CROSSING THE POND: JAZZ, RACE, AND GENDER IN INTERWAR PARIS

by

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Between 1920 and 1939 the nightclubs of Montmartre became a venue where different nationalities came into contact, danced, talked, and took advantage of the freedom to cross the color line that Paris and the “color-blind” French audience seemed to offer. The fascination for black performers known as the tumulte noir provided the occasion for hundreds of jazz and blues performers to migrate to Paris in these years. French society was inundated with the sounds of jazz and also with images and stereotypes of jazz performers that often contained primitivist, exotic and sexualized associations. The popularity of jazz and its characterization as “black” music raised the question of how the French state dealt with racial difference. It caused consternation among „non-jazz” black men and women throughout the Francophone Atlantic many of whom were engaged in constructing an intellectual pan-Africanist discourse with a view to achieving full citizenship and respect for French colonial subjects. This manuscript examines the tension between French ideals of equality, and „color-blindness,” and the actual experiences of black men and women in Paris between the wars. Although officially operating within the framework of a color-blind Republican model, France has faced acute dilemmas about how to deal with racial and ethnic differences that continue to spark debate and controversy. This project contributes to understanding the historical foundations of such situations by analyzing the clash of French reactions to African-American performers and French colonial immigrants of color in the interwar years.

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Introduction

Between 1920 and 1939 in the nightclubs of Montmartre different nationalities came into contact, danced, talked, and took advantage of the freedom to cross the color line that Paris and the “color-blind” French audience seemed to offer.¹ The tumulte noir – the Parisian fascination for black performers – provided the occasion for hundreds of jazz and blues performers to migrate to Paris, among them women such as Josephine Baker, Alberta Hunter, Florence Mills, and Ada “Bricktop” Smith. The popularity of jazz, and its characterization as “black” music, however, made racial difference more visible and raised the question of how the French state would deal with racial distinctions. This era also saw a dramatic rise in immigration from the colonies into France. The transatlantic jazz phenomenon in combination with the increased presence of black Francophone colonial subjects in the French métropole had profound cultural effects on the construction of race and gender ideals throughout the Atlantic.

The exploration that follows uses jazz and musical performance as the departure point for an examination of race relations and gender expectations operating in Paris and more widely throughout the Atlantic in the interwar period. This might seem to stray from the bounds of useful or conventional history. It raises the question of whether studying of popular music tell us anything that we, as historians, need to know. The following discussion contends that it is a

marvelous window into the past. Popular music is just that – popular. And for that very reason examining the experiences and attitudes of people who loved or repudiated jazz illustrates how perceptions of race, class, and gender affected human life in interwar Paris. This study began as an investigation of the sudden jazz craze that swept Europe in the 1920s. Initially it sought to examine how life in France affected black American performers who travelled to Europe to cater to the voracious interwar appetite for jazz. The resulting investigation showed that hundreds of black American performers constituted a visible and influential mini-migration from America into Europe during those years, one larger than previously realized. The study of this particular trend in popular music adds to our knowledge of black American life and culture in the interwar years and it illustrates a demographic pattern of out-migration from rural to urban areas and then across the Atlantic in a reverse middle passage.

Examining the careers of the black American performers involved in this musical migration revealed that the black American press reporting upon jazz artists in Paris constructed a cosmopolitan image of successful “race artists” that served political purposes back in the United States. This study illuminates a transnational flow of ideas and influences at work in the interwar period and argues that the jazz craze in Europe affected race relations in the United States. Furthermore, the following investigation of the positive experiences of black Americans illuminated the contrast between their experiences in Paris and those of black Francophone colonial subjects. Black French intellectuals remarked explicitly in print upon the contrast between the French treatment of black jazz players and that of black French colonial subjects. This study of popular music, therefore, examines many aspects of the historic context that extend well beyond the midnight world of jazz in Montmartre and Montparnasse. Historians of race, of
gender, of the black diaspora, of pan-African intellectual trends in the interwar Atlantic, of empire, immigration, racial oppression and anti-colonial action can all benefit from understanding how jazz and jazz performers of the interwar era affected these dimensions of the social history of the 1920s and 1930s.

Chapter One describes how by 1919 French society was inundated with the sounds of jazz, and the associated images and stereotypes that often contained primitivist, exotic and sexualized associations. It lays out the connection between the intensified visibility of racial difference due to the jazz craze and growing fears that post-war immigration into France from the colonies would compromise the integrity of the French national identity. The chapter then examines the tumulte noir’s impact on the black French community and argues that it motivated individuals to publicly differentiate themselves from black American jazz performers. At the same time, various pan-African groups in Paris became stronger throughout the interwar period and many reacted to race-based injustices in the French métropole. These groups publicly commented upon the jazz craze in order to identify their constituents as different from the jazz performers and to point out the racial prejudices that simmered under the color-blind Republican myth and that were obscured by the welcome offered to black individuals who played jazz.

Chapter Two reveals that at the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, the impact of the jazz migration contributed to the construction of an image of black jazz cosmopolitanism. First it considers how this pattern of movement could be considered as fostering a distinctive and pragmatic black cosmopolitanism. It comments upon the liberating aspect of travel and shows that the interwar period constituted a distinctive historical departure in the experience of black jazz
performers through the number of performers who travelled internationally and the extent of their travel. The cosmopolitanism of the resulting travel experience was in part due to the fact that performers on the Atlantic circuit were plunged into contact with a variety of different nationalities, cultures and languages although this was more true for men than for women. The positive black American jazz narrative generated in interwar France served to promote the prevailing doctrine of France’s republican color-blindness. Black newspapers seized upon this image and used it as the basis of a cosmopolitan critique of America’s oppressive racial practices at the time. This is exemplified in an incident reported in the Chicago Defender in which a white American picked a fight with four African-Americans in a Parisian café and was promptly thrown out. The article quotes a “leading French writer” proclaiming “we love our black citizens while Americans despise theirs; we want them to love France and enjoy all the freedom and happiness it has to offer.” Furthermore the modest socio-economic origins of many players and the populist nature of their métier helped extend the black cosmopolitan ideal to a wide cross-section of the black American community. At the same time the growth of labor restrictions and race-based discrimination in France fostered a more classic cosmopolitan sensibility among black American performers who began to realize the limitations operating on black French performers. The end result of these developments was to broaden the scope of a black Atlantic awareness and to establish a distinctive black cosmopolitanism that was initially pragmatic but increasingly had political import.

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2 This is exemplified in an incident reported in the Chicago Defender in which a white American picked a fight with four African-Americans in a Parisian café and was promptly thrown out. The article quotes a ‘leading French writer’ proclaiming ‘we love our black citizens while Americans despise theirs; we want them to love France and enjoy all the freedom and happiness it has to offer.’ Morgan Blakeley, "Georgia Bully Whipped in Paris Cafe: Legion Vets Find France Is Different," The Chicago Defender, October 1 1927.
Chapters Three and Four explore further the demographics of travel and the gendered ideals of success that accompanied black American jazz performers as they and their music traversed the oceans. Chapter Three considers these issues from the perspective of female performers while chapter four discusses male performers. In conjunction they show that black American performers who became transatlantic stars were subject to a set of conservative behavioral expectations in the hope that they would fulfill contemporary ideals of “race uplift.” The chapters analyze the rhetoric relating to each gender, in order to explore an aspirational discourse that operated throughout the black diasporic world. That discourse was reflected in WEB Du Bois’ notion of the “Talented Tenth,” or a corresponding French ideal of the *Elite Noire*. Within this transnational pan-African set of ideals black performers constituted both an opportunity and a hazard – their visibility made them excellent candidates for race leadership. The flamboyant and sometimes highly morally ambiguous world of the nightclub within which they worked, however, also disqualified many of the more rambunctious entertainers, such as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, from the position of race leader.

Each of these chapters also incorporates material from the black French community that had a perspective of race uplift that was locally distinctive from the American or even pan-African version but shared some characteristics. Black French commentators responded to prejudiced perceptions of black hypersexuality and primitivism that were intensified by the black American jazz presence. In contrast to their American peers, however they were less concerned with the performers as individuals who might compromise or ennable “the race.” They were more concerned with engaging with larger ideological constructions of race and dismantling them through cultural production and intellectual debate. This led to a certain tension between
promoting black cultural production (of the desirable sort) and manifesting mastery of Western
classical traditions in education, philosophy, intellectual engagement, and social behavior.

Chapter Five explores the attempt to promote black Francophone cultural products
further and examines the political aspects of this attempt. It demonstrates that the Francophone
black subjects contrasted their music and dance practices with the American-style jazz dances.
They did this as part of the process of identification and cultural articulation that was becoming
stronger throughout (bourgeois) Antillean black French networks. This interwar process
presaged the later Négritude movement. Many of the pan-African political networks, whether
conservative or more radical and left-wing, were quick to utilize popular music - both jazz and
the Caribbean dance music - as one means of attracting large numbers to their political
meetings. This suggests that jazz transcended political affiliations, even as it served political
purposes, and it also served as a cultural battleground. The final chapter (Chapter Six) considers
the way in which music and dance performances at the Colonial Exposition of 1931 reified
colonial constructions of racial difference and racial hierarchy. It then shows how those
performances were alternately contested and supported by the races they were supposed to
describe. In doing so it reveals the intersection between perceptions of racial difference at this
historical moment, performance, colonial rhetoric and practice, and anti-colonial agitation. That
intersection between jazz, race, and French colonial practices in the interwar period became
abundantly clear in the public image, career choices and racial characterization of Josephine
Baker at the time of the colonial exposition of 1931.
Academic interest in exploring the *tumulte noir*, as the French fascination with African and African American cultural products was called, appeared almost concurrently with the first black performers to set foot in Paris. Ernst-Alexandre Ansermet set the tone for the jazz commentary that was produced during the 1920s and 1930s. His analysis began the process of defining jazz as a black music, and setting the parameters for what that blackness meant in the context of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. He identified a “Negro way of playing the violin… of singing” which had to do with the accenting and sliding, and exaggerated vibrato that characterized the timbre. It was his analysis, and others like it, that helped shaped the reception of black Americans in interwar Paris, and constituted some of the cultural constructions of race that proved simultaneously liberating and limiting. The social construction of race in Europe has historically intertwined with the notion exemplified by works such as Ansermet’s that there is something that can be understood as “black” in music and that connotes instinctive musical ability rather than learned skill. The discussion of jazz during the interwar period was infused

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4 Ansermet’s piece was published after he saw Sidney Bechet playing with the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, and is the first really academic attempt at deciphering what made jazz special. It is reprinted as “Bechet and Jazz visit Europe, 1919” in Robert Gottlieb, *Reading Jazz : A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism from 1919 to Now*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).


6 The term black music is discussed at more length below. The literature on this is extensive, and somewhat divisive – theorists such as Kalamu ya Salaam, or Amiri Baraka, and more recently Eileen Southern and Paul Floyd, not to mention W.E.B. Du Bois and earlier thinkers, are committed to a category that IS black music while others argue
with claims about racial difference. Philippe Soupault, for example, discusses jazz, and the
qualities of the African-American performer in *The American Influence in France* (1930) in
which he articulates the fascination, but also the deeply engrained racial stereotypes, at work in
the French imagination at the time.⁷

Texts such as this serve as primary documents, however, in the academic exploration of
the *tumulte noir*. It has not been until recently that a substantial body of literature on the black
diaspora in France has appeared. As late as 1986 the style and paucity of the scholarship was
such that Rainer Lotz was still able to open his article on band leader Will Garland in the Fall
volume of *The Black Perspective in Music*, with the comment that “Although the Black-
American entertainer is well-known to Europeans, particularly because of the stereotypes that
were and are still very widespread there have been no published book length studies of the black
Americans who toured in Europe.”⁸ Lotz’s brief sketch of the Will Garland tour did little to
expand the field although his longer article “Black Diamonds are Forever: A glimpse of the
prehistory of Jazz in Europe,” in the Fall 1984 edition of the same journal was one of the first
articles examining black influence on popular culture in Europe but again is very brief and useful
primarily for the assembly of sources it provides.

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In the last two decades a growing body of scholarship has developed exploring the African-American involvement in the *tumulte noir* and offering some insight into the interaction between the black diasporic experience of race relations in Europe and the African American experience of race relations in America. Contrasts between race relations in the two regions have often emphasized the perception that Europe was more color-blind than America. Tyler Stovall’s work is foundational in the literature on the back expatriate experience in France, particularly his landmark text *Paris Noir*. His work makes a major contribution to the field in that he opened up the area, and provided a distinctive interpretation of the black experience in Paris. Stovall’s work in *Paris Noir*, however, is somewhat uncritical of French racial discourse and colonial practices. He acknowledges the limitations of the French experience for African-Americans, and the at-times illusory nature of the Parisian dream but his interpretive stance emphasizes the positives. It is accurately reflected in the following quotation:

African-Americans in France pioneered a new type of black community, one based in positive affinities and experiences rather than the negative limitations of segregation, one that included a wide variety of individuals yet at the same time celebrated black culture. This vision of community was an important collective achievement, one with much to offer all Americans.  

A similar tone can be seen in Stovall’s almost halcyon description of Bricktop’s, a nightclub owned by the eponymous artist, where according to Stovall, “black musicians mingled with white millionaires on a footing of complete equality.”

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Stovall employs of “black musicians” and “white millionaires” draw attention to the impossibility of the “complete equality” he describes.

Throughout his account Tyler Stovall hinted at, but underemphasized, the existence of racial prejudice in France despite the black American perception of the French métropole as a color-free haven. Stovall described associations between Josephine Baker and French stereotypes of black savagery and sexual enthusiasm but in a blithe summation he stated “The point is, however, that these stereotypes were overwhelmingly positive.” ¹¹ His discussion of sexual relations between white Europeans and men and women of color describes many such liaisons taking place. Stovall does assess the anxiety these alliances created, but he underplays the white European concern with miscegenation. ¹² This is characteristic of his style throughout Paris Noir in which he acknowledged the racially bound experience of black Americans in Paris and some of the limitations to black acceptance but failed to engage in a thorough exploration of the complexities of that experience. This does not, however, jeopardize the usefulness, and the excellence of his research, but this study will fill in some of the detail that his work necessarily glossed over.

Jody Blake offers a very different style of academic exploration in Le Tumulte Noir, (1999). She, in contrast to Stovall, could be accused of occupying a far more Eurocentric

¹¹ Stovall, Paris Noir, 72. See also p. 94 for a similar interpretation of Josephine Baker’s interaction with other black Americans in Paris.
authorial position, in that she focuses on the elite Parisian understanding of the *tumulte*. She is, however, very careful to differentiate between the perceptions of African-American cultural characteristics and their actuality and makes clear the act of mythologizing which drove European perceptions of black art and music in early-twentieth century Paris. She describes the way in which black men and women gained visibility, exposure, and conditional acceptance for their culture, and yet at the same time their cultural products were appropriated and commercialized, not to mention incorporated into a world-view in which black art was celebrated for its characteristics of spontaneity, naïveté, and primitivism. She also examines the dialectic between Harlem and Paris, locating the origins of the *tumulte* in the cultural developments occurring in Harlem in the nineteen-teens. Blake spends most of her time, however, exploring the reaction of the white Parisian art world to *le tumulte noir* and while her exploration of the cultural construct of blackness, and American blacks in interwar France is richly described she does not address the experience from the black perspective. The following study, in contrast, engages with how black communities throughout the Atlantic were affected by the jazz craze in interwar France, and thus it offers a useful compliment to Blake’s analysis.

Bernard Gendron’s work takes a theory-driven approach to the role of jazz in interwar France in *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*. He invokes Bourdieu, Foucault, and theories of cultural power and exchange in his examination of the meeting of the high art world and black American popular music in Montmartre. Gendron tries to create a genealogy of the aesthetics of popular music and cultural empowerment. One figure in this cultural empowerment is the black

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13 Jackson comments on this ‘absence’ in his work in the appendix to *Making Jazz French*, which is a succinct but very useful survey of major works relating to jazz in interwar Paris. Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 205-209.
performer in Paris. Gendron incisively states in his introduction “It is impossible to deal with the negotiations between high culture and low culture in this century without consistently encountering issues of race.” He argues that friendly encounters between the avant-garde and popular music, such as that between the Parisian intellectual elite and jazz incorporated “attitudinal as well as formal, institutional as well as textual, secondary as well as primary, consumption related as well as production related, and critical discursive as well as musical or painterly” aesthetic practices.\textsuperscript{14} The theoretical trend of Gendron’s work, however, and his focus on aesthetics, tends to limit the agency, or power, of the black men and women he describes. This interpretive choice is apparent in his claim that “the symbolic role of Jazz in 1920s Paris was decisively affected by the way it circulated as a signifier in debates among modernists, and between modernism and traditional culture.”\textsuperscript{15} Gendron is concerned with intellectual history, not the lived experiences of the black performers, whereas my research acknowledges the performers as active shapers of interwar culture.

Jeffrey H. Jackson’s book \textit{Making Jazz French} investigates the intersection between the black American expatriate experience, culture, and Parisian society in the interwar period.\textsuperscript{16} In comparison to Stovall he spends much more time on the French reception of jazz, and their

\textsuperscript{14} Gendron, \textit{Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club}, 19. He defines these practices, such as the distinction between primary and secondary aesthetic productions, and these definitions constitute one of Gendron’s major contributions to the field. He does proffer a token nod in this direction in the final page of chapter five, where he claims that the intervention of African-American authors and émigrés of the Harlem renaissance intervened in the French imaginary of the \textit{nègre}.

\textsuperscript{15} He does note the limitations of French stereotypes of black art and artists. But his prose also strips the jazz artists of agency, as in the following phrase, ‘Le Boeuf was in effect the middle term of a syllogism linking the signifier ‘jazz’ to the aesthetics of Cocteau’s centrist avant-garde movement Gendron, \textit{Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club}, 94-99.

\textsuperscript{16} Jackson, \textit{Making Jazz French}. 
incorporation of it into the French musical and cultural tradition, but in the process of doing this he sheds a great deal of light on the experience of black Americans in interwar Paris.\(^{17}\) Jackson argues that up until a certain date any music up was defined as jazz based on the skin color of the musicians performing it. The French, he states, believed that “jazz was somehow ancient and its black essence was present long before the 1920s.”\(^{18}\) He is careful to provide some description of the urban geography of Montmartre, and the distinctions between Montmartre and Montparnasse, discussing them as sites of racial and cultural, as well as geographic, location.\(^ {19}\) Jackson incorporates these diverse forms of evidence into a compelling and well-written examination of jazz in French culture. His primary concern, however is to trace musical and cultural exchange and in doing this he neglects considering how black Francophone subjects were excluded from the process of cultural integration and also how that process was predicated on a set of musically-justified racial stereotypes.

The studies discussed above are central texts in the body of literature about the black American expatriate presence in France and the place of jazz in French society.\(^ {20}\) They have established that jazz was associated with blackness and exoticism yet its popularity created great

\(^{17}\) Jackson is also good on the cross-cultural interchange between America and France in general, esp., the ‘modernisation’ represented by American popular culture.


opportunities and freedoms for performers. As a group, however, they fail to consider the wider context of increased post-war immigration into France, particularly the immigration of colonial subjects such as sub-Saharan Africans, who were often contrasted with black Americans.

Scholars working on immigration have explored the color-blind myth and revealed the illusory nature of the republican promise but have not used the opportunities presented by the African-American comparison.\textsuperscript{21} And both the historical scholarship on immigration and that considering the experience of African American exiles in Paris has paid scant attention to the gender dimensions of the processes they describe.\textsuperscript{22} Charles Didier Gondola’s brief but groundbreaking comparison between black Americans and Senegalese, for example, illustrates twentieth-century French construction of racial identities but it deals only with men, and does not consider gender as an element in that French construction.\textsuperscript{23}


A related sweep can be seen in texts such as Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. The author investigates cultural changes, and processes across time, and space, using a broad range of evidence from images, to musical works, to intellectual discussions, novels, and print media. Gilroy’s defense of a black Atlantic sensibility that had a definite presence, shaped black identity around Atlantic networks and referenced a shared heritage yet was not essentialist, nor blindly Pan-African, enables him to yoke the ideas and literary offerings of such black thinkers as W.B. Dubois and Frederick Douglass, with the hip-hop producer Quincy Jones, guitarist Jimi Hendrix, and British rap group Soul II Soul. He also manages to reinterpret the Western understanding of ‘modernism’ by showing the way in which these black thinkers contributed to it, and challenged it in their work, particularly by illustrating the reliance of the ‘modern’ on the mechanisms of terror such as slavery and the subjugation of black peoples. Gilroy’s work is perhaps the best-known of a range of studies that do this cultural, social and historical work with particular reference to race. Yet his work, as he himself admits, leaves open many questions pertaining to gender and while he acknowledges that race and gender are mutually constituted he leaves the gender dimension unexamined.

Christian Koller’s comparative work on French and German reactions to black troops in the aftermath of World War One illustrates the way in which intersections between race, sexuality, gender, and empire can successfully be explored and this study builds upon his


24 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. 
approach.\textsuperscript{25} While Koller discusses the white response to the possibility of cross-racial sexual relations in the wake of World War One I explore how members of black diasporic communities dealt with the same issue. The biographical archives and memoirs of ‘Bricktop,’ for example, a successful African-American nightclub owner in interwar Paris, indicate that considerable thought and anxiety existed around cross-racial liaisons in black Atlantic networks. Catherine Hall’s edited collection on \textit{Cultures of Empire} features a number of contributions that, like Koller’s work, mine the intersection between gender and race productively in the context of “cultures of empire.” Music, sadly, is absent from the cultural products under discussion in both instances. In the work that follows I have attempted to maintain the focus on gender and race as mutually constitutive, just as the Hall collection stresses, while offering the fresh terrain of the musical practices that characterized interwar Paris.

Furthermore this study shows that not only were racial distinctions alive and well in the French capital but they intersected with socio-economic divisions. Class differences added an extra layer of complexity to the many differences French colonials and black American entertainers experienced vis a vis the French treatment of racial difference. Elite white women may have acquired a tan to reveal their “inner tropic” but those who formed liaisons with black American musicians tended to be habitués of the lower socio-economic realm.\textsuperscript{26} The middle

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{26} The notable exception to this trend is the white heiress Nancy Cunard, of course, but the scandal she caused simply underlines the exceptionality of her alliance, while black men like Leon Crutcher, who married a white showgirl, demonstrate a more frequent type of alliance. Both examples are from Stovall. The ‘inner tropic’ comment is drawn from Arthur Chandler’s description of the \textit{Exposition Coloniale}, in Arthur Chandler, “Empire of the Republic: The Exposition Coloniale Internationale De Paris, 1931,” \textit{Contemporary French Civilization}, no.
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class Antilleans who were motivated to contest the exotic jazz image through literary and artistic production were unlikely to appear at the fiery anti-colonial meetings led by working class ex-soldiers from sub-Saharan Africa. The research for this analysis revealed many examples such as this which offer productive new avenues for the exploration of class, sexuality, race and gender in Europe.

Black women in interwar Paris are beginning to receive some scholarly attention but are still woefully under-documented and my research treats their words and experiences as an integral component of the narrative of interwar Paris. Recent work on black diasporic practices and networks in the Atlantic during this era has made some headway in considering the contribution of women to pan-African movements but this work does not consider the vital contribution made by jazz to the emergence of pan-Africanism in the French métropole. Finally no-one has yet documented the impact of the jazz migration upon the African-American community back in America. Benedict Anderson’s concept of an “imagined community” captures the connection between touring black American jazz performers and their home communities. The following study is the first to explore the ways in which jazz success abroad expanded the horizons of an imagined community of black fans and families at home.


This brief literature review reveals that while the scholarly body of work is beginning to explore the *tumulte noir* as a site for the construction of gendered identities, and the proliferation of a complex set of negotiations relating to gender, race, identity and sexuality, there is more work to be done in this area. Several major conferences have been held in the last decade to stimulate research into the black cultural presence in Europe. The emphasis on nations other than France in each of these conferences points to the major contribution this study makes by addressing these issues in a French context. The following study explores these complex lines of connection, and delineates the gender expectations and hopes for racial uplift that linked black performers who migrated to Europe between the wars with each other and with the society they left behind in America. Racial perceptions, socio-economic aspirations, and gendered expectations also linked and differentiated them from black men and women in the receiving societies in which they lived and performed.

**Analytic approaches and usage of terms**

This study considers the movement of black men and women and ideas about black men and women in the context of the Atlantic basic between the two world wars. As such it treats the Atlantic as a geographical and cultural field criss-crossed by a variety of human networks.

