked the bars and brothels of America
- Yet, Scott Joplin and others thought ragtime should be considered equal to European classical music – others disagreed
- 1901 AFM convention, the following resolution was passed: Members should “discourage the playing and publishing of such musical trash”
- Here is a 1911 newspaper article:

Brain Doctor Warns Us We're All Being Driven Insane: Unless the American public relinquishes its liking for ragtime music, the whole nation will be driven crazy, according to Dr. Ludwig Brunner, former instructor in the Imperial Academy of Medical Research at Berlin.

“The roll and thump of ragtime is exhilarating to the senses and acts as a stimulant,” says the doctor. “But it has the after effects of an injurious drug that will eventually stagnate the brain cells and wreck the nervous system.”

- Some composers did achieve respectability. Chas Cohen was a black musician married to a Jewish woman and they were home owners in Binghamton, NY – known as “the Parlor City” because of its many stately homes
- “*Riverside Rag*” was dedicated to an amusement park located on the City’s upscale Riverside Drive



Chas Cohen (1878-1931)

- ❖ born in Georgia but lived most of his life in Binghamton, New York
- ❖ some formal training in music as well as piano tuning and repair
- ❖ In addition to teaching, had success as a performer at carnivals and movie theaters
- ❖ earliest compositions self-published in 1910 (age 22) and then reissued, along with other rags, by a mainstream music publisher