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29 A conference was held in 2005 discussing these issues. “Les Africains et leurs descendants en Europe avant le XXe siècle,” Toulouse, 08 – 10 décembre 2005, Université de Toulouse Le Mirail. See also the foreword by Paul Gilroy in Raphael-Hernandez, *Blackening Europe*. 
although much of the attention is devoted to America and to France, in particular Paris. Nevertheless the unit of analysis is the Atlantic and thus this study is transnational – it is concerned with the connections and networks that transcended and flowed around and across national boundaries while acknowledging that those national boundaries existed and determined many aspects of the lives of the men and women in the following study.

The following discussion also relies upon the understanding that the various communities involved in the transmission and consumption of jazz music in the interwar Atlantic participated in a discourse or set of discourses that constructed race. The term discourse is derived from Foucault’s use of the term at its simplest where it references an intertwined and semi-invisible system of practices and beliefs that determine the shape of daily life for a group, or groups of people at a specific historical moment. The following quotation shows how Foucault’s historical analysis exposes the constructed nature of many human social and knowledge systems:

It is perhaps true to say that, in Greece, mathematics were born from techniques of measurement; sciences of nature, in any case, were born, to some extent, at the end of the middle ages, from the practices of investigation. The great empirical knowledge that covered the things of the world and transcribed them into the ordering of an indefinite discourse that observes, describes, and establishes the ‘facts’ (at a time when the Western world was beginning the economic and political conquest of this same world) had its operating model no doubt in the Inquisition – that immense invention that our recent mildness has placed in the dark recesses of our memory. But what this politico-juridical, administrative and criminal, religious and lay, investigation was to the sciences of nature, disciplinary analysis has been to the sciences of man. These sciences, which have so delighted our ‘humanity’ for over a century, have their technical matrix in the petty, malicious, minutiae, of the disciplines and their investigations. These investigations are perhaps to psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, criminology, and so many other strange sciences, what the terrible power of investigation was to the calm knowledge of the animals, the plants, or the earth. Another power, another knowledge.\footnote{Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison}, 2nd Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 226. Foucault’s point is partly that these systems arise somewhat organically, even piecemeal, but assume monolithic proportions. He explains his philosophy of history further in Michel Foucault, \textit{Archaeology of Knowledge}, Routledge Classics (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002). He puts it to use in \textit{Discipline and Punish} and in Michel Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).}

He uses “disciplines” here in a very specific context, to signify a three-pronged process of how human bodies become subject to surveillance (hierarchical observation), normalizing judgment, and examination. This creates the modern prison-system but also the underlying modern (Western) human consciousness of why and how one should behave in such a way as NOT to end up in prison. This analysis is particularly pertinent when one considers the disjunction in the mechanisms of surveillance operating on North African, or Sub-Saharan African immigrants to France compared with African-Americans or even Antilleans. The latter two groups were not subject to the same level of formal police surveillance, because of a set of normalizing judgments which assessed their threat to the French State in terms of an ethnically determined hierarchical structure, and, furthermore, established and enforced the “truth” of that
judgment according to various forms of examination – of papers, of living environments, of health and hygiene practices, and more.

Foucault did not explicitly discuss race (or gender extensively) in his work.\textsuperscript{32} The insight that empirical knowledge is produced by discursive systems, however, discussed in many of Foucault’s works. It reinforces the approach I take in the following study which is to suggest that perceptions of race, like practices and beliefs about sexuality, or like societal ways and means of judging, disciplining and punishing dissident individuals (and deciding who counts as dissident) are manufactured according to a set of pre-existing beliefs. These perceptions of racial difference are then absorbed, internalized, institutionalized, upheld and sustained both by human individuals, customs, and knowledge systems. The following study proceeds on the understanding that the social construction of racial difference, in any given period, functions as a discursive system. Throughout much of post enlightenment human history these racial distinctions were seen as natural, self-evident, and biologically based. When any such beliefs and practices are questioned, examined or even parodied – as they were in interwar Paris – it becomes evident that they are socially determined not historically inevitable and the discourse begins to rupture. The impact jazz had upon Paris meant that certain communities became ever more aware of and affected by racial discourses. This generated efforts to show that the discourse was flawed, should not be taken as given, and thus the discursive construction of race in both

Europe and America shifted notably in the interwar era. The impact of jazz upon the visibility of racial distinctions and racial discourse in the French métropole contributed to this discursive shift.

Any study such as this presents some difficulties regarding how to use and engage with racial terminology. Much of the discussion that follows engages with the process through which human beings define each other upon the basis of skin color. It investigates some of the tangible outcomes of socially constructed ideas about race in the interwar Atlantic. The identification of African men and women, and men and women of African descent settled throughout the world as “black” recognizes an historical predisposition to classify those men and women upon the basis of skin color. It acknowledges the oppressive and unjust conditions that have resulted, and continue to result, from attributing certain qualities and characteristics to race, which is always a socio-cultural human imposition of meaning upon melanin. However the comments, experiences and arguments of the men and women who fall within the definition of African American or Diasporic African it becomes clear that they shared a sense of racial identification and solidarity within their own lives and work and that this shared understanding fuelled the pan-African movement.

In order to honor the term most often used by the anti-colonial black activists in the interwar years themselves, who were beginning to point out the way that racial identification and oppression affected every man and woman of color I have used the term “black” in the study (this also reflects a term chosen by Paul Gilroy, and various other scholars of the black diaspora. This term most truly replicates the term noir that was reclaimed by those activists during the
period under discussion. I have also used Afro-Caribbean, Francophone Afro-Caribbean (and Antillean which signifies a similar group) and black French (a broad group encompassing sub-Saharan Africans and French Caribbeans) at various points during the discussion that follows as they seemed to best represent the groups I was discussing. Furthermore I use the term “the Race” to refer to the African American community in the sense that it was used in the scholarship and print journalism of the day – as a term that signified a unity of origin, of a racial designation active within American culture, and which signified the aspirations and connections binding together principally African-Americans but also other black men and women with whom they forged connections and a sense of solidarity across the globe.

One aspect of life that is central to this narrative of jazz and race in France between the wars is that of gender. The processes under examination in this discussion were all shaped by gender ideals and practices that determined appropriate activities and functions for men and women. My scholarship draws on a rich body of gender theory and analysis and yet my method throughout the following discussion has been to try and keep the theoretical discussion to a minimum and show through concrete examples how the cultural meanings imposed upon biological sex differences shaped the experiences of the individuals and groups I describe. As always, in any discussion involving a consideration of gender the discrepancies between prescriptive literature and lived practice tells us a great deal of societal conceptions of, and expectations relating to, gender differences. These affect men as well as women because gender,

33 Hayes Edwards, and Gary Wilder have good discussions of the use of noir versus nègre in the interwar years in Paris. For one response to the American context see Bell Hooks, Black Looks : Race and Representation (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992).
as many scholars have shown, is mutually and multiply constituted. Chapter three thus considers how black women contributed to, disrupted, and were affected by, expectations of black female respectability active in the interwar Atlantic, and in chapter four, in particular, I tried to consider how the issue of appropriate and admirable masculinity loomed large upon the Atlantic horizon between the wars.\textsuperscript{34}

The intersection between gender and race that shaped individual experiences in the context of the jazz craze was further complicated by the nature of French ideas of citizenship and nationality. The term “socio-ethnic” that appears occasionally throughout the following discussion recognizes that some black Francophone colonial subjects felt an identification with their country of birth even though according to official French rhetoric as colonies their birthplaces had no status as nation-states, thus the term “nationality” is inaccurate for women and men such as the Nardal sisters from Martinique. They themselves related to the French nation as citizens but also to Martinique as their homeland. “Socio-ethnic” tries to capture the complexity of their national, social, racial, and class affiliations.

The issue of agency enters the narrative that follows both explicitly and implicitly. Racial prejudice was alive and well amongst Parisian audiences who consumed the spectacle offered by black performers. It also affected non-entertainers who lived with the realities of European racial thinking and the impact of the jazz craze upon perceptions of racial difference affected their

\textsuperscript{34} Work on masculinity is fairly new terrain in French Historical studies. For the intersection of race and masculinity in a time of war in France see Fogarty, \textit{Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918}. For an assessment of respectability and African American society, that does scrutinize the role of gender somewhat, see Kevin Kelly Gaines, \textit{Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
citizenship status, their career opportunities, and their relationships. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the flow of power and the processes of racial construction were far from unidirectional. White audiences were valued for their ability to pay for black performances, and provide the international fame and recognition that guaranteed black performers status in society of any color. Black performers also had a monopoly on jazz credibility and therefore employment. Their status as sought after performers also guaranteed them clout in the various social worlds in which they moved. Moreover black performers exerted their “gaze” upon the variety of racial others with whom they came into contact in Paris. This latter point is demonstrated not only in chapter two, which considers black American perceptions of France, but also in chapter five which attempts to get at the experience of French colonial subjects of color who performed in the large exhibits at the Exposition coloniale of 1931.

The role of music in social and historical developments is central to the following study. Music often functions in social interactions as innocuous background noise, or a wordless pleasurable leisure pursuit, a non-signifying aesthetic field for enjoyment. It is an immensely appealing pursuit – most human beings have a favorite song they hum, or put on their sound system to relax, get ready to party, or to settle down to work. Music is a sensual, relaxing joy. And yet the very fact that we can use it to set moods for such different activities begins to give away the extent to which it can shape or express our attitudes and beliefs about the world. Ronald Radano, and Philip Bohlman’s edited collection of articles, Music and The Racial Imagination, offers a useful model of a broadly encompassing approach toward race, gender and music, where the presence of race in music and the consequences of that in the present and the past are the focus of investigations ranging from Chicano identity to the legacy of the Austro-
Hungarian empire.\textsuperscript{35} The collection is one of a variety of works produced in the last two decades that examine music in its social, and socially constructing, context. The authors pay particular attention to the way in which whiteness, while often an unmarked category, is nevertheless the outcome of the discursive production of knowledge. The following examination draws inspiration and some methodological impetus from this style of cultural and musical analysis that is typically underutilized in history.

The way historians can usefully integrate music into their analysis emerges in the work of Lawrence Kramer who has suggested productive ways in which to analyze music as a “cultural practice.” This approach enables scholars to parse musical products, structures, and styles to reach useful conclusions about how these practices, styles, and forms not only emerge from specific historic and social and cultural locations but also sustain and create them.\textsuperscript{36} Jazz functioned in just this fashion in France. Even music linked by the loosest possible stylistic thread to the African American product might be distinguished as jazz by virtue of not only its musical qualities – for example that of rhythmic syncopation – but also a social perception about the nature of the performer – that the best jazz players were black. And then the performance of that music looped back into social perceptions and expectations of race.

The efforts I make in the following discussion to examine the practices and spaces surrounding music also invoke Ruth Solie’s examination of Beethoven, in which she suggests


that “the link between music and other aspects of European intellectual life can be made visible by studying music’s place in the general cultural conversation.”

Although Solie’s work is directed toward studying Beethoven’s music her understanding that “the critical language in which music is described and evaluated is drawn from a pool of ideas and perceptions common to all of those performing, critiquing, and listening to the music” has general applicability. Her contention that any contemporary engagement with a musical performance or style therefore “reveals common concerns and ideological preoccupations of the period” is evident in the European reception of jazz. This type of analysis bears fruit in the work of Jody Blake, and Bernard Gendron. I also find it useful in describing how the arrival of jazz in France both reflected and intensified existing perceptions of race.

At the same time my analysis of jazz music in Paris complicates any easy application of Solie’s understanding. Furthermore it asks that we take Kramer into a transnational and comparative perspective because of the diverging concerns and pre-occupations of various groups of listeners and of the performers. The “common pool” of language and musical understanding shared by the European patrons, including the avant-garde, was not that of the African American trumpet player who came to earn money entertaining them in Paris. Nor was it entirely congruent with that of black Francophone subjects who watched the onset of the jazz craze with interest and apprehension. Each of these groups reacted to the raced connotations of the music by drawing on slightly different “shared pools” of language and cultural understanding. The discussion of black music that follows suggests that African-Americans and

Black Francophone individuals shared some aspects of a cultural, musical, and historical heritage that set them apart from Europeans and yet their common pool of ideas was also inflected with national and class differences.

For this reason I find the transnational and comparative approach of Sonjah Stanley Niaah an extremely useful example of how to illuminate similarities and differences in the black diasporic experience. Her work offered a solid methodological foundation for my discussion of the biguine in chapter five.\(^{38}\) Niaah writes about Jamaican and South African dance halls and she argues that a “dancehall’s macro- and microspatialities reveals spatial categories, philosophies, and systems.” She uses the term “performance geography” to describe:

> how people living in particular locations give those locations identity through performances... I see it as a mapping of the locations used, the types and systems of use, the politics of their location in relation to other sites and other practices, the character of events/rituals in particular locations, and the manner in which different performances/performers relate to each other within and across different cultures.\(^ {39}\)

This offers a practical demonstration of how to combine an analysis of social realities with a consideration of musical practices. In chapter five I use this method of examining the spaces in which black dance and music was enjoyed and relating it to the urban context. The chapter examines individuals was involved in music-making, and how, and where there were tensions between different groups involved. Using these methods I was able to investigate the politicization of the Afro-Caribbean music style, the biguine, in interwar Paris and the way the


\(^{39}\) Niaah, "Mapping Black Atlantic Performance Geographies : From Slave Ship to Ghetto."
musical practice intersected with the incipient anti-colonial political and artistic movement at the time. This chapter is characteristic of how my analytic approach emphasizes the historical nature of the processes under discussion to an even greater extent than many musicological or literary analyses.  

The methods outlined by the scholars cited above and show how examining musical practices illuminates our understanding of historical events and developments. In this regard I have also been guided by the work of Keith Negus, Richard Middleton, Ray Pratt, John Shepherd, and Simon Frith who have collectively shown that popular music can offer revealing insights into social situations. Their scholarship complements with that of Kramer, and Niaah in that it emphasizes how even the least political seeming forms and styles of music can convey complex ideas about society, gender, and race.

Where these scholars differ from Kramer, and Solie, but intersect productively with Niaah and Bohlman and Radano is examining black music. This study uses the term black music constantly as it explores how musical practices intersected with the pan-African movement, and the emergent Négritude movement of the nineteen-twenties. The understanding of particular sounds, instruments, rhythms and musical styles, as black worked in conjunction with performance spaces and the race of performers to create a common sense understanding of music as a cultural product associated with race. This association took on a significance that stretched

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well beyond the world of music into that of politics, anti-colonial activism, intellectual and aesthetic production, and changing perceptions of racial difference. And black men and women from a variety of different countries and backgrounds subscribed to a vision of black music.

As Samuel Floyd pointed out in his examination of *The Power of Black Music* pan-Africanism “posited the belief that black people all over the world share an origin and a heritage… and the cultural products of blacks everywhere expressed their particular fundamental beliefs.” Music was just such a cultural product. The study that follows, therefore, uses the term black music to refer to the expressive culture of men and women of African descent, and I principally discuss the music that originated, or was perceived to originate, in African, African American and Francophone Afro-Caribbean communities. Of these the African American musical styles loosely encapsulated under the term jazz get the most attention because they became iconic of the era. In approaching my source music I have been grateful for the clarity of Emmett Price’s delineation of the “shared and distinctive” features of black music. These are:

- The approach to the organization of rhythm based on the principle of rhythmic and implied metrical contrast.
- The tendency to approach singing or playing any instrument in a percussive manner. (Hence the European conception of jazz music as relying on drums – some of what they were hearing was the piano, and double bass, along with other instruments being used as part of the percussion section)

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42 Interwar Paris also saw the growth of North African expressive culture during this time. That set of historical developments also encompassed cultural and political forms of expression and activism, but those developments deserve their own book-length treatment.
43 Samuel Floyd identifies this as “polyrhythms and additive rhythms,” and I would add that the outcome of this impulse is rhythmic complexity and the accented/off beat emphasis known as ‘syncopation.’
The tendency to create musical forms in which antiphonal, responsorial, or call and response musical structures abound. (A classic example is Cab Calloway’s rendition of ‘Hi de Ho,’)

The tendency to create a high density of musical events within a relatively short time frame – tendency to fill up all of the musical space.

The tendency to incorporate physical body motion as an intrinsic part of the music-making process.

The tendency to approach music making in which a kaleidoscopic range of dramatically contrasting sound colors (or timbres) in both vocal and instrumental music are used. (Think here of Louis Armstrong's growls, or Ella Fitzgerald’s scat singing, in addition to Bessie Smith’s groaning in her inimitable blues singing, or the hollers of traditional work songs).

Together these elements reflect a “heterogeneous sound ideal” derived from a set of African music tendencies, practices, and interpretive strategies (and myths and beliefs) that survived the middle passage and the exigencies of plantation life and are shown forth in African American and Caribbean music.

This sketch of a consensus on black music however, can mask ongoing difficulties with the term. Defining black music relies upon acknowledging racial difference even as it tries to deny the biological basis of any such racial difference. It also conceals a huge variety of music-making communities and individuals under the broad category of black. Furthermore the notion that black music “incorporates physical body motion as an intrinsic part of the music-making process” has led even contemporary music critics to veer close to a pejorative linkage between

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44 Samuel Floyd has a tumbling waterfall of a description, drawn from Olly Wilson, which adds more detail to this basic outline. Floyd lists “calls cries, hollers, call and response, additive rhythms and polyrhythms, heterophony, pendular thirds, blues notes, bent notes, and elisions, hums, moans, grunts, vocables, rhythmic-oral declamations. Constant repetition of rhythmic and melodic figures (> riffs and vamps), off beat melodic phrasings and parallel intervals and chords, timbral distortions, musical individuality within collectivity (eg solos, improvisations), game rivalry, hand clapping, apart playing’ in his description of the ‘heterogeneous sound ideal’ that comprises black music.

black music, sex and instinct. Simon Frith, for example, writing in 1983, was dangerously close to the European commentators of the nineteen-thirties in identifying black music as “instinctual” and “sexual.” He wrote “whereas Western dance forms control body rhythms and sexuality itself with formal rhythms and innocuous tunes, black music expresses the body, hence sexuality with a direct physical beat and an intense emotional sound – sound and beat are felt rather than interpreted via a set of conventions.” Frith’s intent was to try and identify how, as Price as argued, physicality is incorporated as part of black music. And yet he does almost echo the commentators on the jazz craze who saw Josephine Baker as freak phenomenon and an exotic primitive, rather than as a highly skilled dancer and entertainer who grew throughout her career, or Bechet as someone whose musical talent was with him “at birth.”

Josephine Baker serves as a particularly telling example of this process. Her life narrative winds through this study and my discussion of race in interwar Paris ends by examining her involvement in the Colonial Exposition of 1931. The reason is that Josephine Baker who, I would argue, is one of the greatest jazz dancers of all time, became for many the image of female involvement in the tumulte noir. Her impact in France exemplifies the way in which black music and dance could be read, simplistically, as “music of the body,” where the body means “uninhibited and natural, and expressive of sexuality.”

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47 Negus, Popular Music in Theory, 102.
Janet Flanner was famed for her columns and comments on the American Expatriate experience in Paris, and she records Baker’s impact on the Parisian public in her customary expressive and incisive prose:

she made her entrance entirely nude except for a pink flamingo feather between her limbs…whatever happened next was unimportant. The two specific elements had been established and were unforgettable – her magnificent dark body, a new model that to the French proved for the first time that black was beautiful, and the acute response of the white masculine public in the capital of hedonism – France.48

Such constructions of black music sometimes served to obscure the high level of skill and art, of complex and difficult musical learning mastered by outstanding jazz musicians such as Sydney Bechet, Louis Armstrong, or Valaida Snow.49 The black men and women of America and the Caribbean who lived and moved and had their being in interwar Paris engaged with the pejorative raced assessments of black music that belittled it as purely instinctive. Chapters one, three, four, and five each touch upon the ways that the desire to offset this perception had a dominant influence on the local variants of pan-African activity in Paris.

These difficulties aside the examination of black music is essential to a full understanding of African American history and in the study that follows I show that it is also critical to our understanding of French Afro-Caribbean history. Kalamu ya Salaam wrote a passionate defense

48 Janet Flanner, Paris Was Yesterday, 1925-1939 (New York,: Viking Press, 1972). She can be a vicious critic sometimes but her memoirs are valuable for the vivid recollections and commentary on Paris 1920s-1930s and beyond.
49 Valaida Snow was a female trumpet player, active in the interwar period, often likened to Louis Armstrong as being equally gifted ‘although’ a female. Her career suffered a spectacular decline however, and accounts disagree on whether it was drugs, or being imprisoned in a concentration camp, that initiated the decline. Be that as it may she was one of the greater jazz musicians of her day. See the account of her European tour in "Rhythm Record Review: Something to Shout About," Ballroom and Band, March 1935.
of this approach, one that tackled the dangers of essentializing black music, in which he outlined the historical context that generated “Great Black Music.” His analysis contended that black music, therefore, is “not a racial term but it refers, instead, to a shared culture and consciousness of oppression and silencing within the context of slavery and colonialism.” His analysis looks at history and race relations to conclude, ultimately, that whether played by black or white men or women “Great Black Music” consists of music that springs from the shared experience of oppression of slavery, and that has extra-musical significance:

The social and aesthetic significance of African American music is neither abstract nor biological. The social and aesthetic significance of GBM is very precisely its warrior stance in the face of the status quo and its healing force for the victims of colonization. Ultimately, the best of our music helps us resist colonization and reconstruct ourselves, whole and healthy.

In ya Salaam’s assessment, therefore, the power of music to transcend, resist, overcome, and articulate one’s experiences of a world dominated by exclusionary white hierarchical structures is just as central to the ethos of black music as its musical elements.

In this respect ya Salaam is re-articulating a well-developed strain of thinking about music that can be seen in W. E. B. Du Bois’ use of spirituals as epigraphs for chapters in The Souls of Black Folk. Noble Sissle came up with a more jazz-oriented and less philosophically oriented statement of this theme in a piece he write for a black French newspaper in which he argued that Jazz’s popularity grew from just the type of transcendent “joy in the midst of

51 Salaam, "It Didn't Jes Grew," 375.
trouble,” and the music articulated the ability within the black community in America to overcome hardship and find strength in musical expression. This strain of thinking about black music raises the issue of the potential of black music to articulate political resistance. The brief mention of colonization in Kalam ya Salaam’s analysis in conjunction with his invocation of the wider black diaspora supports my contention that the music of the Caribbean can and should be analyzed in the way that he, Floyd, Wilson, Price, Negus, Frith, Brian Ward, and so many others have considered African American music. When the Nardal’s enjoyed the music of the Caribbean at the Bal coloniale, for example, chapter six shows that this activity had a significance that went beyond the purely musical. It demonstrated their cultural pride in being Antillean. This was an ethnic pride – not exactly national, as they were French citizens, and proud to be, nor exactly racial – because they clearly differentiated their music from that of black Americans – but definitely linked to their heritage, their country of origin, and a sense that the music therefore expressed something that made them who they were, one aspect of which was their membership of the African diaspora in the Caribbean.

It is my hope that in this study it will become increasingly clear that black music, like the individuals creating it, was and is a many-splendored thing. As Paul Gilroy suggests there is a shared experiential core behind it but individual and collective iterations vary widely and have been shaped by the movement of black individuals and cultural products around the Atlantic:

53 Sissle’s commentary indicated his pride that jazz has caught on throughout the world. Florence Mills also betrayed this in her joy that the English had adopted the Charleston, and although the Nardals were ambivalent about how the biguine was transformed in Paris they were happy that its popularity made their cultural heritage more widely known. Sissle, “Why Jazz has Conquered the World,” La Dépêche africaine, no 8, Oct, 1928, English Language page. Florence Mills, ”“Magic Moon That Brought Me Money” Undated Clipping, " Florence Mills Collection, New York. Andrée Nardal, “The Créole Biguine,” in "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World," (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1971), 121-123.
“the cultural and political connections that bind black people together have been continually created through identities and practices that have been generated during processes of movement and mediation.”

Jazz, a music that was heard and appreciated as a raced cultural practice in interwar Europe, invigorated those who heard it, created fans, entered permanently into European culture and gave the black Americans who brought jazz to Europe a wider cultural experience that then had an impact upon American culture. It shook things up among black French citizens too and that impact had its own political and socio-cultural ramifications. The following study attempts to trace the way in which jazz touched individuals and groups to such an extent that the popular music instigated some changes in the political and social realm of the interwar Atlantic region.

Methods

My methodological approach to the examination of the topic was eclectic. I used some aspects of the musicological approaches described above but these took backseat to a range of traditional historical methods of analysis, close reading, and image analysis. One of my methodological approaches relied on a range of sources to assemble a more quantitative assessment of the scale of black American movement into Paris. I used sources I gathered to assemble my narrative and descriptive account to assemble some statistical information. I made extensive use of the extremely popular and successful black newspaper the Chicago Defender and considerable use of other black newspapers such as the Pittsburgh Courrier and the

Amsterdam News held at the Schomburg. These print media sources, along with the clippings files on jazz and jazz musicians in the department of Arts and Spectacles of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France provided an invaluable week-by-week, month by month, record of the scale of the black jazz migration and also offered very specific details about which performers and productions were going where. I used these, in conjunction with performers’ biographies, the personal archives of many of the performers and those of French jazz critics, and black American literary figures to build a database of black performers known to have been in Paris in the interwar years.

This database records the gender, known performance dates and venues, instrument/s, and marital status of the various black Americans who travelled to Europe (and beyond) between 1919 and 1939. The resulting database provided a solid empirical foundation for my claims about the scale, impact and gendered demographic of the black jazz migration, which is the term I use to describe the movement of black American musical performers across the Atlantic in the interwar period.

In addition to developing a database of performers I analyzed newspaper articles qualitatively, searching for evidence to illustrate how the successes and experiences of black American jazz performers were heralded and interpreted by the black community in the United States. I then compared the newspaper accounts to performers’ own memories and to program notes and discographies to assess the validity of the information and, where necessary, compare different evaluations of the same performance/incident. Sometimes the disjunctions between different accounts offered some very useful evidence of splits between different black groups or
even between a performers desire to be seen a certain way, and their actual reputation (for example chapter three explores a letter from Josephine Baker, claiming status as a “leading race artist” that conflicts markedly with other reports about her in the black press.)

The wealth of archival material held at the Schomburg Center for Black Culture in New York facilitated this interpretive task. I used the Mabel Mercer Collection, the Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith Collection, and a diverse set of collections held within the Helen Armstead-Johnson Collection (including those of Florence Mills, and Opal Cooper) in addition to the newspaper reports. The oral histories recorded as part of the ‘Duke Ellington’ collection at the Schomburg Center and the photograph collections at the Schomburg Center there helped to build up a comprehensive picture of the performers’ responses to their European experience. I used secondary literature to help contextualize these archival sources.

One of the more difficult research tasks I undertook was to attempt a useful and detailed comparison between the black American experience in Paris, and the black colonial experience. In doing this I was helped enormously by a Chateaubriand grant which enabled me to spend time researching in France. I examined the comments made about black American performers in popular newspapers and journals, produced by both black and white Francophone communities and I also used a wide selection of magazines and journals. I had the good luck to consult the archives of noted ‘fans’ such as Hughes Panassié and Charles Delaunay.\footnote{Hughes Panassié’s archives are held in a special collection in the Bibliothèque Municipale in Villefranche-de Rouergue, his birthplace. Charles Delaunay’s are available at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Tolbiac).} The clippings files on jazz held in the Rondel Collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Richelieu) were invaluable in building up an impression of the French response to jazz between 1919 and 1939.
The print media collections in the British Library added a wider European context to my examination of the European response to jazz.

The music was what generated my interest in these performers and as part of the research for the following study I listened to the music that was heard as racially distinctive in the 1920s, both in Europe and America to assess musical elements that sustained this set of racial beliefs. Although much of the musicological detail has been abbreviated the following study does offer a very brief and simplistic comparative analysis of black American jazz with the Caribbean Biguine as a basis for my claim that black French and American communities participated in the different styles of black music. I also used the print commentaries on these different styles of music to analyze what was heard as unique to the Caribbean, or America, by the audiences themselves.

The records of police surveillance of black colonials, held at the Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, in Paris were a valuable resource for tracking the French State’s concern with black colonial subjects and their relative lack of concern with black American subjects. These records also contained valuable evidence of how racially motivated disputes and were treated in nightclubs and other musical venues. The records of such disturbances reveal evidence of anxieties (and the absence thereof) related to cross-racial interactions in the policing of performers and patrons. The police records provided an astonishing amount of information

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about black Francophone community and political gatherings that incidentally revealed how important the use of music-making was in attracting people to anti-colonial meetings and became a valuable avenue into the exploration of dance and political activity in chapter Five. There was an implicit contrast between police concern with that type of music-making and the absence of police concern with the black American performers who occasionally got into fights in the nightclubs. The black American performers were notably far less subject to surveillance and arrest than the black Francophone subjects. One other body of evidence I consulted in France was the *Journal Officiel*, (Record of Parliamentary Debates) for the 1920s leading up to the 1927 Naturalization Law to consider how musicians were affected by the tightening of immigration laws. I used this research specifically for the purposes of tracking the laws applying to musicians and turned to secondary sources for a wider historical overview of immigration policy during the era.

1. Jazz, Racial Prejudice, and the black community in Paris

In August 1918 a group of spectators gathered to enjoy a musical entertainment in the Jardin des Tuileries, a bare few hundred meters from the Louvre, the symbolic centre of Western high art. They witnessed a curious sight: The “Harlem Hellfighters” band had hit town, sweeping spectators away with the energy and originality of their sound. This group of African-American soldier-musicians, led by the charismatic James Reese Europe, was playing what would soon be widely known as jazz. The “Dusky players” finished their first selection and “a shout went up from the multitude that must have been heard by the Kaiser in Germany.” Reflecting on this success nearly a decade later, Noble Sissle, the drum major for the band, described the confusion their performance, skin color, dress and music caused among contemporary French listeners:

It was quite amusing to see how strange they would look at us because we were the first Negro troops from America at the front. At first we were taken for Moroccans or Singalese [sic] and were hardly noticed but when the band struck up you should see the awed look on their faces… and puzzled looks amid smiles of pleasure at hearing the music.

His comment suggests that through this experience a European audience was forced to recognize African-Americans as a racially specific group that differed from the Senegalese. This shift in recognition was due to the novelty and the appeal of the music played by the black Americans and it disturbed French perceptions of fixed racial qualities that linked to skin color alone. The distinctive style of music played by the African-Americans meant that another

57 Spectators were there as part of the Women’s World Congress, following the war.
59 Sissle, "Why Jazz Has Conquered the World."
component had to be added into the European assessment of racial difference. Drums had already been associated with Africa and Africans but jazz was more than just the drums and was also played in more venues than traditional African music at this time.\textsuperscript{60} The following discussion examines how jazz introduced new complexities into French racial stereotypes and it challenges the celebratory portrayal of black American performers in Europe that has informed much of the current literature on the black American presence in Europe.

Noble Sissle was surprised that the “sorrow-stricken” French found jazz so appealing given the difficult post-war conditions in France:

‘There now,’ I said to myself, ‘Col. – has brought his band over here and started rartistis in France! Ain’t this an awful thing to visit upon a nation with so many burdens?’ But when the band had finished and the people were roaring with laughter, their faces wreathed in smiles, I was forced to say that this is just what France needs at the critical moment.\textsuperscript{61}

His description of the crowd reaction suggests that disillusioned and devastated white European audiences found solace and escape from a bleak new post-war world in jazz. Sissle later tried to explain this phenomenon in an article he wrote for a black French paper that showed “Why Jazz music has captured the world.”\textsuperscript{62} He pointed out that jazz had evolved from music that asserted humanity and creative expression amidst the daily abuses of human dignity committed in the institution of slavery. As Sissle tried to indicate in his article, jazz arose within a black American population that had fused Western and African musical traditions together in

\textsuperscript{60} Blake discusses the sense of ‘African-ness’ attached to the ‘tam-tam’ or African drum music, and also to early forms of African American music and dance such as the cake-walk in chapters One and Two of \textit{Le Tumulte Noir}. Blake, \textit{Le Tumulte Noir} 25.


\textsuperscript{62} Sissle, "Why Jazz Has Conquered the World," 8.
the crucible of slave experience. Jazz lovers and analysts have long recognized that the music reflects the history of how black Americans confronted the issue of how to create art in a world seemingly devoid of justice, humanity, and reason.63

Paris, in the years between 1920 and 1935, was a world badly in need of such an art. French society had been shaped by the devastation of World War One. The war called into question all the values of nationalism, heroism, and the ideal of inevitable human progress that had characterized the Romantic art and music of the late nineteenth century. It was in this context of grief and disillusionment that the invigorating sounds of jazz, and the unfamiliar shapes and colors of African art, presented a solution to the tension between the desire for art and music, and the perceived failure of pre-war Western high art forms.64 Some artists turned toward the surreal, others embraced further the “oriental” and African influences they had begun to explore prior to the war. One of the results was the interest in primitivism evident in the work of Gauguin, Picasso, Bracque, Stravinsky, and many of the luminaries of the high art world in France.65 This post-war cultural context set the stage for a substantial migration of black American jazz performers into the French capital. As artists turned to the African continent for inspiration music-lovers of all classes turned instead to the thrilling sounds of jazz from the Americas. One music-lover and critic argued that musical life during the war had “taken refuge

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63 See, for example, Salaam, "It Didn't Jes Grew."
65 Jody Blake traces these links. Blake, Le Tumulte Noir
at the music hall because one could not play Debussy… it might further grieve those in mourning whereas the carnivalesque crashes of the revues wouldn’t shock anyone.”66 The statement has an ironic inflection but it captured popular French sentiment at the time. After the war the entry of black American military bands into Europe, playing a syncopated, fresh and exciting style of music became an unstoppable cultural phenomenon.

“Ragtimitis in France”: Jazz music and European racial discourse

The racial discourses that would be so powerfully influenced by the arrival of jazz predated the tumulte noir.67 Anthropologists, psychologists, politicians and philosophers had been engaged in analyzing the extent and origins of racial differences between humans for decades and continued to do so during the interwar era.68 Many of them perpetuated a longstanding association between the race noir and an “innate” gift for rhythm, music, and cultural creativity. One impact of the popularity and presence of black jazz performers during this era was to bring these discourses into the open and present racial images in a very direct

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66 This is a fairly free translation of the following sentiment in French: « Toute la vie musicale de la guerre s’est, en effet, réfugiée au music-hall. On ne joue de Debussy qu’avec une pudeur inquiète, pour ne blesser les familles en deuil : mais les explosions foraines des orchestres de revues ne scandalisent personne » Emile Vuillermoz, « La Musique de Guerre; Ragtime et Jazz-band, » Unidentified clipping, 6 October 1918, in ‗Coupures; Jazz,” R 98531, Collection Rondel, Département des Arts et Spectacles, Richelieu, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France.


68 In her discussion of the intellectual history of racism and ‘anti-racisme’ during the interwar era Carole Reynaud Paligot points out that many of the French anthropologists working to explore theories of racial difference during this era were contending with the legacy of Gobineau while by 1930 they were also attempting to offset the influence of anti-semitic pro-Nazi racial thinking disseminated by academics such as George Vacher de Lapouge. Reynaud Paligot, Races, Racisme Et Antiracisme Dans Les Années 1930.
fashion rather than through the erudite discussions of scientists and academics.\textsuperscript{69} In the nineteen-twenties the strains of jazz, and the dances that were wildly popular such as the Charleston, the Caribbean Beguine, and the Latin American Tango all held an exotic allure linked to perceptions of race. Black players and dancers, for example, were seen as the most authentic source of the exciting new jazz music and images of black jazz performers abounded in popular newspapers and journals.\textsuperscript{70} Most of these images reflected the contemporary acceptance that jazz was black music, that is music originating from Africa and developed by African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. This attitude was expressed in two journalistic inquiries into jazz, the first of which appeared in \textit{Paris-Midi} in 1924, and the second in \textit{Paris Soir} in 1926.\textsuperscript{71}

In the latter Raoul Laparra, a then-prominent composer, argued that although jazz was a black American form, the rhythmic elements of the music derived from Africa and the only “true” jazz was found there. He contends that:

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\textsuperscript{70} This chapter offers numerous examples. See also the images reproduced in Blake, \textit{Le Tumulte Noir} See also the rich selection of images reproduced in Tobias Wendl, Bettina von Lintig, and Kerstin Pinther, \textit{Black Paris : Kunst Und Geschichte Einer Schwarzen Diaspora} (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 2006). The microfilm reel, “Coupures; Jazz,” file R 98531, Département des Arts et Spectacles, Richelieu, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France has useful cartoons some of which are reproduced later in this chapter. Numerous images were printed in a variety of print media sources notably in \textit{Comoedia} and \textit{La Vie Parisienne}, for example, ‘le Jazz-band’ \textit{La Vie Parisienne}, (Paris) 1er Janvier 1921, p.16.

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First, the black American, who is the father of jazz, is an uprooted soul, who sings better and is more rhythmic than white colonizers but is less good than his ancestors who remain in Africa. Moreover, then white colonizers can find no more to imitate in him than a second rate model, because true jazz, the only jazz, is from the black continent, where the form is still nude, feet on its own soil.72

This statement identifies a racial hierarchy of jazz authenticity within which the closer one is to the source of this “nude” or “primitive” music the more authentic it is. Thus the white man is the least authentic practitioner of jazz while the American who is still linked to the “black continent” through his origins and the color of his skin is more authentic. “True jazz,” however, is from Africa. Laparra’s analysis, therefore, assumed a hierarchy within which jazz performers were judged according to perceived racial and ethnic characteristics rather than musical skill. But Laparra also typified a tendency to think that any music with a dominant rhythm section featuring syncopation counted as jazz.73 He failed to take account of the fact that jazz emerged from the intersection of white American and transplanted African culture on the soil of the Americas. As a musical style it was never derived from a “pure” source. Laparra committed an act of racial and musical conflation even as he sought to draw a distinction between white men of European descent, black American men, and African men.74 Nevertheless his attempt to draw

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72 « D’abord, le nègre Américain, qui on est le père, est un déracinée qui chante, rythme, mieux que les blancs colons, mais moins bien que ces ancêtres restés en Afrique. Ensuite, le blanc colon, ne fait qu’imiter en lui un modèle de second ordre, puisque le vrai jazz, le seul jazz est au continent noir, ou l’être est encore nu, les pieds sur son sol. » Laparra ‘Aimez-Vous le Jazz’ Paris Soir, 14 July, 1926. My translation. Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

73 Blake discusses this aspect of the initial phase of the tumulte noir, as does Jeffrey Jackson.

74 The gendered usage of ‘man’ here is deliberate and reflects the fact that when many commentators discussed jazz they assumed it to be a musical creation produced by males. Women were recognized as singers but not instrumentalists nor as creative forces within the musical genre. This lamentable habit obscured the achievements of women such as Marian McPartland, Lil Hardin Armstrong, Valaida Snow, Alice Coltrane, and numerous others. See, for example, Sally Placksin, American Women in Jazz : 1900 to the Present : Their Words, Lives, and Music, 1st ed. (New York: Seaview Books, 1982).
distinctions between these groups illustrates the tendency of critics in the 1920s to analyze racial difference as part of their evaluation of this new musical form.

Laparra’s article also shows how European commentators held preconceived associations of blackness and primitivism and how these were integrated into their appreciation of jazz. The reference cited above to the nude form of jazz on the “black continent” where people’s feet still “touch the soil” articulate the widespread French characterization of Africa as a timeless, unchanging, and therefore primitive society that produced inhabitants who shared these characteristics. Many critics extended this characterization into their evaluation of jazz. Sir Henry Coward, a prominent British music critic, made his understanding of the linkage between jazz and primitivism perfectly clear in the following comment:

Jazz is a low type of primitive music, rounded on crude rhythms, suggested by stamping feet and clapping hands. It puts emphasis on the grotesque by banging and clanging of pots and pans...The noble trombone is made to bray like an ass, guffaw like a village idiot, and moan like a cow in distress. The silver-toned trumpet, associated in poetry with the seraphine [sic], is made to screech and produce sounds like...the wailing of a nocturnal tomtat. Jazz cannot make anything but the essence of vulgarity. The popularity of jazz and the attendant immodest dances are lowering the prestige of the white races.75

French journalists had a more positive response to the music but they made the same links between jazz and primitivism as Sir Henry. Composer Francis Casadesus, commented in 1926 that: “Pure jazz is a primitive mode of expression, with a real originality ; It has comical and syncopated rhythms with savage appeal, bestial, and bizarre harmonies caused by random

75 Sir Henry Coward, Address to the Sheffield Rotary Club, cited in Dave Peyton, “The Musical Bunch,” Chicago Defender, October 15, 1927. This comment was excerpted in the Chicago Defender and mocked because despite Sir Henry’s opprobrium jazz bands were making huge amounts of money in interwar Europe.
combinations and improvised instrumentation." European interactions with jazz were passionate because of the musical impact jazz had upon listeners. However the public media commentary that resulted from this passionate appreciation came to serve as a conduit for ideas about racial difference. Much of it perpetuated European associations between African heritage and primitivism.

Scholars have already explored these aspects of the jazz craze and many have established very clearly the discursive constructions of blackness and primitivism that lurked beneath the surface of the enthusiastic reception of the music itself. This scholarship has also demonstrated how French commentators paraded racial clichés in their reviews of jazz and the jazz scene. The following analysis builds on their findings. It begins by examining the illustration “L’inv {asion noire” (figure 1) to illustrate how a new consciousness of race emerged in visual forms of popular culture in interwar France.

Figure 1. “l’Invasion noire”\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{79} Wendl, Lintig, and Pinther, \textit{Black Paris}. 
This poster, printed in 1927 in the popular French magazine *Fantasio*, was intended as a humorous comment on the jazz craze that would have wide appeal. The heavily caricatured figures are representative of popular French racial discourse at the time and exemplify a habitual association of erotic and hypersexual self-presentation with blackness and black jazz performers. The black performers are depicted scantily clad and have assumed animalistic dance positions. The central female figure has donned some European flesh-colored stockings and bustier but remains dark-skinned underneath these trappings of European culture. It functions as a satiric reference to Josephine Baker. In addition to exemplifying the links between ―primitivism,‖ blackness and jazz it also shows that the French felt ambivalent toward the *tumulte noir*. Furthermore the title. ―*l’Invasion noire,*** suggests that some French, at least, associated the jazz craze with the migration of African colonial subjects to France, and were uneasy about that process.

This poster offers a useful example of how historians can analyze musical trends and styles in order to reveal cultural beliefs and changes in social constructions of race, gender, class, and other distinctions between people. Music permeates society published responses to musical products and practices can generate, reinforce and reveal certain conceptual frameworks within a society. Recent discussions of classical music have suggested that the link between music and other aspects of European intellectual life can be made visible by studying music's place in the general cultural conversation.81 The critical language in which music is described and evaluated

80 For further analysis of such caricatured depictions of racial difference especially within the world of Parisian nightlife and jazz clubs see Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire.*
81 “Beethoven as Secular Humanist,” in Solie, *Music in Other Words.*
derives from a common pool applicable to all subjects of discussion and therefore reveals common concerns and ideological presuppositions of the period. This argument can be extended with regard to the pool of visual images that were generated by the sudden passion for jazz music in Paris. Parisians might mark a page in a novel with a caricature of a jazz drummer in bookmark form, while the cover of their latest piece of sheet music sported a grinning black guitarist with bananas for hands (see figures 2 and 3). Fashionable women treated their hair with “Bakerfix” a Josephine Baker inspired product, or ordered Haute Couture inspired by the shimmy or the charleston, all while flicking through the pages of magazines featuring images of jazz bands, caricatures of jazz performers, and visual jokes about the attempts of European men and women to dance the “Black Bottom.” Numerous postcards featuring Josephine Baker but also many of the touring jazz bands that roamed Europe in the decades between the two World Wars added to the array of visual referents to jazz. The posters of Paul Colin are perhaps the most well-known representations of the impact of jazz on the French métropole but his set of posters – while gripping – was one small component in a rich medley of popular visual representation that showed the linkage between jazz and race in interwar Paris. Jazz music and the art that represented, idealized, caricatured, and documented it illustrate the pervasive influence of jazz,

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82 The images are selected from the rich selection shown at the ‘Black Paris’ exhibition in Frankfurt, 2007. Both are included in the exhibition catalogue. Wendl, Lintig, and Pinther, Black Paris.
83 The Mabel Mercer collection, the Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith collection, and the ‘Josephine Baker’ photograph collection each contain numerous postcards of themselves and their friends produced in Paris and posted back to America, Schomburg Center for Black Culture, NYPL, NY. Postcards of Baker also sold well to the wider public, see Wendl, Lintig, and Pinther, Black Paris, 68-69. Jody Blake uses many of these images in her analysis of jazz, culture and avant garde art in interwar France. Elizabeth Ezra discusses a ‘colonial unconscious’ that emerged and was reinforced by hundreds of images relating to colonialism and black subjects but she doesn’t specify jazz. Elizabeth Ezra, The Colonial Unconscious : Race and Culture in Interwar France (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
and the perceptions of racial difference that accompanied it, on mainstream popular culture in France.

Figure 3. “musiknoten” or sheet music, Paris 1920s.  

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85 Wendl, Lintig, and Pinther, Black Paris, 55.
“L’Invasion Noire”: Immigration and racial difference after the war

The socio-cultural impact of the *tumulte noir* coincided with increased migration into the French métropole. One effect was to heighten both the visibility of racial differences among French subjects and also the fears associated with such distinctions. The use of colonial subjects to labor and to fight in World War One was a catalyst for race-based fears about the impact of immigration upon the French republic. The war “brought a large, non-European, racially distinct population to France for the first time in the nation’s modern history.”

Approximately half a million colonial subjects served as soldiers during the war, about 223,000 more were drafted as laborers to assist the war effort and 200,000 African-Americans swelled the numbers of men of color on active war service in France from 1917 onward. This was a significant movement of

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86 Stovall, "The Color Line Behind the Lines," 742.
non-Europeans into France and one that Tyler Stovall has suggested made “racial difference based upon skin color… a significant factor in French working-class life for the first time.”\textsuperscript{88} The post-war labor conditions continued this trend which was exacerbated by the cultural turn to jazz. The following examination explains how the passion for jazz, in conjunction with the context of post-war social and labor conditions meant that anxieties associated with racial difference became a very present feature of French life, for bourgeois as well as working class men and women during the interwar period.

The widespread awareness of racial difference that spread through France as a result of the war deepened after the war and it became a source of contention as racial differences were more thoroughly mapped onto ideas of national character and citizenship. In the immediate aftermath of the war France desperately needed immigrant labor because the native French population had been decimated. Yet the French State paradoxically tried to repatriate colonial subjects of color rapidly once armistice was declared.\textsuperscript{89} This was done explicitly upon the basis of race. Even as they repatriated colonial subjects of color the French State made bilateral labor treaties with surrounding European nations to attract more “suitable” immigrant labor. The prevailing wisdom, influenced by contemporary anthropological, political, and colonial theory, saw the \textit{jaune} and \textit{noir} population as less assimilable than white-skinned European immigrants from Spain, Italy, Belgium, and Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{90} Laurent Bonnevay, deputy for the Rhône, advised that the French State “call upon European labor forces in preference to exotic or colonial

\textsuperscript{88}Stovall, “The Color Line Behind the Lines.”
\textsuperscript{90} Mary Dewhurst Lewis discusses the inequity of migrant rights according to ethnicity and race and discusses colonial workers, Lewis, \textit{The Boundaries of the Republic}, 18-20, 51-53.
labor, because of the difficulties of social order, and ethnic relations that would be created by the presence on French soil of ethnic elements too markedly distinct from the rest of the population.\(^91\) The concerns went deeper than social order as some French officials and intellectuals feared that the incorporation of citizens of color into the French republic in large numbers would jeopardize the dignity of the white race and compromise France’s national character.\(^92\) Despite the best efforts of the French authorities, however, many colonial subjects who had been drafted into the French war effort remained in France after the war both legally and illegally.

This series of events meant that by 1924 there were more men and women in Paris who identified as colored or black than ever before.\(^93\) A small but long-established group of Francophone Afro-Caribbeans resident in Paris was joined by large numbers of sub-Saharan Africans who had served among French troops in World War I (such as the Senegalese

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\(^91\) Quoted in Reynaud Paligot, *Races, Racisme Et Antiracisme Dans Les Années 1930*, 129-136. Schor also quotes this and, like Paligot, comments upon the French government’s preference for white-skinned immigrants due to their assimilability, and gives some of the anthropological intellectual background for this preference as well as contextualizing resistance to these racial theories Schor, *L'opinion Française Et Les Étrangers En France, 1919-1939*, 82. Some of the perceptions were attached to the idea that darker skinned workers were ill-disciplined and lazy. See Frader, *Breadwinners and Citizens*, 90-91.

\(^92\) One professor of the College of France specifically suggested that the ‘dignity’ of the white race would be compromised by a significant black population in Paris. See Reynaud Paligot, *Races, Racisme Et Antiracisme Dans Les Années 1930*, 85. Many of the fears about ‘immodest’ jazz dances were an expression of this irrational concern about white ‘dignity’ and an underlying concern about sexual contact between white and black. See Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire*. See also below, chapter 3, where this concern is discussed in relation to how it affected black attempts to offset such images through ‘respectable’ dress and behavior.

\(^93\) Again the terms are difficult here because the limited information available through the semi-regular *recensements* conducted by the police departments did not always distinguish between North Africans, Madagascans, and sun-Saharan Africans yet these groups were very distinct entities in their social networks, affiliations and sense of ethnic identification. See introduction for my choice to consider sub-Saharan Africans and Antilleans as *noir* and treat them as two linked groups who nevertheless constituted a distinct racial entity according to contemporary perceptions. In this I follow Philippe Dewitte. Note Rosenberg’s discussion of this issue with regard to Algerians, Rosenberg, *Policing Paris*, 119.
tirailleurs) and remained in France after their tour of duty. At least 20 to 30,000 colonial laborers and soldiers were still on active official duty stationed in France in 1919. Many of the troops took leave in Paris and were hosted at one of several foyers for colonial troops, any of which received 500 guests per year. In addition to these men, who were legally resident in France, many tirailleurs escaped efforts to repatriate them and remained there once discharged. A few ex-tirailleurs wished to go home but were refused repatriation because they were considered a communist threat after being exposed to radical politics in France. In addition the failure to implement effective immigration controls in active ports such as Marseilles, and the ability of migrant workers to help others forge entry papers meant that the numbers of colonial subjects of color residing in France grew slowly but steadily after liberation. The proportions of noirs in Paris and Marseilles was much higher than in other French towns and villages and thus colonial subjects of color were always a more visible presence in urban centers than in other

94See Dewitte, *Les Mouvements Nègres*. He gives 10-15000 noirs (both Africans and Madagascans) living in the Paris region by 1926, however he notes that this count excludes Afro-Caribbeans who were considered citizens of France and thus not counted in the recensements. Mariane Amar and Pierre Milza, give figures for all Africans, including North Africans and Madagascans at 0 (recorded) in 1911 but 38,000 in 1921 which had risen dramatically to 105,000 in 1931 (it then dropped again due to tightened restrictions on foreign workers due to the Depression). This figure doesn’t separate out Sub-Saharan Africans but in 1946, the first census which DOES distinguish between the two groups, Sub-Saharan Africans numbered 13’517 en 1946. This is consistent with Dewitte’s figures and thus I have followed that estimate. Amar and Milza, *L’immigration En France Au Xxe Siècle*.


96 In Paris several ‘foyers’ hosted African and Malgaches soldiers on their annual eight days leave. One, at 23 RIC boulevard Kellerman, was for ‘militaires indigènes d’élite’ and accepted on average 500 guests a year. ANSOM, affiches Polit. 1492, Dossier ‘Comité d’assistance aux troupes noir’ Archives d’Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.


98 Dewitte discusses the ease of circumventing immigration control. He then places the approximate rate of immigration after the war at several hundred colonial subjects per year, and contends that hundreds of Africans and Madagascans entered each year through Marseilles. Dewitte, *Les Mouvements Nègres*, 20,29, 37-39.
regions of France. By 1926 Paris was host to about 10-15,000 noirs. They may not have been a huge percentage of the 460,000 étrangères resident in Paris at the time but they were highly visible and they caused public debate which, in turn, ensured that perceptions of racial difference remained in the public eye in interwar France despite the repatriation of numerous colonial subjects of color after the war.

Jazz was implicated in this series of developments because as a public, popular and racially identified musical style with cultural influence that had become a source of contemporary media interest it affected public perceptions of racial distinctions. Of course it was also in the big urban centers that the biggest, brightest, and best entertainment venues were found and thus the visibility of black men and the few women performers resident in Paris was correspondingly high in those centers. However images of black men and women were disseminated widely throughout France in advertising campaigns, and also through the print media that was generated in the urban centers. If Paris was the “window of France,” the showplace for French art and culture, then what did it mean when the “City of Light” was “filled with Russian accents, black American jazz bands, and spectacles whose names one could barely pronounce in French.” In a gossipy survey of the state of popular music and dance the journal Paris qui Chante reflected on the fact that Parisians were caught in a postwar frenzy of dancing because “le jazz font rage,” or “jazz was making them crazy for dancing.” Furthermore the

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99 This estimate is from Dewitte and his estimate is confirmed by a comment in the Cri des Nègres the Union paper for black travailleurs. This estimate is given in the context of an appeal for funds, Cri des Nègres, (Paris) Juillet-Aôut, 1933, 2.

100 This is a liberal paraphrase of the following description of interwar Paris, drawn from Milza and Amar, : “Paris est capitale, vitrine de la France, de sa culture, de son art de vivre. Alors on s’inquiète, ou l’on se moque, de ces spectacles à l’accent Russe, des danses nègres et des programmes de théâtre aux noms si peu Français. » Amar and Milza, L’immigration En France Au Xxe Siècle, 244.
columnist specified that everyone loved the “eternal” shimmy. Bands might play a waltz once in about twenty dances and the tango once in ten dances. “Above all” one danced the Charleston, an “American import” that shared with the shimmy the “rhythm of the blacks.” In 1926, when this was published, the editors of this French music-hall gossip magazine were amused and slightly disdainful of the trend. By 1929 they had launched a campaign to “renew the French chanson” in the face of the overwhelming dominance of jazz.

In this context jazz not only provoked observations about the links between racial difference and primitivism but also raised concerns about French national culture, French imperialism and the status of colonial subjects. Many recent accounts of the interwar period in France have not fully explored such connections although journalists articulated some of the links very clearly in their reportage at the time. Georges Oudard wrote a lengthy feature entitled “Série Noir” for La Revue Française in 1926. In it he explicitly linked jazz and the tumulte noir to a change in the status of all black inhabitants in the French métropole, and speculated on the consequences for the imperial status quo. First he summarized the artistic and musical genesis of the tumulte saying:

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101 All of these quotations are from an untitled column in Paris qui Chante, issue 1766, année 24, 15 mars 1926, p. 18.
102 ‘Une Page de la Gloire de la Chanson Française,’ Paris qui Chante Août 1929, no 1775 27ème année, p. 15. This article is followed by ‘le Renouveau de la Chanson,’ Paris qui Chante, no. 1776, Sept 1929, p. 1.
‘Black’ art has established itself everywhere. And public curiosity has been turned little by little, by this means, toward Africa. Jazz, in turn, has triumphed. One sees it, provided by men of color, in all the dancing establishments that are multiplying… That which is ‘black’, by this means, has won even more ground.

This quotation is a fairly straightforward summary of the impact of jazz on the Parisian populace. But the implication that cultural products characterized as “black” have “won ground” in French culture leads Oudard into a set of fascinating observations that bring to light the connections between jazz, racial discourse, and imperialism in the French métropole.

In his investigation Oudard claimed that the cultural developments in jazz and art had made an impact upon labor practices and thus socio-economic relations between black and white in France. He argued that before the war blacks played a different role in society and it seemed they were destined to serve in inferior occupations. Prior to the tumulte, Oudard says a shopkeeper would have been ashamed to hire a noir, but now, he states “Equality has been established, and a black person equals a white.”

“We rejoice” proclaimed Oudard but then he backtracked, suggesting that perhaps this development is a double edged-sword. His conclusion illustrates the complexity of the repercussions of the jazz craze on the world beyond the musical nightlife in Montmartre:

103 Georges Oudard, ‘Série Noir,’ La Revue Française, 21st année No. 46, 14 Novembre 1926.
104 ‘l’Egalité est établie,’ and ‘Un noir vaut un blanc.’
Except, said a friend who read these lines, what would you do about our prestige in the colonies? Are you going to create two kinds of blacks? The ‘exported’ black who is your equal. The indigenous black who can’t be…? That this civil invasion has multiple repercussions is apparent. Of what order will they be? It is difficult to say straight away. [He]… suggested one. There will be others. The path to the equality of the races has been opened, in sum, by the clownish dancers, and jazz players. It is striking enough to merit commentary. The série noir has commenced. How far will it go? Let’s hope it isn’t a series of events too dark for us.  

This analysis registered Oudard’s underlying concern and even fear about what would happen to French society in the face of the immigration of men and women of color into the French métropole in the nineteen-twenties. Such fears were not limited to the journalist and they were interwoven with the relationship between metropolitan France and her colonies. The perception that members of the African diaspora had arrived in Paris, were there to stay, and threatened to change the social and physical landscape of the French métropole emerges very clearly from such reactions to the jazz craze which were read by a wide cross-section of the Parisian public. Moreover the perception of an invasion that was changing the character of France may have contributed toward several racially-motivated employment and immigration restrictions on the part of the French State introduced toward the end of the decade.

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105 One element of the comments that doesn’t come through in the translation is the French play on the words un Série noir which can mean ‘the series on black people,’ or ‘a series of disasters.’ The author contended that he used noir rather than nègre simply because it was the term used by ‘respectable’ black people themselves and he didn’t want to offend their ‘touchy’ sensibilities. One suspects he is not averse to the pun, however. Georges Oudard, ‘Série Noir,’ La Revue Française, 21st année No. 46, 14 Novembre 1926.

106 Such differences between colonial subjects who were granted full citizenship and those who were not became a big point of discussion in the Dépêche Africaine the leading black Francophone publication at the time. See, for example, the editorial “La Naturalisation des Indigènes”, p. 1, Avril, 1929. The issue of naturalization and how it should be made accessible to all Afro-diasporic French subjects whether in the métropole or not, whether educated or not, and definitely if they had served during the war, was a constant theme in the paper from its inception.

107 France had always premised citizenship for colonial subjects on the basis of assimilation and the premises were adjusted according to each colony but almost always included adoption of the French language. Alice Conklin has a
In the same year that Oudard published his piece his fellow journalist Michel Georges-Michel reflected on the rise of immigration into France. After claiming that Paris had already been conquered by the Lyonnais and the Russians he continued:

[Now] here are the blacks. They have placed themselves everywhere, from the houses of parliament to Montmartre, and from the university to the Champs Elysée. A music hall in that area owes its fortune to them, and they’ve brought a new contribution to music; jazz which precedes Débussy and which Stravinsky has jumped all over it with both feet, from its first appearance.\(^{108}\)

Men and women of African descent were seen to be affecting the métropole and jazz was their calling card. Yet although jazz was African American music critics like George-Michel and Oudard attributed its social impact to black French colonial citizens as well as African-Americans. This explains why Georges-Michel’s comments characterized music as part of the dialogic process through which black French citizens had shaped the métropole. And this multi-

directional exchange between colonies and métropole, colonial subject and state, operated on
every level from the institutions of governance to the production of culture, both high and
popular, to academia, and within the economy. Parisian journalists in the nineteen-twenties
consistently made such links between black immigration, cultural practices and the powerful
influence of jazz on the European public.

The Bal nègre exemplified the complex set of social, racial, and colonial
relationships that characterized interwar Paris. It was a popular Parisian dance hall frequented by
black Francophone subjects and designed exclusively to serve as a social space for black colonial
subjects. In fact the original bal and the imitations that soon spring up were frequently called
bals coloniales.\footnote{In 1929 Paulette Nardal reviewed a ‘new’ establishment founded in response to the success of the original, Paulette Nardal, ‘Le Nouveau Bal nègre de la Glacière’ La Dėpėche africaine, 30 May, 1929, 3. The Cri des Nėgres mentions multiple ‘bals coloniaux’ by 1934, ‘La bourgeoisie manoeuvre…les uns contre les autres,’ Cri des Nėgres, Avril-mai, 1934, 4. The political and cultural significance of these balls and similar social spaces are discussed further in chapter four.}

\footnote{Edwards notes that Countee Cullen’s felt his lack of ability to speak fluent French prevented him from fully belonging at the bal. Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora. This highlights the point that not all diasporic Africans in Paris felt ‘connected’ by a racial identification, and the notion of race was deeply complicated by an individuals’ place of birth, class and the perceived and actual status of the colony in which one originated.}

Although the first Bal nègre in the rue Blomet had originally served as a
gathering place for Antilleans and Africans living in Paris it was eventually discovered and
patronized by the avant-garde and other elite. It therefore became a place of mingling and
cultural exchange although there were tensions between white patrons and black colonial
subjects at the music hall and African-Americans found it difficult to fit in.\footnote{When journalist
Marcel Pays reviewed the bal for his readers he identified how the dancehall mirrored larger
social and cultural shifts in interwar Paris: “We have colonized the blacks. They have colonized
us in their turn. In the last few years the blacks, in France, have experienced increasing success

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in the dance venues, the Music-Halls, in the theatre, literature and somewhat in their habits and customs.”

He reminded his readers that the music hall was not the only area in which *les noirs* had made inroads in the *métropole*. He claimed that one could no longer count the number of *hommes de couleur*, and French citizens “perfectly honorable and educated,” who were filling the ranks of administrators, politicians, and work in the army, commerce and industry.  

Marcel Pays ultimately took a different editorial stance toward the *invasion noir* than Georges Oudard. He advised the French public that it would be a “veritable ingratitude” to fail to recognize how much of value black immigrants, whether American or colonial, had brought to France. He then noted how Francophone African immigrants had spurred the “development of national activities and the *mise en valeur* of France’s wealth and resources.” In interwar Paris the notion of *mise en valeur* was often used to suggest how the French could extract material wealth from their colonies but also “bring them into value” by “civilizing” the populations of such colonies and developing local infrastructures. Marcel Pays subtly twisted this customary usage to imply that French men and women of color contributed to the *valeurs* of metropolitan French resources. In doing so he acknowledged the multi-directional flow of influence, power, cultural products, and ideas within the French imperial system. The *Bal nègre* represented some of those colonial exchanges in the microcosm of the dancehall.

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111 Marcel Pays, ‘Un bal Nègre,’ *Information*, undated clipping, ‘Jazz’ Coupures, R 98531, Richelieu Département des Arts et Spectacles, BNF, Paris, France
113 The phrase *mise en valeur* is usually used with reference to the French impact and improvement upon the colonies, and the productivity thereof.
“But Josephine”: The black French community in Paris reacts to the jazz craze

These intersections between popular music, politics, and colonialism meant that black Francophone residents in Paris were profoundly affected by the French jazz craze. As black music made racial distinctions more visible, for example, it paradoxically served to undermine the association between primitivism and blackness described above. Jazz music was not just associated with the primitive it was simultaneously thought to “transmit the spirit of the machine age, or to embody the dynamism of a machine aesthetic.”\textsuperscript{114} Therefore a major difference between European perceptions of black Americans, and their perceptions of black French colonials (especially those from Sub-Saharan Africa) during this era was the modernity associated with jazz and the men and women who performed it. The “jungle” or primitive qualities of black jazz co-existed with its ability to represent the future, the modern and the machine age and thus led to a “conceptual slippage pervasive in Europe because Jazz meant American and America meant Modernity.”\textsuperscript{115} Furthermore jazz’s associations with modernism were substantiated by a variety of cultural products such as Pol Rab’s illustration of \textit{La Revue Nègre} in Stéphane Manier’s book \textit{Sous le Signe de Jazz} (1926). Rab’s image combined the “savage” Josephine Baker, the tap-dancing Douglas, and the obligatory jazz drummer. He then superimposed them over salient features of the stage sets, including the “New York Skyscraper.”\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} Rasula in Raphael-Hernandez, \textit{Blackening Europe}, 27.
\textsuperscript{116} Blake, \textit{Le Tumulte Noir} 99.
The impact of this cultural shift upon Francophone black men and women who were living in the métropole during the jazz craze was significant. Black Francophone intellectuals swiftly realized that the cultural effects of yoking jazz to both modernism and primitivism affected them. The implications of this were teased out at the time by Jane Nardal. Jane Nardal was one of five sisters, born in Martinique, who lived with their family in Paris in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. She and two of her sisters, Andrée and Paulette were studying at the Sorbonne and they became involved with the fledgling pan-African movement that begun among middle class, educated, black French men and women in Paris at the time. They facilitated both the development of a literary “black internationalism” and the Négritude movement by hosting a salon at their home in the suburb of Clamart. Their involvement with music-making was considerable – at their salon they encouraged the singing of African American spirituals and they attended both classical concerts and a number of concerts that promoted African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean musical styles and performers in the capital. Jane and Paulette were very involved in the publication of the pan-African newspaper La Dépêche africaine. They wrote for that publication and for la Revue du Monde Noir, a short-lived arts and literature journal inspired by their salon. Their writings engaged with numerous issues that arose for black

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117 Bernard Gendron lays out the association between jazz and the avant-garde in Gendron, Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club. Jed Rasula and Samir Dayal also do in their contributions to Raphael-Hernandez, Blackening Europe. Brent Hayes Edwards begins to trace the linkages I have identified here and Jennifer Boittin and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting examine the editorial from Jane Nardal that I consider below although they concern themselves more with Nardal’s work and her role as a woman in black intellectual networks than her analysis and relationship to the impact of jazz as black music; Boittin, "In Black and White: Gender, Race Relations, and the Nardal Sisters in Interwar Paris.", Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora; Sharpley-Whiting, Negritude Women.


119 T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting covers their autobiographical details in Sharpley-Whiting, Negritude Women.
Francophone women, and for all colonial subjects, in the context of greater France after the First World War.

In 1928, Jane Nardal identified the possibilities (and perils) inherent in the associations between blackness, jazz and modernism in a long article entitled “Pantins Exotiques.” She described the situation for black French inhabitants in Paris and how it had changed in the wake of the jazz craze. She explained that each “creole” living in France was aware of the power of certain words to evoke raced images in the French imagination. When the French perceived that one was “exotic,” they displayed a lively interest. She then commented, rather dryly, that she was never thanked for correcting their associations of colored skin with hammocks, palm trees, naïfs inhabitants, and “poésie sexuelle.” She noted that she sometimes experienced the sense of being “a disappointment for someone who has evoked exotic princesses in your honor,” when she told them that “just like a little French bourgeoisie the studies I am pursuing in Paris begun at a Lycée (French High School) in the tropics.” Nardal pointed out that many French viewed colonial through the lens of a single stereotype and characterized them as primitive and exotic, hailing from some mythical African jungle. Her claim that the French conflated a variety of members of the African diaspora living in France into very limited stereotypes of black colonial men or women (and the stereotypes were gendered) is borne out in much of the secondary literature on this period. Yet jazz music created a rupture in the prevailing discourse on racial

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120 Jane Nardal, “Pantins Exotiques,” *La Dépêche africaine*, Oct 15 1928, 2. This article has been discussed by a variety of scholars, but not in this context. For other discussions see; Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*. See also Boittin, "In Black and White: Gender, Race Relations, and the Nardal Sisters in Interwar Paris."

difference in contemporary interwar Paris and it paved the way for black men and women from both the Americas and Africa to challenge it still further as Jane Nardal pointed out.

Nardal critiqued a variety of literary works that portrayed colored citizens and colonials as either exotic, or “Uncle Tom”-esque. But in a surprising twist she contended that jazz and the *tumulte noir* first freed black men and women in France from these stereotypes. She claimed that Josephine Baker burst through the bounds of the French colonial imaginary, and into the twentieth century:

But Josephine came… Behold, a woman of color who leaps onto the scene, with lacquered hair and a sparkling smile; she is still dressed in feathers, and banana leaves but she brings to the Parisians the latest Broadway productions. The transition between the past and the present, welding the virgin forest to modernism, the black Americans are achieving this, and making it tangible.

Nardal here articulates the ambivalence literate members of the black Francophone community felt toward the black American presence taking Paris by storm.

**Contesting jazz and expressing black French difference**

Jane Nardal challenged her readers to do better than the jazz performers and establish a modern and, most importantly, intellectual image of black men and women in France. Many

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122 Philippe Dewitte seconds this impression in his work on pan-African movements although he contends that the presence of large numbers of black colonial subjects in France during the war and their contributions to the war effort was a major factor in shifting French perceptions of *noirs* from exotic to more familiar, as symbolized in the Banania advertising campaign. Dewitte, *Les Mouvements Nègres*.


124 This emphasis on the black ambivalence felt toward the *tumulte noir* is intended in part to contextualize analyses that have previously focused on white ambivalence. See Brett Berliner’s coverage of white ambivalence in *Ambivalent Desire*, or Elizabeth Ezra’s analysis in *The Colonial Unconscious*. 

other Francophone Africans and Afro-Caribbeans living in Paris shared her desire to promote a multi-faceted black Francophone image. As a result several overlapping Pan-African, transatlantic, literary and political movements were formed during the interwar period. These groups could be roughly divided into a set of working class (and pro-working class) unionist political activists who were adamantly anti-colonial, and a group of more conservative, mostly middle-class, intellectuals who pursued their political goals through publishing moderate critiques of empire and promoting black culture, art, and intellectual debate in public and in private settings. The networks overlapped to a certain extent and students, in particular, seemed to inhabit both circles. The moderate network was heavily populated by Antilleans whereas the more radical associations appealed to sub-Saharan Africans who tended to be in a worse socio-economic situation than Antilleans and also had a more invidious citizenship status than Martinicans and Guadeloupeans. These differences were important but the networks overlapped, some individuals participated in both, and they shared a collective disillusionment with France’s colonial practices and de facto race-based citizenship criteria in the aftermath of World War One. Both groups used print media, political meetings, and private salons to articulate their criticisms of the French state. They were inspired by the attention given to black culture during the *tumulte noir* and also by the jazz craze. The work and art they produced

126 There is a similarity between this set of overlapping networks and those that contributed to the Harlem and Chicago ‘Negro Renaissance.’ In each city groups of moderate middle-class reformers overlapped but also competed for political and social influence, with more radical or working class movements. The obvious example is Du Bois versus Garvey. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*.  
127 Note that the slightly different shadings of *nègres* versus *noirs* is discussed in the introduction. It became a signifying gesture for conservative versus more radical black French political groups.
led to “the birth of a black movement that was multiple, protean, clamoring for its right to liberty, equality, and also proclaiming the originality and excellence of its culture.”

Louis Achille, a black student at the Sorbonne in the 1920s, and later professor at Howard University, was a frequent guest at the Nardal sisters’ salon and wrote for the resulting publication the *Revue du Monde Noir*. He claimed that the people who contributed to both the salon and the journal were inspired by “the successive waves of jazz, Charleston, of Josephine Baker, the black spirituals, the creole biguines and Antillean orchestras playing at the *bals Nègres*, the African sculptures and the success of Rene Maran’s novel *Batouala*.” In 1932 a group of black communists attempted to launch the ill-fated *Légitime Défence*. This literary journal came from an ideological perspective utterly different from that of the Nardal sisters and Louis Achille but its editors, like their bourgeois counterparts, acknowledged the inspiration of the *tumulte noir*. The editorial mission statement urged readers to read André Breton, and Aragon, to take note of Tzara, Eluard, and Dali, leading lights of the surrealist movement, several of whom were activists prominent in anti-imperialist organizations, and all of whom promoted and participated in the *tumulte noir*. Black communists looked at the subversive potential of the *vogue nègre* (their term for the jazz craze) and the black cultural activity it inspired, and sought to turn it to their own purposes.

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130 For further evidence of the anti-imperialist attitude of the Surrealists and their pro-African stance see the membership roster for the *Ligue contre L’impérialisme et L’Oppression Coloniale*, which includes Aragon and Unick, dossier 5250, série BA 1912, Archives de la Préfecture de la police, Paris. See also the publication André Breton, "Le Surréalisme Au Service De La Révolution," (Paris,: s.n.).
The group of left-wing activists who formed the *Ligue de défense de la race nègre*, the most active and influential black political organization if the interwar years, were intensely critical of the influence of the jazz craze. They drew a damning contrast between the contribution of pan-African intellectuals and activists to racial equality on the one hand, and the damage done by the image of frivolity and subservience created black jazz performances on the other hand. As one writer commented:

To those who do not demand that our movement for the defense of the Negro race should be universal: to those who would make of us a group dancing the ‘charleston’ and other alien steps, presided over by the benevolent eye of some white politician: to all these [I say]… Negro brothers of the whole world (and especially you African Negroes, who have so much cause for complaint!), remember that the supreme duty of a Negro is to aid the *Ligue*, both materially and morally… To aid and support this organization is to contribute to the defense of the rights, the interests, and the prestige, of the race itself.¹³²

This editorial clearly critiqued fellow *noirs* from any country who catered to a white European taste for “exotic” and “alien” performances. It implicitly accused them of fuelling patronizing European views of black men and women. There is little recognition here of the agency of black performers who chose to cater to the taste for jazz. The authors probably thought that the economic perspicacity of a performer like nightclub owner Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith who made thousands of dollars teaching the charleston to members of the white elite was simply a sell-out and perpetuated damaging power relations between black and white, colonizer and colonized.

¹³² *La Race Nègre*, June 1927.
Later, however, another black union paper the *Cri des nègres* put forward a more nuanced view of black music and came out in defense of jazz and jazz players. The editors accused the “bourgeois press” of fostering racial prejudice amongst white Union members. The article dealing with jazz was written in response to the way a mainstream evening newspaper had portrayed black musicians as unkempt, with creased suits, and wasted faces, exhibiting such indifferent skill on the “tambourines, trombones and cymbals” that no-one bothered to listen to them. The black union paper was incensed by this depiction. It asked all white union members to look beyond this shallow report and think of the *orchestres nègres* they had heard “many a time” in Paris – whether at a music hall, the *Bal coloniale* or simply on the radio or phonograph. The *Cri des Nègres* counseled white and black union workers alike to appreciate the “pleasant and moving sounds” of black music and the commentary ended by adamantly assuring readers that black band attire was every bit as smart as that of white musicians. Black union activists and middle-class intellectuals alike were quick to embrace, enjoy and celebrate black music when it promoted their political vision of black pride, racial solidarity, and socialist anti-imperial politics. They were quick to deride any sensationalist image of black music that threatened that vision. Both wings of the emergent black French intellectual movement were motivated to

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133 The following paragraph analyses the article ‘La Bourgeoisie manœuvre les uns contre les autres pour opposer les un contre les autres travailleurs blancs et nègres’ *Cri des Nègres*, avril-mai 1934, p. 4. The journalist attacked is Jean Lasserre.

134 The article commented upon a black jazz band playing in Panama, and the journalist who described the band was doing an ‘investigative report‘ on black people. He also commented on the grinning, servile, and shoeless chauffeurs in the French Caribbean, and the ‘lazy’ black farm and factory workers who took a break during the noonday heat. ‘La Bourgeoisie manœuvre les uns contre les autres … travailleurs nègres, travailleurs blancs,’ *Cri des Nègres*, avril-mai 1934, p. 4.

135 Chapter four discusses further the ways in which black political groups participated in music as political action and an affirmation of their cultural links to either the Caribbean or Africa.
comment publicly on musical issues by the vastly increased attention paid to black men and women as a result of the jazz craze.

This attempt to contextualize the jazz craze on a cultural front was paralleled by political action in the decade following the war as black Francophone networks in the métropole began to organize formal associations. These Francophone black men and women differentiated themselves from African-Americans in Paris partly because of the difference in the way they were treated but also because they were fighting to establish a distinctive sense of group affiliation from African-Americans. Many of them wished to acknowledge their French heritage and a corresponding sense of affiliation to France but they also wished to integrate a sense of ethnic identity. Many of them also wished to clarify and make more visible both the links and the distinctions between various black French colonial populations. Within the movements attitudes ranged from pride in the French nation-state to outright anger and vehement anti-colonialism inspired by international communism. Sub-Saharan Francophone Africans allied at times with a much larger and ever more dissident North African population, yet, as Philippe Dewitte points out, they identified as a separate population with their own perspective on the colonial relationship. Despite these internal differences the state clearly perceived a threat to

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136 A slightly looser series of linkages which differed from these can be seen in the relationship between North African and Sub-Saharan African/Afro-Caribbean groups. North Africans were rarely ever included under the umbrella ‘pan-African’ although they were integrated through the ‘anti-colonial’ affiliations with other groups of French citizens. Gary Wilder is extremely good on these connections in the second section of Wilder, The French Imperial Nation-State : Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars..

137 Dewitte, Les Mouvements Nègres.
its interests once groups of colonial subjects began to form active associations and thus colonial subjects were closely monitored by the State in the interwar decades.\footnote{Rosenberg, Policing Paris. See also Dewitte, who also describes how police surveillance of African immigration became more stringent when Africans and Madagascans were seen to be listening to and responding positively to anti-colonial political activists visiting Marseilles, Dewitte, Les Mouvements Nègres, 21-22.}

Table 1, shown below lists the competing political organizations formed by people of color that sprang up between the wars. It illustrates the increase in political activism that concerned the State but it also indicates the serious political differences that emerged among Africans and Afro-Caribbeans in Paris as the nineteen-twenties progressed.\footnote{Gary Wilder has considered the relationships between many of these groups fairly carefully in Wilder, The French Imperial Nation-State : Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars. I have tabulated their formation dates here only to illustrate the larger point that the jazz craze was one factor in a suddenly very locally active expressive community of black men and women in the French métropole.}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name or meeting</th>
<th>Date formed</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Ideological affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ligue Universelle de Défense de la Race Noir</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Touvalou Houenou, Maran, Fangeait</td>
<td>Liberal-radical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comité de défense des intérêts de la Race Noire</td>
<td>March 1926</td>
<td>Lamine Senghor, Mme. Kossoul, Emile Fauré, Georges Fougues, Kouyaté, Sajous</td>
<td>Liberal, left-wing, but not communist initially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ligue de défense de la race nègre</td>
<td>23 Mai, 1927</td>
<td>Lamine Senghor, Kouyaté</td>
<td>More radical than CDRN, strong affiliation with communists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ligue Contre Imperialisme et l'Oppression Coloniale</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Lamine Senghor, AugusteBloncourt,</td>
<td>Liberal, left-wing, anti-colonial, affiliation with comintern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union des Travailleurs Nègres</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Kouyate</td>
<td>Radical, Trade Union, Communist sensibilities although maintains fiscal and political autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salons chez les Sœurs Nardal</td>
<td>1930 onward</td>
<td>Nardals, Louis Achille, Leopold Senghor (briefly), Aimé Césaire</td>
<td>Bourgeois, liberal, advocates working within colonial systems initially</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Information collated from Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Paris, Dossiers sur Associations 671, 802, files 79-501-754, and 79-501-615, also Série BA 1912, dossier 5250.\(^{140}\)

The interaction among and between these various groups of the African diaspora in Paris and America increased throughout the interwar period, along with efforts to foster pan-African political solidarity. Very few of the prominent jazz performers active in Paris between 1919 and 1929, however, were involved in these political pan-African circles. Many of them failed to see

the injustices that galvanized pan-African activists and very few of them had strong ties with the literate and middle-class community within which ideals of pan-Africanism were being discussed passionately. Many of them worked late hours and might not have been able to attend political meetings even if they were aware of the existence of such meetings. Even without these constraints the black American perception of France as a land of racial equality worked against widespread African American empathy with the work of Francophone black activists. Yet the jazz craze influenced the black French community profoundly and that community did not fail to publicize the different experiences of black Americans and black French subjects in the city of light.

In 1927, for example, Gratien Candace, the Deputé and homme de couleur originally from Guadeloupe, was featured in a lengthy interview printed in Paris Soir. He poignantly described the fate of black ex-soldiers and other Africans who had been mistreated in France. He asked that they be looked after as befitting their loyal service in World War One. The interview with Candace reveals how the experience of these diverse francophone pan-African groups was intricately interwoven with the jazz craze and the tumulte noir. Candace established a strong contrast between the experiences of ex-soldiers and the black jazz diaspora in the article which is entitled “L’envers du jazz,” or the “flipside of jazz” reminding readers that the jazz story is not the only black narrative in interwar Paris. Candace described “unsophisticated” colonials as subject to accusations and insults of sale nègre (dirty nigger) on all sides despite having serving in a war that was not their own, and being promised fraternité and lasting recognition for doing

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141 Chapter two discusses this issue further and contends that by the end of the twenties African American artists had become more ‘cosmopolitan’ and attuned to the issues facing black French subjects.
so.\textsuperscript{142} The Guadeloupéan deputy then insisted that France act for its own colonial and republican honor, arguing that it was critical to show people of color that they shouldn’t say “France has mistreated me,” but “some French have exploited me.” He thus spelled out the French state’s obligations to her black colonial subjects, acknowledging that France had not met them, and was not color-blind.

Candace concluded his comments by linking France’s colonial reputation with its republican heritage of universalism, and comparing this to America’s shameful virus of “negrophobia” which he claimed the French had resisted. In the last sentence he linked each of these political observations back to the jazz craze which had sparked them:

France… is happily not like America. France is the daughter of the Revolution. In the past she struggled to eliminate the leprous evil of slavery. She mustn’t betray her past. France, a colonial power, for her honor, and for her future must not alienate her colonial subjects… Parisians, when the comic face of jazz makes you laugh and shrug your shoulders, think for a moment of its flipside.

His injunction warns Parisians not to be beguiled by jazz into forgetting that joy and frivolity was not the only truth of jazz. As a black music it was also the product of the subjugation of one people by another upon the basis of race and thus an unlikely cultural outcome of plantation slavery. Candace’s warning to the French is not to be seduced by American music into American racism. Moreover, he adds, jazz is not the only face of black Paris. His second injunction is that French citizens everywhere combat the race-based injustices of interwar France that spring from the unequal power relations between colonizer and colonized. The article shows why many black Parisians resented Gratien Candace as it

characterizes black soldiers as naïve, primitive, and hundreds of years behind the Europeans in civilization. Moreover his investment in colonial ideology is clear. But the way he sets black colonial subjects claims against the backdrop of jazz illustrates the connection between the cultural product and a complex set of socio-political developments relating to race.\footnote{\hspace*{1em}It is important to note the wage differences between black jazz musicians and regular working wages for low paid jobs in Paris at the time. Chapter Six gives a comparison of singer Opal Cooper’s wages, with those employed at the colonial exposition. Jeffrey Jackson has some supplementary information on jazz wages in Jackson, \textit{Making Jazz French}. The case study below engages with this but in addition to different wages for the same occupations black colonial subjects faced the problem that, as in the case of ‘women’s work,’ black people have been subject to occupational segregation, which carries direct financial consequences.}

\textbf{Conclusion}

The following tale of the rise of the bandleader “Jazz Williams” illuminates Candace’s pointed analysis and shows how the experience of racial difference, as well as the perception of racial difference, in France was colored by the social and cultural impact of jazz. André Démaison, a French journalist and author found himself in Marseilles in March of 1929 where he had a remarkable chance meeting with Jazz Williams, an old acquaintance from Senegal, at a nightclub.\footnote{\hspace*{1em}Démaison was a French author and apologist for colonialism who wrote a highly celebratory guide to the colonial exposition of 1931. He won the grand prix du roman for his novel \textit{Livre des bêtes qu’on appelle sauvages} in 1929. The following article may or may not be true but it reflects French perceptions of racial difference at the time. André Démaison, « Jazz Williams, » unattributed clipping, ‘Coupures; Jazz,’ R 98531, Collection Rondel, Département des Arts et Spectacles, Richelieu, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France.} They had met when Jazz Williams was still known as Wali Kané (later renamed Alphonse by missionaries), “a youth who, in the past, hung around the office, helped with the
cooking, pretended to wash the dishes and succeeded more often in breaking them." When Démaison asked him what he had done since being an office boy the musician explained:

- War! You see, it hasn’t damaged me too much. After the liberation I came to Paris. Yes, your Paris! It is something your Paris! There I was lost like a shell in the ocean.
- And after that?
- After that, I was a messenger for a restaurant, then a laborer in the metro. A new line under construction. In that rat hole, if I had strayed from the path a bit, no-one would ever have found me. So, I wanted to see the sun again. I fell back on hotel work, being a lift-boy, and a dishwasher. Finally, however, I was engaged by a music hall troupe. I worked the dance floor and played the bass drum.
- You had learned music?
- Not much, but a little, with the priests. I had forgotten. So the band leader gave me signs, you understand. Entertaining your types (white audiences) is easy…

And what are you doing here, in Marséilles Alphonse?

- Chef d’orchestre!... he affirmed
- And this name, Williams?
- Oh that, you have to understand, that’s for the likes of you. Audiences love to be fooled. Alphonse Kané, from Senegal, a French colony, no-one would pay any attention. “Williams” is better, it comes from America. It means something...

He laughed at his ruse. He also laughed with joy at demonstrating his knowledge of our weaknesses.

This anecdote illustrates the harshly different treatment offered to black colonial subjects and black American musicians and it underscores the accusations launched by political activists who articulated the grievances of ex-tirailleurs. Alphonse Kané, a colonial subject who had migrated into Paris after the war, like so many of his fellow soldiers, was offered the lowest

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145 This quotation and the dialogue that follows are my translation of the original article. André Démaison, ‘Jazz Williams.’
paying jobs – a dishwasher, a laborer in the metro, and a lift-boy. The introduction of colonial troops may have war shifted the perception of Senegalese from “savages” to be feared to a more familiar, although still somewhat exotic, image represented by the grinning face of the *tirailleur* on the Banania advertisement.\(^{146}\) However in terms of labor opportunities it seems clear that Kane, like many others, was hamstrung by perceptions about the laziness of colonial subjects, the threat they posed to organized labor, and their lack of aptitude for sophisticated tasks.\(^{147}\) It was through learning the bass drum and adopting an American persona associated with the new jazz music that Alphonse Kané was able to “fool” white audiences.

André Démaison claimed to distinguish between the Senegalese members of the band who “were the same black as my long lost Alphonse” and “the banjo and the ukulele players” who “were lighter: these latter had re-crossed the breadth of the Atlantic after having, over the course of the two past centuries, acquired some drops of white blood.” The Senegalese players were thus recognizably African rather than African American to white French eyes but through adopting the mantle of an American jazz player they assumed a mask which entitled them to a better lifestyle. Jazz Williams stated that his experience in Paris as a black man had shown him that “working and earning little, that’s the story of fools [but] playing and earning a lot is preferable.”\(^{148}\) The fact that he manipulated French perceptions of race and music in order to earn a lot and to circumvent the discriminatory treatment suffered by colonial subjects of color emphasizes how the jazz craze created greater complexity in the perception of racial difference.


\(^{148}\) André Démaison, , ‘Jazz Williams,’
in France, and how it produced very different experiences of men and women supposedly of the same race in France. The French state, and many white French, did distinguish between Africans and African-Americans based upon considerations of nationality and claims to citizenship even if they saw both within a set of exotic – but differentiated - stereotypes.

The story of Jazz Williams underlines the point that African-Americans were treated better in France than black colonial subjects and preferential treatment was given to black jazz performers who were presumed to be American. It underscores African-American jazz performers’ lack of political engagement with France’s colonial practice while based in Paris. African-Americans were far more likely to draw a comparison between France and America in which France appeared to great advantage than to scrutinize France’s treatment of her colonial subjects of color. However the print media record of French fears about an invasion noire show that French color-blindness was more myth than reality. The white French perception that jazz had overtaken the French métropole revealed deep fears about the migration of Francophone Africans and Afro-Caribbeans into France. Interwar journalism from both black and white communities recorded and analyzed the black French experience in France and revealed that the Parisian public at the time was well aware of racial differences and some, at least, were beginning to tease out the distinctions between the glamorous image of the black jazz entertainers’ lifestyle and the life of other black Parisians. It also shows that an unanticipated social and political outcome of the tumulte noir was to stimulate a series of efforts among black communities to articulate and promote an identity that contrasted to the frivolous jazz image.

149 See chapter two.
The divisions between different groups of African, Afro-Caribbean, and African-Americans in Paris and the disillusionment expressed by Francophone black advocates and activists contrasts sharply with the celebratory narrative of black Americans in the interwar Parisian jazz world. However, many black American men and women who followed the progress of the *tumulte noir* from "across the pond,"0 did not want to acknowledge the existence of race-prejudice in Europe. African-Americans promoted and clung to a hopeful vision of racial equality made real in interwar Paris. In doing so they contributed to an emergent populist concept of black jazz cosmopolitanism that built on the positive experience of many black Americans in interwar Europe but occluded the experience of many black Francophone subjects in France. The following chapter discusses the emergence of this populist black cosmopolitanism in the interwar transatlantic context.
2. Black Cosmopolitanism in the interwar Atlantic

In 1925 George H. Evans, one of the many black American jazz performers living in Paris in the interwar period penned a chatty “Letter from Paris” to the “World’s Greatest Weekly” the Chicago Defender, a popular African American newspaper. First Evans assured his “friends” – namely anyone reading this open letter in the Chicago Defender - that he was well. Many of his colleagues were touring other countries during the summer but those that remained could be found at a nightclub managed by his fellow African American Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith. Bricktop’s was a center where “artists of both races” congregated to sip whiskey and water and “do their stuff” once their paid gigs were finished. Evans ended his letter by expressing sympathy with Prince Kojo Touvalou Houénon, a black French society figure who had been denied service at a Chicago hotel due to his race:

All of the gang over here were shocked to hear or read through the W. G. W (World’s Greatest Weekly) of the humiliation Prince Kojo received at the Astor hotel in Chicago and we sincerely hope that those guilty shall be brought to justice as the prince is a great friend of ours, having played a special engagement for him on my arrival in Paris in the famous Latin quarter, where he received from his associates there, esteemed courtesy according to a man of his title, regardless of his color. Long live Prince Kojo.151

150 George H. Evans, “Letter from Paris: American Express Co., 11 Rue Scribe, Paris France, June 18 1925,” Chicago Defender, Saturday July 18, 1925. The incident occurred when Kojo Tovalou-Houenou, who claimed to be of royal Dahomean descent, had finished giving a lecture to members of the Women’s International League in Chicago and entered a restaurant at the Astor hotel for dinner, but was refused service because he was black. He protested and the police were called. The Chicago Defender reported the incident. “Prince Kojo beaten by policemen in Café: Royal Guest given sample of true Americanism,” Chicago Defender (National edition), May 30, 1925.

George Evans, Bricktop and “the gang” of black entertainers in Europe constituted a diasporic network of hundreds of black American performers who left the States to tour and live in Europe during the interwar years. Their experience of Europe was cosmopolitan in that they lived and moved freely throughout a variety of nations and communities. Evans and his fellow entertainers travelled internationally, sipped whiskey with entertainers of every race on an equal footing, and shared in the condemnation of the Astor Hotel’s racist treatment of a black French friend for whom they had performed. However this was a very pragmatic cosmopolitanism. Many performers enjoyed their European experience so much that they failed to register or report upon the racial exclusions operating in Europe. This omission was reflected by the black press in America which parlayed the entertainers’ success in Europe into a powerful rhetorical tool with which to critique racial practices in America. The reportage in black American press thus exploited the myth of ‘color-blind France’ and pursued a vision of ‘black cosmopolitanism’ in their portrayal of a European world in which all black men and women could move freely, act with dignity and feel like a member of a universal human community.

The distinction between a practice and a politics of cosmopolitanism raises an important question about the nature of cosmopolitanism. One definition argues that lived or practice cosmopolitanism occurs wherever individuals “have thought and acted beyond the local.”\textsuperscript{152} The strength of this definition is that it circumvents “triumphalist notions of cosmopolitical coexistence” that posit each and every human as the bearer of universal rights.\textsuperscript{153} Such notions

have frequently been framed by the ideal of national sovereignty – an ideal that is necessarily exclusive and thus not inclusively cosmopolitan. The danger of such a broad definition, however, is that it reduces the potential of the cosmopolitan experience to serve as a call to political action and an argument for inclusion. More recent attempts to grapple with what constitutes cosmopolitanism have considered large world cities that bring people together as a site of cosmopolitanism or, alternatively, diasporic networks that link various localities across the globe as inherently cosmopolitan. Black entertainers performed in large world cities, and formed a loosely entwined diaspora. They definitely “practiced” cosmopolitanism through travel and through socializing with a diverse range of fellow entertainers in a variety of locales. Whether they became cosmopolitan in that they felt like members of a wider world community that transcended class and race and linked men and women of various races into a common humanity is less certain. The following discussion, however, illustrates the emergence of a black cosmopolitanism based upon the link between black entertainers engaging in cosmopolitan practices of travel and overseas living, and the way the wider black community – led by the press – perceived such practices as evidence of the promise that every black person could be recognized as a bearer of universal rights.

“Plying back and forth across the Ocean”: Travel as black cosmopolitanism practice

The jazz migration into Europe between World War One and World War Two forged a network of performers that flowed freely across and around national boundaries.\textsuperscript{156} For many players it was the culmination of a series of moves that brought them from their local towns or from New Orleans into the North specifically Chicago and New York in a musical version of the great migration: “Musicians moved north for the same reasons that motivated other groups: the search for a better life, for greater opportunities to work, to support a family, [and] to enjoy a modicum of personal freedom.”\textsuperscript{157} The Great Migration was aggressively championed by the black popular press, in particular the \textit{Chicago Defender} which waged a fierce campaign to critique the racial restrictions operating in the South and promote full citizenship rights for African-Americans. It is no wonder that when black musicians took the Great Migration another step and pursued fame and fortune overseas the \textit{Chicago Defender} seized every opportunity to publicize their success and boast of the many freedoms enjoyed by these peripatetic black performers in Europe.

In 1925 the newspaper proudly recorded that a “growing group of internationally famous stars,” was “plying back and forth across the ocean as if they were merely making trips back and

\textsuperscript{156} It is important to acknowledge that African-Americans had travelled either individually as intellectuals and artists, or with earlier tours, dating from the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1873-1874, to James Reese Europe who accompanied Irene and Vernon Castle’s pre-WW1 tour, or Louis Mitchell’s jazz group that was in London in 1914. However the scale of what I have called the ‘jazz migration’ of 1919-1925 was unprecedented. For the Castles see Jackson, \textit{Making Jazz French}, 17. For Fisk Jubilee singers see Veit Erlmann, \textit{Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13. See also Geneva H. Southall. "Jubilee Singers." And Howard Rye. "Mitchell, Louis." In \textit{Grove Music Online}, \textit{Oxford Music Online}, http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ilsprod.lib.neu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/14522 (accessed February 18, 2009).

\textsuperscript{157} Gioia, \textit{The History of Jazz}, 45.
forth to Harlem on the subway.”\textsuperscript{158} The press report, in this case, accurately recorded a significant movement of African-Americans that created a jazz diaspora of black Americans in Europe.\textsuperscript{159} The jazz craze provided the opportunity for black Americans with even a modicum of musical talent to find employment in Europe. Hundreds of them took that opportunity. The number of African-American jazz musicians living in various European cities boomed between 1917 (when black servicemen and military bands introduced jazz to Europe) and 1929 when the onset of the Great Depression began to affect employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{160} There is no official census recording the scale of the black musical migration to Europe between the wars and figures in different accounts vary considerably. Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith, one of the first women to settle in Paris, claims that when she arrived in 1924 there were no more than “eight to ten negro entertainers in all of Paris.”\textsuperscript{161} However Tyler Stovall lists the permanent community of black Americans in Paris as numbering several hundred although many of these were not performers.\textsuperscript{162} By 1927 the \textit{Chicago Defender} claimed that Paris boasted “over a hundred dark Americans now employed as musicians and entertainers in the resorts’ in Paris.”\textsuperscript{163} Joel Rogers, the Paris-based correspondent for the black press, claimed that in 1926 “colored Americans in

\textsuperscript{159} See Tyler Stovall’s work \textit{Paris Noir} in which he considers the various groups of African-Americans who ended up in Paris, artists, novelists, public figures, and businessmen in addition to the jazz performers. Stovall mentions the various groups of black diasporic men and women in the capital from places other than America. Stovall, \textit{Paris Noir}. For a full consideration of these groups see Edwards, \textit{The Practice of Diaspora}. Charles Didier Gondola offers a brief discussion of the differences in the way the black Americans were treated in France versus black Francophone diasporans “But I ain’t African, I’m American,” in Raphaël-Hernandez, \textit{Blackening Europe}, 201-215.
\textsuperscript{160} Tyler Stovall does a good job of charting this and Jeffrey Jackson has also explored the phenomenon. Jackson, however, concentrates on the cultural exchange and transfer that occurred Jackson, \textit{Making Jazz French}; Stovall, \textit{Paris Noir}.
\textsuperscript{162} Stovall, \textit{Paris Noir}, 46.
\textsuperscript{163} Morgan Blakley, “Georgia Bully whipped in Paris: Legion Vets find France is Different,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, Oct 1 1927, 1.
this city could be numbered in hundreds.” 164 An examination of evidence from newspaper reportage, memoirs, archival collections of program notes, and discographies that list jazz recordings made in Europe suggests that the musical migration into Europe between 1919 and 1931 numbered between five hundred and a thousand performers. 165

These players enjoyed an access to independent travel and mobility that was one of the attributes of black cosmopolitanism vaunted by the black press and one that made a deep impression upon the performers themselves. For black Americans - a group of individuals who had historically been denied freedom of movement and whose previous experience of large-scale Atlantic travel had been through the forced migration of the slave trade – travel took on profound significance. 166 This point is more compelling given that many performers who ‘crossed the pond,’ were born within twenty years of emancipation. 167 By the mid nineteen-twenties black jazz performers were travelling the world and they described the process as one of unprecedented opportunity that expanded their horizons dramatically. 168 Singer Florence Mills, for example,

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164 He comments “Five years ago colored Americans in this city could be numbered in the hundreds.” J.A. Rogers, “Bottom out of Montmartre’s Nightlife,” circa October 1931, Tuskegee Clippings file, 779.
165 These figures are preliminary results from a database that records African American (jazz) performers who travelled abroad. The database draws on a variety of sources; biographies, discographies (which list recording venues and performers), newspaper articles, archival sources, jazz journals, scholarly monographs and the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*. It records names, birthdates, dates of presence in Europe, birthplace, instrument, venues played and marital status.
166 Some sense of the significance of travel is evident in the dominance of the theme of movement in blues songs of the nineteen-teens and twenties.
167 The database shows that the oldest performer for whom a birth date is available was born in 1869, just six years after emancipation. Furthermore of the 77 musicians for whom he have reliable birthdates thus far, 14 were born before 1880, and 46 before 1890. These preliminary results suggest about half the performers who travelled were within one generation of slavery and travel was a visible demonstration of their access to a basic human right, to be ‘cosmopolitan’ as never before.
168 This particular discussion concentrates on Europe but black musicians travelled the globe. In 1927 the “Harmony Kings” were busy “raising Cain” in “far off Sydney, Australia.” In the same year Teddy Weathersford the “demon pianist,” was being “likened unto a king,” in China. For Harmony Kings see “Across the Pond,” *Chicago Defender*, Oct 8 1927. For Teddy Weathersford see “Across the Pond,” *Chicago Defender*, November 26 1927.
recalled that as a girl she had learned about London in her “history and geography lessons” but at that stage “it seemed as far away as the moon, and I felt like the small boy whose mamie laughs when he whispers he’d like to go to the moon.”\footnote{Mills, Florence, “Magic Moon that Brought Me Money: Colored Star’s Romantic Rise to fame,” unattributed clipping, box 1 folder 9, Florence Mills Collection, Schomburg Centre for Black Culture, NYPL. This is authored (or at the very least ghost authored) by Mills but it is clearly written for the British public as she notes that ‘you do the dances I know so well’ and “I like London, I feel more at home here” (than in Paris).} She couldn’t believe it when she got the chance to go to “London, that city of my dreams, 3000 miles away across the ocean.”\footnote{Mills, “Magic Moon”} The self professed “normally unexcitable” singer Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith, recalled in her memoirs that the call to Paris surprised and excited her and she became “quite a celebrity to [her] New York friends” because in those days a trip to Europe meant that “you had money – unless you were one of those eccentric writers.”\footnote{Bricktop and Haskins, \textit{Bricktop}, 83. See also the interviews conducted by Chris Goddard, which reiterate the point that at the outset of the interwar era the journey to Europe was seen as a very big deal. Goddard, \textit{Jazz Away from Home}, 281-303.} International travel was still a novelty for most black men and women in the nineteen-twenties and it represented a dramatic freedom from the restrictions on movement that had accompanied slavery and racial oppression.

Many jazz performers evinced a clear sense of excitement about travel and the freedom they experienced outside of America. Earl Granstaff, a trombone player who spent years in Europe, wrote to his friend and singer Florence Mills with a sense of astonishment and agency about his experiences playing in various European cities. He exclaimed at the fact that since leaving New York in 1924 he had “seen a lot” and “lived the life of O’Reilly.”\footnote{“Earl Granstaff, to Florence Mills,” Dated June 3rd, 1926, Constantinople, Turkey, Florence Mills Collection, Schomburg Centre for Black Culture, NYPL.} His letter is full of glee at negotiating good contracts, enjoying the freedom from American prohibition laws, and actively choosing which cities to visit and how long to stay. His trip began when he “grabbed an
armful of boat,” and went to work in Paris. Before long he moved to Budapest where he stayed for eight months after which he joked that he had absorbed so many “brain-racking words” that he thought he’d “jump to London.”\textsuperscript{173} Opal Cooper, a popular tenor and banjo player, managed to live and work in Europe for the whole interwar era during which time he enjoyed a trip to Bombay to promote a new song.\textsuperscript{174} Sidney Bechet, a stunningly talented soprano sax player and clarinet soloist arrived in Europe in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{175} Between 1925, when he featured in the \textit{Revue Nègre} starring Josephine Baker, and 1929 when he was expelled from France for his involvement in a gunfight Bechet toured Europe and the Mediterranean extensively.\textsuperscript{176} In the year prior to his expulsion Bechet was living with a German woman, Elizabeth Birgler, and had filed for a \textit{carte d’identité} in May of 1928.\textsuperscript{177} He clearly wanted to stay in Europe and in the 1950s he managed to return for the rest of his life.

One precondition for cosmopolitanism is the ability to move beyond the local, to travel, to become part of a wider group of humans than that in which you were born, raised, and socialized. The jazz craze in the nineteen-twenties provided exactly that precondition so that the possibility of black cosmopolitanism was extended to a wider black community than those who “had money” or were “eccentric writers” as Bricktop put it. Travel, in turn, made other aspects of cosmopolitanism available to black performers and the journalists and readers who followed.

\textsuperscript{173} Earl Granstaff, to Florence Mills, Dated June 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1926, Constantinople, Turkey, Florence Mills Collection.
\textsuperscript{174} Opal Cooper Files, folder 1 Box 6, Helen Armstead-Jones Collection, Schomburg Centre for Black Culture, NYPL. (Hereafter Opal Cooper Files, HAJ Collection)
\textsuperscript{175} ‘Sidney Bechet’ file, Série G/a (étranger), Archives de la Préfecture de la Police (Paris).
\textsuperscript{176} ‘Sidney Bechet’ file, G/a (étranger), APP. Bechet visited the Netherlands, Berlin, the Czech Republic, Austria, Budapest, Frankfurt, Bulgaria, Istanbul, Greece, Egypt (Alexandria and Cairo), Belgium, Algeria, Portugal, and Italy.
\textsuperscript{177} ‘Sidney Bechet’ file, G/a, APP.
their exploits with excitement. These were: the chance to socialize beyond the boundaries of any
given local community or “race” and an engagement with, and contribution to, cosmopolitan
“spaces” in the European métropoles.

Networks and spaces as sites of connection

The members of the jazz migration from America to Europe formed a loosely knit
diaspora through which players could find information, get work, and enjoy fellowship and
camaraderie even when far from home. If a cosmopolitan is a member of a diasporic network
that both reflects a local identity and yet connects many locales, as Evridiki Sifnios suggests in
relation to the Greek commercial diaspora, or Mamadou Diouf does in his discussion of the
Senegalese Murid Trade, than black jazz performers clearly qualify.178 The jazz migration
enfolded within it a chain migration process in which players wrote letters and returned home to
recruit others. Opal Cooper, for example, had performed with an army band during the war, and
once it was over he returned to New York just long enough to assemble a group of colleagues,
and name them the ‘Red Devils’ before hotfooting it back to Paris.179 Eugene Bullard, the black
American fighter pilot and war hero opened a club after the war and sent Sammy Richardson, a
black American pianist to employ Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith as a hostess and resident singer for his

178 Evridiki Sifneos, “‘Cosmopolitanism’ as a feature of the Greek Commercial Diaspora,” Mamadou Diouf, “The
Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the making of a vernacular cosmopolitanism,” in Breckenridge,
Cosmopolitanism, 679-702.
179 Opal Cooper Files, HAJ Collection. See also the players’ description of being lured to Europe by word of mouth,
positive reports, and recruiting activities of other performers, in the interviews transcribed in Goddard, Jazz Away
from Home.
nightclub. Once Bricktop arrived in Paris she, like Eugene Bullard before her, became a personal and institutional resource for numerous bands and singers. She hired Fats Waller to play at her club, she gave Josephine Baker advice about how to deal with sudden and overwhelming popularity and she noted that “[American] musicians and singers were always showing up at Bricktop’s and if they were good I’d hire them.” These interactions illustrate the way that black performers fanned out through Europe but maintained links with each other and with the folks back home.

Clearly performers did form a diasporic network that linked many different locales but there is some doubt as to whether they were major figures in the emergence of “black cosmopolitanism.” Tyler Stovall’s seminal work on black Americans in Paris explicitly claims that in the interwar years the African-American community in Paris “not only embraced the spirit of black cosmopolitanism, but itself became a potent symbol of that spirit.” He argues that this was due to the various diasporic African groups in that city and Brent Edwards offers a compelling explanation of how interactions between these groups produced a Paris-based black internationalism that “came to represent certain kinds of crossings, certain extensions of the horizon, even for populations that did not travel.” Yet Edwards is articulating an intellectual and cultural phenomenon or network within which internationalism signified the transnational

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181 Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 108. and Phyllis Rose, Jazz Cleopatra : Josephine Baker in Her Time, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1989). For Fats Waller, see “To Grant Fisk, From Thomas “Fats” Waller with Best Wishes, Bricktop’s 1932,’ Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith Photograph Collection, Schomburg Center for Black Culture, NYPL.
182 Stovall, Paris Noir, 129.
exchange of ideas and it also involved the attempt to construct a pan-African discourse. Edwards doesn’t comment extensively upon how travel affected the individuals he describes. Tyler Stovall does engage with this aspect of the black experience in Paris and he claims that black intellectuals and writers had a more cosmopolitan experience in Paris than did the jazz musicians because they saw more of the city and met more diasporic Africans. There is evidence to suggest, however, that black performers forged cosmopolitan social networks although their black cosmopolitanism was not recorded in intellectual literary works. Furthermore the “black cosmopolitanism” represented by these musicians may have seemed relevant to a wider cross-section of the black community than the pan-African international rhetoric of black writers and intellectuals and thus extended collective horizons further than pan-African intellectuals.

Many black performers in Europe worked with colleagues from a variety of different ethnicities and nationalities and travelled with them, learning to communicate and share living and working spaces amicably. Earl Granstaff, for example, “met a fellow named Eric Borchard,” a bandleader, who employed him and “carried him all over Deutschland’ in his mostly-white band.” Sam Cook’s Southern Syncopated Orchestra took on the white British trombone player Ted Heath and his friend Tommy Smith, a trumpet player. Ted Heath later remembered the collegiality of the band members who were “a pretty rough crowd,” but “very helpful” and one of whom, Buddy Gilmore, “went out of his way to teach us about the different approach and

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184 Stovall, Paris Noir, 98.
185 Earl Granstaff, to Florence Mills, Dated June 3rd, 1926, Constantinople, Turkey. Mills Collection. Granstaff describes Eric Borchard as a ‘German Paul Whiteman.’ Whiteman was a popular and celebrated white American band leader who employed mostly white musicians to play a ‘Europeanized’ symphonic jazz. See Jackson, Making Jazz French, 94-95. See also Goddard, Jazz Away from Home, 76-78.
technique needed for jazz.”

Jazz Williams (aka Alphonse Kane) a Senegalese French colonial subject had tried to make his way in Paris after the war. After trying several jobs he defaulted to playing in a jazz band – one of the most lucrative options for anyone who could pass for a black American at the time. He was taught to play the bass drum by an American band in Paris and by 1929 he was leading his own band, comprised mostly of Senegalese but the banjo and the ukulele players were American. They socialized freely with Jazz Williams and a diverse group of black entertainers in Marseilles. French musicians such as Andre Ekyan apprenticed with African American bands, and black American bandleaders such as Arthur Briggs, and Willie ‘the Lion’ Smith, put together bands including players of various nationalities.

In addition to incorporating non-American players into their bands black American jazz players participated in a cosmopolitan entertainment culture where musicians of diverse nationalities were employed at the same venues. The dance hall, nightclub, or cabaret was a microcosm of the larger global city in which most of these venues were located. Paris was not only inundated with tourists at the time but it also played host to large numbers of exiled “white

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186 Goddard, Jazz Away from Home, 60.
187 Eugene Bullard realized this and taught himself to play drums before accepting the job of managing a nightclub, Langston Hughes couldn’t find work as a writer so he worked as a dishwasher at Bricktop’s club, and Jeffrey Jackson tells the story of a breach of contract trial for a black jazz band who employed a white musician. See Lloyd, Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris. See also Hughes and others, The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, 130-132. For a white player in blackface see Jackson, Making Jazz French, 26.
188 The article describes them jamming together with the Senegalese after the club is officially closed although theirs is not an ethnically inclusive cosmopolitanism as they get into a fight with some Chinese patrons at the club. André Démaison, « Jazz Williams, » Coupures ‘Jazz’, R 98531, Dept des Arts et Spectacles, Richelieu, BNF, Paris. André Démaison, , who wrote the article about Jazz Williams, was a well known apologist for colonialism, who also wrote the Guide Officiel for the Colonial Exposition of 1931 and this may affect his portrayal of the situation. He characterizes the Americans as having ‘recrossed the breadth of the Atlantic after two centuries’ thus emphasizing a link between them and the Senegalese.
Russians,” immigrant Poles, Italians, Spanish, and North Africans, in addition to smaller groups of diasporic Africans. These groups fuelled the interwar demand for exotic music and thus foreign musicians. Jazz bands often alternated sets with bands that played the ever-popular Argentinian tango and after 1931 clubs also employed Martinican musicians to play the biguine. Several Parisian nightclubs added a third band to their nightly offerings. The *Ermitage Muscovite* and the Embassy employed a jazz band, a tango band, and also a *Tzigane* band, while the Lido featured an *Orchestre Napolitain* along with its tango and jazz bands. Most of these bands contained a mix of foreign and French musicians but with a high concentration of *étrangers* (foreigners). These musicians worked together in the same places and the tone of camaraderie in the trade journals in addition to the nightly “jams” with “artists of

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191 See Maurice (Wa-wa) Bedouc-Ermenchy, “Main d’oeuvre étrangère,” Jazz-Tango, 2ème Année, No. 6, (1 March, 1931), p. 3-4. The author, a ‘conseiller syndicale’ or union organizer for French musicians published a table listing employment statistics for foreign labor. He may exaggerate slightly the employment of foreign musicians to demonstrate his concern with their domination of the entertainment scene at the expense of French citizens. Of all the establishments employing bands that were surveyed 13 out of 50 (slightly under a third) employed multiple bands, most often a jazz band and a tango band. Of the clubs that used orchestras with ‘foreign’ directors the number was much higher – 11/29 (38%). See also Pierre Ramelot, « le Jazz et la Crise,” Le Canarde, 17 February 1929. André Démaison, “Jazz Williams,” mentions both a jazz band and an Argentinian band at the club in Marseilles. See also Jackson, *Making Jazz French,* 42. Once the biguine won popularity as a result of the Colonial Exposition it was added to the musical mix in many of these spaces. See Andrée Nardal’s comments on the growth of its popularity in “Notes on the Biguine Créole/Etude sur la biguine créole,” "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World." 121.

192 ‘Main d’oeuvre étrangere,’ Jazz-Tango, 2ème Année, No. 6, (1 March, 1931, 3-4).

193 Within the bands led by foreigners the Jazz-Tango survey recorded that the total number of musicians employed was 277 of whom 236 were non-French citizens, *étrangers,* and 41 were French. For French-led bands the numbers changed, and 101 of 146 musicians employed were French.
both races” at Bricktop’s in the mid-nineteen-twenties suggests that there was a musical cosmopolitanism that transcended some barriers of race and nationality. 194

The audiences and clients who came to listen and dance to the bands, furthermore, required that bandleaders and nightclub managers display “international style and wit.”195 The very locale of the jazz performance – a nightclub, or music hall – was itself a multicultural space, “un établissement cosmopolite par excellence” catering to a “crowd of people from every nation.”196 A band leader or a nightclub host “must sing in English, in French, in Italian – with the wit and charm of Chevalier” to be truly successful.197 Band leaders, singers, and members made efforts to learn the language and idioms of the cultures in which they played. Joe Turner, for example, an “eminent pianist,” learned to speak “very good German and Italian,” and “a little Czech and Hungarian,” and made good use of his linguistic abilities to court his future wife a

194 Jazz-Tango, for example, published chatty news and gossip about both black and white bands, led by and employing both French and “foreigners.” As the economic depression worsened the tension between black American players and French citizens increased and the sense of solidarity I have identified as characterizing the mid-twenties seemed to wane. But Jazz-Tango still published “work wanted” advertisements of bands containing ‘foreigners.’ The Revue du Jazz published columns and “Gossip from the Tabac” about both black and white musicians in Paris, London, and America, and interviews with musicians of a variety of different nationalities – usually as they passed through Paris. So in these trade journals at least there was a spirit of jazz camaraderie that lends credence to the idea that black American jazz musicians in Europe felt part of a cosmopolitan jazz network. The nightly jams are mentioned in the quotation that begins this chapter.

195 J.B. interviewing M. Conti, “Cœurs Nouveaux, Musiques nouvelles; le leader’ Intransigéant, 10 September 1927. Conti is French, as the reporter takes pains to point out, but his remarks reference the general role of all band leaders regardless of race.


197 « Il faut plaire à un public de toutes les nations, dans le même moment. Une plaisanterie mal comprise par un étranger et tous les incidents sont possibles. Il faut un gaité internationale, si l’on peut dire, et surtout n’etre jamais vulgaire,” J.B., «Cœurs Nouvelles » Intransigeant, 10 September 1927.
“beautiful Hungarian violinist.”

Earl Granstaff, as noted above, absorbed his fair share of “brain-racking” words while in Hungary, and Bricktop ‘fractured the audience’ with her “fractured French,” when she started incorporating it into her American jazz and cabaret songs. Learning another language involves absorbing the concepts and even some aspects of the mode of thinking of another group of humans from a different cultural and ethnic background. It is a cosmopolitan action which encourages men and women to recognize a shared humanity across linguistic and cultural divides.

Many black performers also met and forged social connections with very diverse individuals through their work and their networking with audience members. Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith was comfortable hosting the colorful figures who congregated at her bar: Picasso, Man Ray and Kiki, the Hemingways, Cole Porter, The Prince of Wales, Salvador Dali, and even black French intellectuals such as Prince Kojo Touvalou. Singer Florence Mills was a hit in London and she impressed individuals from every sector of London’s international population when she toured there. The graceful, slender, and elegant star was feted in high society circles and asked to judge the dance competition at a local charity ball in Regent’s Park. A “white poor man” wrote an admiring fan letter to Mills, advising her to “be true to yourself, and then, you will

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199 Granstaff, Earl Granstaff, to Florence Mills, Dated June 3rd, 1926, Constantinople, Turkey, Mills Collection. Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 121.
201 Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited (London,: Chapman & Hall ltd., 1945), 193-197. Waugh’s novel is a fictional account, but it closely resembles Mills’ experience at elite parties such as one hosted by Nancy Cunard, described in Bill Egan, Florence Mills: Harlem Jazz Queen, Studies in Jazz, No. 48 (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 93. For charity ball see William Warshawski to Florence Mills, 17 November 1926, Mills Collection.
reach the hearts of the Real White Men.\textsuperscript{202} The singer met the Liberian consul in Liverpool who was so impressed with her he gave her a letter of introduction to the president of Liberia (then holidaying in Paris). The consul praised Mills for her “sheer force of talent” which had “gained her worldwide commendation” and was positive the Liberian president would be pleased to meet her.\textsuperscript{203} Jazz performers on the European circuit performed with, met, entertained and talked with, a diverse range of fellow musicians and audience members. Extending one’s experience and one’s empathy beyond the local, beyond one’s immediate cultural and linguistic background, was thus part of the jazz world, and the performers’ role in it. The practitioners of jazz had to be versatile and internationally savvy to please crowds in different cultural settings as they moved from country to country, city to city, and audience to audience.

And yet despite this glowing picture of a cosmopolitan process at work in the jazz migration it would be naïve to ignore the fact that the jazz craze enfolded highly racist and sexist discourses related to black performers. The postwar European vogue for African and African American cultural forms spearheaded by the avant-garde was due to a set of assumptions about race, exoticism and primitivism and it did not necessarily represent unqualified acceptance of all humans regardless of racial distinctions.\textsuperscript{204} Players themselves were not slow to realize this which was precisely the reason Bricktop chose to keep her professional and private life very distinct. Her romantic liaisons ranged from taxi drivers to jazz musicians to nameless “colored

\textsuperscript{202} The letter is quite astonishing, all written in rhyming stanzas and/or couplets, and full of advice to Mills to be ‘natural’ ‘good,’ and womanly and innocent in order to retain her hold on male fans. Mills did not, as far as we know, meet this ‘poor white man’ but she kept his letter in her personal files. A Sincere Admirer, A white poor man to Florence Mills, November 19, 1923, Blighty (Britain), Florence Mills Collection.

\textsuperscript{203} The Liberian Consulate C. E Cooper to His Excellency C. D. B. King President of Liberia, 10\textsuperscript{th} August, 1927, West Africa House, Liverpool, Mills Collection.

\textsuperscript{204} Blake, \textit{Le Tumulte Noir} and Berliner, \textit{Ambivalent Desire}. have very good analyses of this cultural context.
French boy.” But she “never fooled around with any of those big clients,” because she “didn’t want to be a backstreet mistress” and knew “that’s all [she] could have been.”

Bricktop’s comments draw attention to the way that gender limited the degree of cosmopolitanism available to African American performers. Just as jazz and blues musical repertoire varied between men and women – the male blues, for example, far more often featured travel than did female blues – so the practice of international movement was also divided along gender lines. Both men and women traveled and travel constituted a critical component of cosmopolitan success, but men tended to enjoy far more freedom of movement, and exercised more individuality in their travel choices. This gendered pattern of international travel was partly dictated by the vehicle that enabled travel – jazz. Most jazz instrumentalists were men, and women were more often dancers and singers. Musicologists have demonstrated that in many societies gender affects a performer’s choice of whether to play an instrument or sing and in most cultures men play instruments and women sing.

This distinction held true in the jazz world of nineteen-twenties Europe, as is evident in a quick survey of some of the major players on the scene in Paris during the twenties and thirties. Among the women Florence Mills, the adored star of the revue Blackbirds that toured Paris and London in 1926, was a singer, Bricktop was a nightclub owner who got her start as a singer, Alberta Hunter and Mabel Mercer were both celebrated singers, and Josephine Baker was a dancer-singer. European critics and audiences alike expected and appreciated the men and

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205 Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 130-132. With typical humor she adds ‘What would we have talked about when we got out of bed? I don’t know anything about polo!’

women of jazz to perform different activities and manifest different qualities onstage as the following review shows:

Soon after began the spectacle imported from Harlem, Teddy Hill’s jazz band with the musicians completely dressed in white, occupied the rostrum, and unleashed a veritable tempest of sound. The blare of the trumpets was still echoing in our ears when the “25 Copper Colored Gals” made their entry: their youth and their beauty were seductive, and this ensemble, where every shade from sepia to the palest brown, was represented, was astonishing.  

The gendered division is clear. Men play, and are admired for the strength and volume of their sound, while the women dance, sing, and are complimented primarily on their physical attributes, although later they are commended for the brilliance of their ‘spécialités’.  

Such differences in expectations and in performers’ areas of expertise both created and were reinforced by a difference in employment opportunities. Most European clubs wanted dance music, and smaller instrumental bands with perhaps one singer. For every female singer fronting a small club-based band there were at least four instrumentalists, and often the clubs didn’t need a female singer because one of the men in the band would serve as singer when needed. Female dancers and chorus-members were more likely to find employment in the chorus line of a large revue than to be offered a contract for small gigs. There were several famous all-black revues that toured Europe during the interwar Period, beginning with the *Revue Nègre*

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207 My translation is intended to convey the sense and feel of the passage rather than the literal meaning. Montboron, ‘Place Blanche, une troupe noire; Le Cotton Club de New-York au Bal du Moulin Rouge,’ unattributed clipping, Florence Mills Collection, Schomburg Center for Black Culture, NYPL.

208 This is in quotation marks in the French as well, and leaves one wondering what *spécialités* are being referenced. ‘Place Blanche Une Troupe Noir.’ It is also worth noting that the ability to play loudly was one of the signifiers of male musical skill in the blues and jazz world at the time. See Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 35. Gioia notes Buddy Bolden – reputed to have driven himself mad with the volume of his playing (literally blown his brains out – to quote an anecdotal account) and discusses Louis Armstrong and his ‘powerful’ tone, 51.
which featured Josephine Baker and the *Blackbirds of 1926* which starred Florence Mills, then followed by the *Chocolate Dandies*, the *Brown Birds*, the *Blackbirds of 1929* (starring Adelaide Hall) among others. Each revue carried a talented chorus line of between ten and eighteen women but also required a band, and both male and female stars. In contrast many of the large all-colored bands that travelled, such as the *Southern Syncopated Orchestra*, or the *Southern Serenaders*, were mostly-male. Opportunities in these larger bands was more than matched by the opportunities for black American male performers who formed smaller bands, or took their one, two, or three-man shows on the road.  

There were simply more, and more flexible employment opportunities for male jazz players to travel freely as individuals, than there were for women. The gender differential was thus coded into the very fabric of performance itself.

These performance practices played a part in regulating international travel styles for women. Substantial numbers of “copper-colored gals,” and “créole girls” did experience travel. Many of them, however, travelled with a group and often a husband.  

The large revues were subject to strict schedules and itineraries thus performers tended to stay in hotels rather than finding their own places and setting their own pace of travel. Just as the freewheeling Earl Granstaff, or the peripatetic Sidney Bechet reflect typical male patterns of travel, singer-dancers Florence Mills, Adelaide Hall and even the famed Josephine Baker illustrate the typical pattern

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209 See database for a more detailed listing of some of the groups that travelled, both small and large. Some of the more successful acts include Evans and Crutcher, the Harmony Kings, the Black Diamonds, Layton and Johnstone, the Three Eddies, and the Red Devils.

210 See Evan’s letter “ten of our girls direct from Harlem,” are at the Moulin Rouge; George H. Evans, ‘Letter from Paris; American Express Co. 11 Rue Scribe, Paris’ *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1925. “girls créoles” is from ‘Aux Ambassadeurs; Black-birds 1926,’ undated clipping, Florence Mills Collection, NYPL. Other examples can be found in ‘Jazz’ file, R 98531, Dept. des Arts et Spectacles, Richelieu, BNF, Paris, France.

211 Travelling accompanied was just one facet of the doctrine of respectability that was applied to the singers and dancers I discuss further in relation to marriage and sexuality in chapter three.
of female musical travel at the time. They were signed on as stars with a revue that was then contracted to tour to Europe. The revues often toured for several months and played in two or three major cities but the artists travelling with them travelled as a group, and were contracted for the length of the show. After the tour many of the women involved returned to America but many of the male instrumentalists used the tours as a springboard to launch a more substantial European séjour. There were, of course, exceptions to this general pattern and the transatlantic tour did launch black women, as well as men, into independent European success.

However, despite these differences the effect of travel upon black American women’s options and expectations of life was considerable. The story of the women who did venture overseas offers a corrective to the perception that “career options for black working class women were generally a choice between cleaning women and prostitute.” The comment is meant to highlight the exceptionality of Josephine Baker and it has some truth in that black American women were subject to severe and widespread labor discrimination. It is, however, reductive. Baker was extremely successful and talented but she was just one of the numerous black American women who were neither cleaning women nor prostitutes.

The success of Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle’s all-black show Shuffle Along in 1921 taught chorus girls to dance in a jazz style, and it taught audiences to expect the top quality

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213 Josephine Baker and Bricktop are the obvious examples here.
214 Sweeney, From Fetish to Subject, 42.
215 Sweeney also neglects the meteoric rise of black cosmetic moguls Mme. C.J. Walker, And Annie Turnbo Malone and their African American saleswomen who fanned out across the nation in the 1910s and 1920s. See Kathy Lee Peiss, Hope in a Jar : The Making of America’s Beauty Culture, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998). It also seems perpetuate problematic racial associations to focus so intensively on black women, in particular Josephine Baker, as women who made money through “exploiting the intelligence of her body” during this era. What about the Crazy Horse salon, or the ‘Tall Chorus Girls’ spectacle both of which involved white women.
energetic dance numbers that resulted. It raised the profile of skilled women by making them an integral element in a successful show:

The most impressive innovation of *Shuffle Along* was the sixteen-girl chorus line. When not dancing on stage they sang in the wings to keep things moving. “Besides being superb dancers,” says Sissle, “our chorus girls were like cheerleaders.” They started a new trend in Broadway musicals.\(^{216}\)

Revues and chorus line opportunities in America presented a highly visible career option in urban American culture after the *Shuffle Along* breakthrough. Black chorus performers were hailed as “far surpassing any chorus of white girls on Broadway” and offering “snap and verve” in comparison to the “blasé slouch of our Broadway queens.”\(^ {217}\) This success coincided with the *tumulte noir* in Europe to ensure transatlantic success for black touring shows. The result was that black working class women who could dance, sing, or act, or alternatively work as dressers and hair and makeup artists for the shows had a financially viable career option.\(^ {218}\) Those who performed with the most successful revues such as the *Shuffle Along*, the *Blackbirds*, or *Chocolate Dandies* not only opened Broadway – “the Great White Way” - to all-black revues but they also expanded the potential for black working class American women to travel overseas and to enjoy a successful career. And overseas the wages ensured more than just a living – they offered a comfortable lifestyle and, in some cases, luxury.

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\(^{218}\) According to her own account Baker actually started as a dresser because she was too young to act in the show but finagled her way into appearing onstage Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra*. 
These brief examples illustrate that the practice of black cosmopolitanism in Europe was limited by gender and class even though at first glance conditions seemed more liberal than the oppressive racial restrictions operating in the United States. Some of these limitations will be discussed further in chapters four and five which place them in the context of the high expectations placed upon internationally successful performers. Despite these limits jazz players who migrated to global cities were brought into direct connection with the wider world beyond America and their experience created their own form of cosmopolitanism. Jazz enabled travel, and travel enabled a wider world perspective. Through the black press in America, moreover, “race artists” became a vehicle for the cosmopolitan aspiration of journalists and thousands of their readers.

**The black American press: Marketing black cosmopolitanism**

The migration of African American performers like Granstaff, Bechet, Bricktop, and Baker, initiated a transnational process that linked black communities in America to the cosmopolitan jazz experience in Europe through an “imagined racial community.” The *Chicago Defender*, the *Amsterdam News* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* all carried numerous reports of black musical success in Paris that formed a common source of pride among their readership. These publications referred to Bricktop, Mills, and men such as Noble Sissle as “race artistic celebrities” and their experiences were transmitted to thousands of working class Americans who

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read about them in the black press.\textsuperscript{220} The wide circulation of newspapers such as the \textit{Chicago Defender}, in conjunction with the fact that they were read aloud in social environments such as the barbershop indicates that black musical success in Paris really did percolate through to an “imagined community.”\textsuperscript{221} Some black American performers even wrote to the \textit{Chicago Defender} while abroad as though the paper itself were a friend, sending their news, and including a forwarding address in Paris, thus symbolically including all of its readers in their social networks. Alberta Hunter, the jazz legend, wrote to the \textit{Defender} from Paris in 1927, asking to be “remembered to her host of American friends,” and reminding them that she “would receive mail from them in care of the American Express, Paris, France.”\textsuperscript{222} Furthermore the reporters consistently referred to performers by diminutive affectionate terms such as “popular little dancer,” or “clever comedian.” The sense of intimacy and almost familial pride in these performers is very clear as is the appropriation of their experience as an extension of the collective horizon.\textsuperscript{223}

The stories and articles that emerged in the black press in the decade following the Great War therefore disseminated the narrative of black cosmopolitan experience in Europe to readers in America. It may not have made them black cosmopolitans but it made them conversant with

\textsuperscript{220} Who also consumed the LPs that served both as entertainment, and as physical artifacts of internationalism, recorded and marketed across a shrinking Atlantic.

\textsuperscript{221} For the way in which the black press served and created an ‘imagined racial community,’ see Bill Mullen, \textit{Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). See also Roi Ottley, \textit{The Lonely Warrior; the Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott} (Chicago,: H. Regnery Co., 1955). See also Charlene B. Regester, \textit{Black Entertainers in African American Newspaper Articles} (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2002). Scholars estimate that at the height of its popularity each copy of the \textit{Defender} that was sold was read by four or five people putting its readership at over 500,000 people per week; \url{http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/defender.html}, accessed July 18, 2009.


\textsuperscript{223} For other reinterpretations of the Atlantic in black popular culture see Alan J. Rice, \textit{Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic}, The Black Atlantic (London ; New York: Continuum, 2003).
the notion that an African American could be one. Drummer Sonny Greer reminisced that when he travelled to Europe in 1933 with Duke Ellington he and the band were “very fortunate to carry the banner to foreign lands for American kids.”224 And Bricktop’s biographer James Haskins spells it out;

Blacks who had made it were a common topic of discussion and though my small town in Alabama was light years away from the great cities of Europe – and the lives of my parents equally as alien to the life of a cosmopolitan nightclub operator – it was a peculiar fact of existence for the average American black to be on intimate terms with the stories of the few of us who had managed to burrow out from under.225

This quotation illustrates the role popular reportage played in promoting the Atlantic journey as a route to success, and a source of possibility to black American communities who represent a completely different social sphere to that of WEB Dubois, and the literary movers and shakers who populate the early chapters of Paul Gilroy’s Black Atlantic.226

In 1926 the Chicago Defender introduced a column entitled “Across the Pond,” that followed the exploits, gigs, and lucrative contracts being signed by black American musicians “on the other side.”227 Bricktop, Mills, Lottie Gee, Earl Granstaff, and the myriad of others “plying back and forth across the ocean” thus contributed to a transformation in the popular black American consciousness from viewing the Atlantic as the site of the middle passage, the voyage into slavery, to viewing it as an almost neighborly space, a “pond” and an entry point

224 Sonny Greer Interview, Se Audio C-475 Side 1, (New York : Duke Ellington Society, New York Chapter, 1961) Schomburg Centre for Black Culture, NYPL.
226 Gilroy, The Black Atlantic.
227 The earliest formal “Across the Pond” column appeared in July 1926 and it became a fixture thereafter appearing sometimes weekly, and sometimes fortnightly.
into international success. Of course practices on the ground differed from the discursive ideals of cosmopolitan success, as put together in the black American press. And they were further complicated by class and gender. Performers simultaneously represented working class origins and were held accountable to a race uplift rhetoric due to their success as “race artists” performing on the international stage, as is discussed further in chapters four and five. But their transatlantic welcome and success presented a contrast and a challenge to contemporary race relations in the United States.

The performers’ experience of international success, travel, expanded horizons, and success abroad led to greater consciousness of the injustice and inequities black men and women faced in America in contrast. The point is most clearly illustrated by the discussion of a practice that was seen to be more possible in cosmopolitan Paris than anywhere else – that of socializing, flirting, and even engaging in sexual relationships, across the “color line.” Cross-racial relationships represented a chance to escape from America’s racial Puritanism and a number of these relationships resulted in marriage rather than the more customary casual fling.\(^{228}\) The nightclub owner Bricktop commented later on the fact that such relationships were not unusual in interwar Paris or for her personally. She wrote in her autobiography that “\textit{Woman’s Wear} interviewed me once and I told them I could dispel the myth about Negro men being the only ones who knew how to make love.”\(^{229}\)

\(^{228}\) Stovall, \textit{Paris Noir}, 74-76. Notably Eugene Bullard married a Frenchwoman, Sidney Bechet was living with a German woman, as mentioned above, Leon Crutcher had a violent argument with his white French lover which resulted in a gun fight. Arthur Briggs and Willie Lewis both married Belgians, “Across the Pond,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, March 4, 1939.

black Welsh singer Mabel Mercer, contain numerous images of the two of them in the middle of groups of men like this one in which white patron is perched on Bricktop’s knee.²³⁰

Figure 4. Bricktop’s club, showing her with patrons, and fellow singer Mabel Mercer.

Bricktop’s comments were echoed by other performers with a collective tone that suggests that the freedom and glamour associated with travel and the sophisticated jazz lifestyle

was also represented by the seeming freedom with which relationships could develop across the “color line.” And such freedoms served as a basis for critiquing America.

The cartoon strip “Bungleton Green,” popular in African American newspapers in the United States in the 1920s features the eponymous “everyman” character meeting and dating a French girl Jacqueline. In one strip Bungleton Green and his ‘girl’ are insulted by a white American visiting Paris, upon which Green batters the white American over the head with a walking stick. The cartoon parodies an experience that was reported upon as a frequent occurrence in interwar France – the consternation of white Americans in Europe as they were confronted by the complete absence of state-sanctioned segregation laws. It reflects a common theme in social commentaries of the day, in both black and white press, that praised France’s color-blind society, and used this perception of France to lambast the USA. The claim emerged very clearly in a much publicized incident in which a white American was arrested for instigating a fight in a Parisian Café. The Defender used the incident as the perfect opportunity to mount a critique of racial boundaries in the United States;

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231 The significance of this is partly that even the suggestion of such alliances, particularly marriage, were still seen as incredibly threatening in the United States in many areas/communities. And even educated black men and women had reservations about marrying outside “the race.” See Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 130-132.


233 See also Robeson’s comments from meeting at Farringdon Memorial Hall, held 13 June 1931. Robeson recited stories of ill-treatment at his hotel, although noted that it was due to white American guests rather than English people. “Race Problems, 1931,” Tuskegee Clippings File, Reel 39, Newspapers Collection, Colindale, British Library, 622.

234 Police report, 27 August, 1927, incident no. 1196, Folios 33 32 (Arrests St Georges), Série C/b, APP, Paris. The police report also records that James Parrish was from Virginia, not Georgia, and there is no mention of his five comrades, but Parrish did use a large kitchen knife, and was arrested for the use of arms and disturbing the peace.
Southern whites now visiting Paris as members of the American Legion are attempting to establish race hatred among the French … but Frenchmen will not pay heed to their prejudicial appeals… Resort owners requested additional police protection to avoid racial clashes. This action was hastened when it was learned that over a hundred dark Americans now employed as musicians and entertainers in resorts here held a secret meeting and discussed plans by which they could offset American prejudice… The first serious outbreak occurred last week when James Parrish, a white man, entered a restaurant in the Rue Monsart and objected to the presence of four dark Americans. His protest went unheeded by the management of the café but to impress his point he went outside and summoned five of his compatriots. A free-for-all fight ensued in which Parrish used a knife on a policeman who interfered. Parrish… was unmercifully beaten and when he arose from the floor his face bore the imprint of a black man’s heels… A ‘leading French writer’ was reported as saying ‘we love our black citizens while Americans despise theirs; we want them to love France and enjoy all the freedom and happiness it has to offer.’

This incident had great symbolic value for the black community. The “Georgia Bully,” as the headline describes him, emerged from his attempt to instill racist practices in France with a face that “bears the imprint of a black man’s heels.” He was quashed – not only by Eugene Bullard and Sidney Garner, the black men in question (of whom there were only two according to the official police report) - but also by the state apparatus by way of the police. The incident occurred in part because of the encounter of two groups from the same nation, who were divided by race, upon the soil of a third nation where the rules and social structures within which the groups operate in their own nation were suspended. The cosmopolitan experience, in this instance, allowed for a radical re-framing of racial relations that had applied back in the home nation, such that the customary relations of power and race were reversed. And the possibility of that reversal was then extended beyond the participants involved in the actual fight described.

here. The rumored “secret meeting” of musicians in France determined not to let American racial practices filter into the French métropole probably never took place. But the idea that it might shows how the musicians were thought of as a community that represented black Americans abroad, and that could act politically on the basis of their racial identity even when based outside the nation-state – and in fact precisely because of their status as temporarily beyond the reach of the American nation-state.  

Many French reporters, public figures, and instruments of state (such as the police) seized upon such incidents to articulate the official rhetoric that France did not observe the ‘color line,’ and, as the article states “loved her black citizens.” This characterization ignored the existence of racially discriminatory practices such as the active surveillance and exploitation of black colonials in France in the interwar era. But it was a popular rhetorical trope in interwar France. Reporter Marcel Pays compared the mixed dancing at the Bal nègre, – a dance hall established by and for Paris’s black colonial communities – with social segregation in the United States. He claimed that in America you’d never see this type of mixed race dancing because “the colored man who risked such audacity faced the bastonnade of the Ku Klux Klan.” In France, “Our

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237 As mentioned in chapter one the African-Americans based in Paris were not very involved in various anti-colonial groups and activist associations. While using the French state’s supposed racial tolerance to further their own careers, and point out America’s shortcomings they were somewhat willfully blind to the plight of exploited colonial communities in France, and to racial prejudices which operated in a more subtle fashion than America’s overt segregation and violence.


239 ’…qui aurait cette audace risquant la bastonnade du ku klux klan.’ Marcel Pays, « Un Bal Nègre » Information, 23 July 1928. Marcel Pays is not quite accurate, as Kevin Mumford’s work shows in Interzones but his perceptions are telling.
liberal and hospitable” country on the contrary, wrote Pays, “le nègre isn’t limited to the jazz band but is welcomed on the dance floor as well, and men and women of a variety of skin colors and nationalities dance together freely.” The Guadeloupéan deputy Gratien Candace warned French citizens against American nègrophobie in 1927 and lamented: “America, alas! In coming here they have contaminated us with a racist virus; the majority have reacted against it.”

Candace then stated that France, as the daughter of the revolution, struggled against slavery, and she must remain true to her universalist republican ideals.

_Crapouillot_, a French publication, noted for its acute and often sarcastic take on current affairs, offered a powerful statement of the French attitude toward American racism in a special feature on America. The reporter, Claude Blanchard, wrote graphically, and with disgust, about lynching and analyzed the sexual fear that often accompanied the lynching, while also mentioning the taboo surrounding miscegenation in America. He then pointed out that centuries of that taboo had clearly not prevented cross-racial liaisons:

No-one will agree to talk about the attraction that American men or women show, often, for the race they despise. Yet although one never encounters mixed race couples (couples panachés) the métis individuals, proof that such couples exist, are numerous.

The author also mentions that he had arranged to invite a fellow journalist, who happened to be black, to dinner, and his friends advised him against it, if he wanted to be accepted in polite society. Reports such as this one appeared numerous times in France as the jazz craze took hold.

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240 Of course he doesn’t think about why Francophone black subjects might have wanted to establish such a dance hall in the first place, and what that implied about a de facto sense of segregation in France.


In all of them France’s liberal attitude was contrasted with the racial prejudice apparent in the States. The color-blind promise was a myth – as many recent monographs have shown – but the American jazz artists served as the perfect vehicle for promoting this myth precisely because of their ‘outsider’ status in French society. They ultimately presented no threat to France’s colonial power and thus could be embraced with few repercussions. Furthermore the trope of French color-blindness – and many of the articles that described it - were picked up (and translated where necessary) by the black American press.

The jazz performers, and the reporters who covered their every movement, were entranced by the myth of color-blind France and they used the trope of racial equality constantly in their collective narrative of the jazz migration. A succinct little entry entitled “Adopt European Customs,” in the Chicago Defender’s theatre news section of November 5, 1927 noted:

London. England. Nov. 4 – Henry Johnson, who will be remembered as a member and manager of the once famous quartet the Black Diamonds is doing an act with William H. Goodrich, who came over a year ago. Mr. Johnson has lived in Europe for many years and seemingly has no desire to return to America. This is the case with a great number of our people who find comfort in the freedom and fellowship found abroad.243

Mr. Johnson is claimed as “one of our people” by the paper, and the emphasis on freedom, and a network that offers “fellowship” rather than segregation illustrates the use of the jazz experience in Europe to draw an implicit contrast with the realities of racially bound existence in the USA. The paper frequently reported on performers who were enjoying the

243 “Adopt European Customs,” Chicago Defender, November 5 1927.
camaraderie and freedom to be found in Europe, and who had vowed not to return to the more restrictive conditions found in the USA. J. A. Rogers, the Paris-based correspondent for numerous black newspapers made a comparison between racial attitudes in America, France, and England – and France won out. He concluded that “in one respect France is greater than any other country on earth. There is no color line… All hail the power of France’s name! Here’s to France the “white hope” of the colored races of the world!”

Paul Robeson expressed a different opinion in his 1931 address to the newly formed “Colored Persons’ Association” in London. He warned that the English should beware of being corrupted by American racism and engaged in a thoughtful but pointed comparison of Britain, France, and America that reveals the way black men and women abroad were using the experience to piece together a cosmopolitan critique of the treatment of racial difference.

Robeson stated that in England:

He had been taken at his full value, treated as a human being and without sentimentality. He felt at home in England which was more than he had ever done in France and America. There was something exotic in the French attitude. They seemed to think that fundamentally he was a savage. (laughter).

The reservations expressed by Robeson had a basis in fact and his thoughtful comparison and later political activism set him apart from some of the jazz performers who romped around

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244 J. A. Rogers, Column for Pittsburgh Courier, excerpted in, Tuskegee Clippings File, 768. See also p. 772, column dated 8/19/31 he argues in favor of France and against England vis a vis the color bar, and offers personal anecdotes for his integrated social experiences in France. This particular column was printed in the Amsterdam news, and other black papers in Baltimore; and Chicago.


246 Robeson cited the dangers of US racial prejudice when stating he had been treated badly at an English hotel by visiting Americans – in contrast to his usual experience in Britain. Of course this is early in his career, before his turn to communism (and anti-colonialism?). “Race Problems, 1931,” Tuskegee Clippings File, 622.
Europe “just out for fun” who “wasted the freedom,” they found there.\textsuperscript{247} Such players nevertheless mounted a cosmopolitan critique of their own in that they spread the word to other black American musicians that in Europe “nobody’s bothering you,” and as far as race relations were concerned, “you have no problems over there.”\textsuperscript{248}

As the interwar period progressed black musicians in France were affected by the economic depression and the rise of conservatism in politics with the result that diasporic African individuals from Africa and America were drawn closer together. George H. Evans offers an early example of this when he offered Prince Tovalou the commiserations of “the gang” in Europe for the incident at the Astor Hotel in Chicago in 1925 and noted that many of them had played for Touvalou at a pan-African concert. By 1927 Joe Alex, a black French actor, dancer, and director commented that work for jazz musicians was getting scarce, and characterized those in the “jazz nègre” or the black jazz bands who, like him were losing work, as “compatriotes.”\textsuperscript{249} By 1939 the black American musicians still active in Paris were making a point of attending and promoting the performances of non-American men and women of color. Edgar Wiggins was now the author of “Across the Pond” and an active member of the French jazz network in Paris. His columns reported more and more frequently upon ‘French colonials’ and entertainers such as ‘Bingo and Bungo, African duo.’\textsuperscript{250} Clearly the black American

\textsuperscript{247} Elliot Carpenter interviewed by Chris Goddard, transcribed in Goddard, \textit{Jazz Away from Home}, 302.
\textsuperscript{248} ‘Doc’ Cheatham, interviewed by Goddard, transcribed in Goddard, \textit{Jazz Away from Home}, 295.
\textsuperscript{250} Edgar Wiggins, “Across the Pond,” \textit{Chicago Defender (National Edition)}, July 1, 1939. For performances in which both French colonial and African American entertainers worked together see his column of Dec 17 1938.
entertainers still felt a sense of national difference from these ‘French colonials’ but they were included in the reports of ‘the gang’ across the pond.

By July 1939, when the political situation was clearly deteriorating Wiggins wrote a column promoting and reviewing a ‘Grande Soirée de Gala’ for French colonials which featured one of Joe Alex’s ‘dynamic plays on the inter-racial problem.’ Wiggins attended and mentioned with evident pride that only one of Monsieur Alex’s troupe was white. He noted the quality of the 600 strong ‘intellectual and colorful crowd,’ who later enjoyed dancing and a ‘delightfully merry atmosphere’ until six in the morning. These reports were written by a musician reporting for the black press and thus they unify the two types of black cosmopolitanism I have outlined in this discussion. They suggest that by 1939 African American performers in Europe were participating in black cosmopolitan networks that reflected some sense of shared humanity, linked by race, and bridging national divides.

Conclusion

Black American performers in interwar Europe gained new knowledge of the world in their travels that equipped them with the authority to compare the restrictive racial practices in America with a variety of alternative practices. A hint of the long-term effects of this might be found in performers’ increased involvement in political observation and action after their experiences of welcome and success in Europe. Noble Sissle, and Fredi Washington were

inspired to join the Negro Actors’ Guild once they returned to the States.\textsuperscript{252} Eugene Bullard and Josephine Baker gave up on America completely after their warm welcome in France although both were involved in protest actions during the civil rights years.\textsuperscript{253} Bricktop was transformed into a model black cosmopolitan by her European experience. She was proud to be a ‘100% American negro born in Alderson West BY GOD Virginia’ but lived internationally for most of her life and socialized with a truly cosmopolitan network.\textsuperscript{254} She believed in receiving full respect and citizenship regardless of racial difference and although she herself didn’t protest politically she supported those who did and raised awareness of the issue among her personal acquaintances. In a brief and unsuccessful stint in New York when the war forced her to flee Europe she contested the segregated seating rules in New York clubs and created her own entertaining spaces in ‘back rooms’ to avoid those rules.\textsuperscript{255} She complained bitterly to elite friends such as designer Elsie Mendl who wrote back agreeing that the endemic racism in America was shocking. She adored Paul Robeson even when he lost favor in America for his political views, and was honored to meet Martin Luther King Jr (She cooked him a “down south” dinner of black-eyed peas when he visited Rome but warned him not to appear before “European

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{252} See \url{http://www.nypl.org/research/manuscripts/scm/scmfredi.xml}.
\item \textsuperscript{253} For Bullard, see Craig Lloyd’s account of his refusal to submit to racist harassment at Paul Robeson’s Peekskill concert in 1949, and the subsequent publicity, Lloyd, \textit{Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris}, 134-137. See also the account of his earlier fights with Americans in Paris for the same reasons. For Josephine Baker, see Rose, \textit{Jazz Cleopatra}, ch 7.
\item \textsuperscript{254} Private letter, undated, Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith collection. Schomburg Center, NYPL.
\item \textsuperscript{255} Bricktop and Haskins, \textit{Bricktop}, 210-211,214.
\end{itemize}
dinner hours”). The journals and notes for her autobiography that she wrote later in life contain musings on the importance of equality in education as a cornerstone of racial justice.  

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the European experience for the development of an African American ideal of cosmopolitanism, however, was that it expanded the horizons of wider African-American community. The interwar jazz migration was a complicated historical process whereby performers freely chose to travel but also accepted the sometimes demeaning, frequently racially stereotyped, and almost always gender-bound roles they were offered. Nevertheless travel to Europe and especially Paris promised mobility, money, and social acceptance to a group that had historically been denied all three. The possibility of transcending the Jim Crow limitations of interwar America through the jazz migration offered a ground-level narrative of black cosmopolitan identity forged in the ‘black Atlantic’ in which:

Mutation, relocation, displacement, and restlessness are the norms rather than the exceptions and where… there are long histories of the association of self-exploration with the exploration of new territories and the cultural differences that exist both between and within groups that get called races.  

Jazz musicians moved and relocated like Bricktop, they were footloose and restless like Granstaff, and their career meant that travel was the norm rather than the exception. The interwar jazz craze established long-lasting patterns of mobility for jazz musicians who from that

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256 Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 281-282.
257 Elsie Mendl to Bricktop, Sept 28 1943 from California: “Dear Bricktop, Thank you for your letter. I agree with every word you say about the treatment of the Negro in this country. I have the deepest sympathy for you all. Your people have turned out splendid fighting units and if they are good enough to fight for us they should be good enough to be friends with – and they deserve fair treatment.” MSS 831, box 1, folder 4, Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Collection, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. See also Box 4, folder 2, in the same collection which contains her comments on education for African-Americans.
258 Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 133.
time forward seemed to chart the Atlantic with increasing frequency and reliable success. Black jazz musicians in the nineteen-twenties developed a cosmopolitan set of practices that resonated well beyond the confines of a crowded Parisian nightclub. Their experiences fuelled a substantive and constant journalistic exploration of territorial and cultural differences between Europe and America that promoted a vision of full citizenship in society regardless of color. It also gave black Americans of all classes a vicarious pride in these globe-trotting representatives of “the race” as it presented them with a new and widely disseminated model of black jazz cosmopolitanism.

The presence of hundreds of black jazz players in Europe raised the stakes for men and women in the proto-Négritude movement who wanted to be recognized as modern, serious, and dignified individuals of color, worthy of full citizenship wherever they lived. The black press in America looked for “race leaders” who could parlay talent and transatlantic mobility into a celebratory narrative that would extend the bounds of possibility for the imagined community of their readers. The following chapter explores the transatlantic resonance of race leadership, respectability, and self-presentation for black women artists. Debates about the style, conduct, and public image of black female performers were conducted with a sense of urgency because of the great visibility of jazz men and women in the interwar period and the danger that general audiences would extrapolate from their image to a generalization about all black men and women whether Caribbean, American, African, or Madagascan.
3. Black Women, Jazz, and Race Uplift

Let the blare of jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith penetrate the ears... we younger negro artists ... intend to express our dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. We build temples for tomorrow. Langston Hughes.\textsuperscript{259}

The jazz craze caused as much anxiety and ambivalence as it did excitement in both America and Europe. It raised the stakes in a growing transatlantic effort among middle class black men and women to combat racial inequality through attempts to “uplift the race.”\textsuperscript{260} The race uplift approach was “based on the premise that African-Americans would ‘measure up’ to the artistic, cultural, and economic standards of the white world and eventually become part of a racially equal society.”\textsuperscript{261} The role of jazz and blues performers within this approach was contentious because they were involved in cultural production but sometimes their lifestyles conflicted with the race uplift ideals of sexual propriety, hard work, sobriety and respectable conduct. Furthermore the race uplift movement was characterized by conservative gender expectations that favored decorous, morally upright women who would combat stereotypes of black female hypersexuality. The following discussion identifies the core elements of race uplift ideology before turning to the way it affected women involved in the \textit{tumulte noir}.

Both French diasporans and African-Americans invested in the discursive linkage of social, musical, and behavioral practices with respectability. As a group they subscribed to the

theory that emulating certain forms of Western European middle class taste and behavior might “level up” the races. One prong of their campaign for equality was to deconstruct the myth of the primitive black man or woman caught in a timeless atavistic state. A second and corollary feature of that campaign was to show that black men and women were “civilized.” As early as 1904 Dubois contended that “the Negro races are from every physical standpoint full and normally developed men [who] show absolutely no variation from the European type sufficient to base any theory of essential human difference upon.” His thinking about this issue shifted over the years but in the August 1911 issue of the Crisis he laid out two highly influential principles:

The leading scientists in the world have come forward and laid down in categorical terms a series of propositions which may be summarized as follows:

1(a) It is not legitimate to argue from differences in physical characteristics to differences in mental characteristics.
2(b) The civilization of a... race at any particular moment of time offers no index to its innate or inherited capacities.

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262 This phrase is from Florence Mills, “Magic Moon that Brought me Money”
This position was adopted by members of the transatlantic black intellectual network in the years after the war including the French authors cited above. It clearly contested a biologically determined view of race and introduced the valence of civilization as not showing racial limitations. The logic led to the conclusion that culture, however, could show how far a race had come or could go.

Louis-Thomas Achille, a French artist and intellectual involved in the Nardal salon, for example, identified “civilization” as no longer (by the nineteen-twenties) a Western European entity. In a piece written for the *Revue du Monde Noir* (the journal that emerged from the Nardals’ salon) he argued that “European civilization is no longer national or racial” and “is likely to be adapted by different human races, who will consider it their own modern civilization.”²⁶⁶ He thus articulated a vision of modernity in which racial and national differences were subsumed within modern civilization. Obviously this notion of modernity was idealistic and unrealized but Achille clearly saw it as a humanistic stance that leveled the colonial and racial playing field for men and women who were prepared to “adapt” and “advance.”²⁶⁷ This latter characterization of certain races as needing to adapt and advance highlights the tensions within arguments made by thinkers like Du Bois and Achille. His understanding of civilization clearly reflected Western capitalist and intellectual systems and this included systems of cultural production.

²⁶⁷ The word adapt is used incredibly frequently in *LDA* and the *RDMN*. In the inquiry into fashion, as noted in previous chapters it is almost always in conjunction with the notion of choice, and good taste.
Race uplift reasoning held that black men and women would demonstrate the qualities of modernity and civilization through cultural production and publication that fell within the parameters of Western High Art. *La Dépêche africaine* (the moderate black Francophone newspaper published in Paris) urged readers and contributors to produce more intellectual and cultural work and to educate themselves and reflect upon issues, attend classical concerts, and read great literature (or at least reviews of it) so as to illustrate their humanity and viability as French citizens. The Victor Schoelcher prize, inaugurated by Maurice Satineau, the founder and editor of the *Dépêche Africaine* offered six thousand francs for work by black authors that reflected black intellectual life. This resonated with the vision that inspired Alain Locke to assemble his anthology *The New Negro*. The black Francophone community strove to emulate the ethos of Locke’s work in the *Revue du Monde Noir* and the Nardal sisters attempted to translate it into French as a resource and inspiration for that community.

As scholar Samuel Floyd points out, the musicians and the music that featured in this transnational vision of “appropriate” black cultural production were those like Paul Robeson, who used spirituals in his classical concerts and made them “respectable”, Roland Hayes, a fine classical tenor, or Florence Price, who created classical forms from African American folk music styles:

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268 Jane Nardal’s conclusion to “Pantins Exotiques,” discussed in chapter one speaks to this issue, as does the introduction to “La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World.”
270 Paulette Nardal corresponded at length with Locke regarding this project although the translation never came to pass. See Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 16-17; Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*. 
the Harlem and Chicago flowerings are all of a piece – aspects of a worldwide movement...[that] embraced Washington D.C., Atlanta and other large cities around the world – cities that served as bases for the dissemination of the art and ideas of Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, James P. Johnson, Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Roland Hayes, Richard Wright, Edmund Jenkins, Wm. Grant Still, Thomas Dorsey, Florence Price, Earl Hines, Alain Locke, and all the other important figures of the movement.\footnote{Floyd, \textit{The Power of Black Music}, 131.}

Floyd’s comment identified the transatlantic nature of the race uplift discourse although his emphasis is on American men (as was that of the race uplift movement in many ways). His observation that Western High Art was part and parcel of the race uplift discourse was true of France, as well as America. Langston Hughes and Duke Ellington moved easily between popular culture and the Western high art tradition and ultimately they did manage to shift away from the classicizing impulse of the race uplift movement but that took time, and will be discussed later. At the outset of the nineteen-twenties the race uplift ideology emphasized incorporating ‘African’ cultural elements or features into Western forms such as the symphony, or the novel.

In 1928, the \textit{Dépêche Africaine}, for example, announced enthusiastically “To Readers” that the publication itself had commissioned a committee to organize concerts at which both American and French artists would perform. It had done this “with a view to making known, in Europe, the evolution of the \textit{race noire} in the artistic realm.”\footnote{‘A nos lecteurs,’ \textit{La Dépêche africaine}, October 1928, 1.} The committee was led by Mme. Margeurite Vinci, a “beautiful singer from the opera” and the first concert featured her, an American soprano, and several other classical musicians. This French cultural “moment” was exactly in accord with the values of an American book on music, published about the same time,
that “put the race’s best foot forward by treating only the accomplishments of those who could read music.”

Jazz music, of course, was usually improvised and yet it was an important and innovative mode black cultural production. It sat uneasily and awkwardly within (and beyond) the race uplift discourse because it was improvised, performed by men and women of every class, and both adored and despised by the white establishment.

It also complicated the gender dynamic of race uplift discourse. It is no coincidence that the figures that inhabit accounts of the Harlem Renaissance are almost all men. The vision of Alain Locke’s “New Negro” or Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth” was not just a socio-economically exclusive, but also a gendered vision. The words of Du Bois offer one of the most cogent examples of this gendered discourse:

Do Americans ever stop to reflect that there are in this land a million men of Negro blood, well-educated, owners of homes, against the honor of whose womanhood no breath was ever raised, whose men occupy positions of trust and usefulness, and who, judged by any standard, have reached the full measure of the best type of modern European culture? Is it fair, is it decent, is it Christian to ignore these facts of the Negro problem, to belittle such aspiration, to nullify such leadership and seek to crush these people back into the mass out of which by toil and travail, they and their fathers have raised themselves?

The ways in which men – and the gendered language here is inescapable – demonstrate their right to equality – the right not to be “belittled” and “crushed” is found in adhering to the mores of middle class “European culture;” to be well-educated (Western classical education), to own one’s home (modern capitalism and emphasis upon individualism and material possessions), to follow “trustworthy” occupations (socially regulatory institutions such as education and the

law and medicine, all bastions of institutionalized power that privilege Western knowledge, science and technology), and to possess women who are beyond reproach upon moral grounds (standard Western monogamy and chastity which symbolized control of property). These things are encompassed under “the best type of modern European culture” and it is here that the inextricable linking of race uplift with respectability and modernity within a Western European model is absolutely apparent.\footnote{J. Besson analyses Caribbean women’s role as “bearers of respectability” according to the European colonial social constructions of gender roles, and examines the anthropological belief that they function this way arguing that it obscures the complex way in which Caribbean peasant women interacted with this role. Besson, “Reputation and respectability reconsidered,” Janet Henshall Momsen, Women & Change in the Caribbean : A Pan-Caribbean Perspective (Kingston, Bloomington, London: Ian Randle; Indiana University Press; J. Currey, 1993), 16ff.}

It also exposes the gendered nature of the construct of race uplift.

Female jazz performers represented both a promise and a threat to advocates of the race uplift doctrine. They were highly visible and thus potential “race leaders” who could demonstrate upright black female lifestyles to all Americans through their public image. They sang and danced with a level of talent and in some cases genius that won international fame. And yet they were associated with the world of the stage and or jazz both of which have been historically characterized as zones of moral ambiguity. Furthermore their dancing and singing was populist and emerged from diasporic African popular culture or “low” culture.\footnote{For music and drama as a zone of moral ambiguity see, for example, Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, Cecilia Reclaimed : Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Ellen Koskoff, Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective, Illini books ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).}

Jazz and blues, in particular, were often described as the devil’s music in contrast to spirituals, and gospel music. Black jazz performers, like others, dressed, danced and behaved flamboyantly on stage and sometimes in public. For these reasons the jazz craze in Europe threatened to revive a pernicious
association between men and women of the African diaspora and hypersexuality. Perceptions like these had functioned as a potent source of racial prejudice from the age of exploration onward. They became a pressing issue for black men and women of the Atlantic in the interwar period when America was still ravaged by the scourge of race-based lynching and when the fascination with black jazz performers in Europe had sparked anxiety in some quarters that white women would be swept off their feet by black male jazz performers while black women would be labeled as exotic puppets.277

Successful black female performers living or performing widely in Europe intersected with various visions and practices of race uplift. Singers like Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith, Florence Mills, Adelaide Hall, and Josephine Baker were internationally famous. They also mixed with very elite society. And yet these women danced and sang onstage for a living and thus perpetuated an association between the black female body and physicality. Their experiences and career choices, when analyzed alongside audience responses to those choices, reveal the strength of the ‘race uplift’ doctrine. Josephine Baker, in particular, presented a problematic image for both French and American black communities because of these characteristics. In contrast Florence Mills seemed to embody the ideals of race uplift in her life and work, while Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith took a ‘middle path’ and was respected but not revered. This chapter considers how these women, and others, affected, and were affected by, the expectation of respectability

and respectable success that circulated throughout black communities in France and America. It uses the broad categories of dance, dress, repertoire and sexual behavior to examine how the image of black performers intersected with the doctrine of race uplift.

**Black women and the Banana Dance**

For the pioneering jazz women who travelled to Europe in the nineteen-twenties the risk of being perceived as sexually promiscuous was an ever-present danger and one heightened by pervasive images of primitive and semi-nude black women that circulated in European culture. These were prevalent in art, literature, and journalism, in Parisian society in the immediate years after the First World War. Man Ray’s provocative presentation of a “Black Venus” as equivalent to the Greek Aphrodite in the piece *Black and White* was one of many pictorial explorations of the black female nude. That piece was produced in order to claim that African art and classical art were of equal aesthetic value. However many other versions of such images were widely disseminated, and these renderings of black Venus were little more than exploitative presentations of bare-breasted primitive African women. *Le Monde Colonial Illustré* was perhaps the most egregious of the pro-colonial interwar publications in that it “frequently presented half-naked African women for no ostensible reason.”

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278 Of course images of naked white women circulated in European culture too, but the range and style of characterization used to portray black women was very different. See Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*; Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*.


280 Brett Berliner discusses this and has a postcard image which illustrates this phenomenon beautifully, Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire*, 135-137.
Paul Morand, a French author whose portrayal of black men and women was popular with the reading public in interwar France identified the decade of the nineteen-twenties as “a Negro Era.” He was excoriated by black Francophone intellectuals for the way he portrayed black men and women in print. His prose is full of commentary that purports to portray black culture accurately but that actually selected and presented an exoticist image. Furthermore Morand suggested it was the influence of black culture that had made the 1920s an age of decadence: “Just think of the general slackness, the distaste of young people for hard work, the nudity, equality, fraternity, clay houses that last three years, public lovemaking, divorces, publicity.” Morand’s evaluation is laden with prejudices that enraged the black Francophone community and one of them was that he presented nudity and sexual incontinence as an intrinsic part of a monolithic and universal black character. Morand was not alone in equating black men and women with nudity and seeing that as evidence of primitivism and atavism.

This “common pool of ideas” about race circulating in Europe and in parts of America meant that the enormous success of black American female entertainers in Paris carried a high risk in the view of the respectable black community. The stage, and the entertainment business as a whole, presented a complex zone where gender identities might be exaggerated for comic effect – but that was not always understood by a white audience. Josephine Baker, for example, might ironically perform an eroticized wild African “savage dance” but the white audience may

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282 Jane Nardal critiques him heavily in ‘Exotic Puppets’ but he is also mentioned with distaste elsewhere in La Dépêche africaine. In the October 1928 edition, for example, a journalist-reviewer compares Morand unfavorably to Louise Fauré-Favier as a white author depicting black cultures, La Dépêche africaine, no. 8, Oct 1928, p. 6. Morand was also scorned in other black Francophone publications such as the RDMN and le Cri Nègre.
283 “Common pool of ideas” is a concept drawn from Ruth Solie’s work on Beethoven. See Solie, Music in Other Words.
not understand the irony and be all too happy to extrapolate or believe the wild and exotic image she presented. It was also a world in which performers received such public attention that they became representative of “the race” as a whole. The image of jazz musicians, as performed in the public zones of nightclubs and music halls and reported upon, or caricatured in the press, therefore threatened to affect the image of all black men and women. And that image was imbued with, and represented, deep differences between the genders.

Dance is an obvious example of a gendered practice comprised of a set of “stylized repetitive gestures” (in Judith Butler’s conception) and dance was the mode through which many black women became well-known or successful in interwar Paris.284 African American women taught and performed the jazz dances like the Charleston as part of carving out their careers in Europe.285 Florence Embry-Jones, for example, was one of the first black American women in Paris after the war.286 She sang and served as mistress of ceremonies and host at her husband’s nightclub. She was renowned as a successful black female entertainer in Paris at a time when they were still rare and she deliberately positioned herself as a vocalist and a social facilitator and did not dance much. However she was praised for her “twinkling ankles” and her ability, like fellow nightclub doyenne Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith, to encourage wealthy clients on to the dance floor.

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284 The database of performers collated in the course of this research shows that women comprised about a quarter of all African Americans who travelled to Europe in association with the jazz craze. About a third of those women were travelling with their spouses but of the rest, those travelling as artists in their own right, all mention dance in either a primary or secondary capacity. Most of them list dance as their primary entertainment skill, and singing second although for some it is the other way around.

285 Note that some of the discussion that follows references Judith Butler’s concept of gender as a performative gesture, although I do not follow her conception to the conclusion that all gender identity is nothing but performative. Sara Salih and Judith Butler, The Judith Butler Reader (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003).

286 Florence Embry Jones is mentioned as already being in France by 1921, Chicago Defender, November 19, 1921.
floor. *Time Magazine*’s travel article on Florence Jones’ nightclub described the visit of the British Prince Henry. Upon his arrival:

Florence's chic ankles twinkled toward him. Her figure is svelte, lithe—though she does not dance—her voice sultry, a blues voice. At a curt nod from her the huge, perspiring black who is Miss Jones' husband snapped his hot-time jazz baton. Prince Henry hesitated, then rose, followed Florence out on the floor and black-bottomed.287

There are clearly very strong perceived gender differences between the “huge perspiring black who is Miss Jones’ husband,” and the svelte, chic hostess with her “twinkling ankles” and the way such perceptions affected men will be discussed in the next chapter. But the association of women of color, entertainment, and dance, held true even for Florence Jones who “did not dance” as such. To be defined by one’s ability to dance is to be identified with the body and physicality. In the case of the Charleston it was a more modern dance than many of the classic ballroom dances and slightly more gender-neutral in terms of the movements, and the fact it could be danced alone as well as with a partner.288 It still, however, linked these women with the physical and the feminine in a set of associations that did nothing to undo centuries of linking black with body and the stylized repetitive gestures of dance with gender roles. This was particularly true of American dances like the Charleston and the Black Bottom which were perceived as fairly flirtatious and sexualized.

Nightclub manager, *compère*, singer, and eventually businesswoman Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith also became defined through dance, and specifically dance that was associated with her

288 Bricktop specifically mentions this as one of the attractions of the dance, *Bricktop* 102.
skin color and nationality. She struggled to get her start in Paris when she first replaced Florence Embry-Jones as hostess at the club *le Grand Duc*. It finally happened because she impressed Cole Porter with her singing and her ability to dance the Charleston. He publicized her dancing prowess among his set of elite and wealthy friends and as a result Bricktop was asked to teach *le tout Paris* how to do the new American dances.\(^{289}\) Shortly thereafter society figure Mme de Polignac, using the full weight of her social standing, promoted Bricktop and advised her to capitalize upon her dance skills in order to establish herself as a success in Paris:

> Dear Bricktop – if SEM, the famous French caricaturist, writes to you or goes to see you, be sure to pose for his drawings of Charleston steps if he asks you to as it will bring you the best publicity. I gave him your name and address last night. Wishing you every success.\(^{290}\)

Sem, or George Goursat, the caricaturist famed for capturing slices of Parisian life, doesn’t seem to have asked Bricktop to pose for him (although he himself appeared in Paul Colin’s lithographs of famed Charleston dancer Josephine Baker).\(^{291}\) Mme. Polignac’s advice, however, illustrates the way in which professional black female entertainers could capitalize upon the vogue for dance styles inspired by African American culture, of which the Charleston was the most popular. Her advice is predicated upon the pervasive linkage in European culture

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\(^{289}\) In July of 1926, for example, Bricktop and Porter exchange telegrams arranging for her to give a set of private dance lessons to a wealthy client at the Excelsior Hotel (Venice), Telegram from Porter to Bricktop, July 4 1926, Venice. Box 1 folder 2, MSS 831, Bricktop Collection, Emory University Archives, Atlanta, Georgia. See also the (slightly differing) accounts of the Cole Porter/Ada Bricktop Smith meeting in Bricktop and Haskins, *Bricktop*, 110-112; McBrien, *Cole Porter : A Biography*, 108-109.

\(^{290}\) Mme de Polignac to Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith, July 1 1926, 41 Rue st Dominique, Fleurus 69-82, Paris, Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith collection, MSS 831, box 1 folder 2, Emory University Archives.

between the racial identification of jazz and the intersection of that linkage with gender expectations related to dance.

In 1925, a year and a half after Bricktop landed in Paris she was joined by the girl who was to eclipse both her and Florence Embry Jones – and most other black women – in visibility and popularity. Josephine Baker made her entrance onto the Parisian scene with a breath-taking, agile, and by all accounts electrifying performance of a danse sauvage in the Revue Nègre. Paul Colin’s set of lithographs of the Tumulte Noir were inspired by Baker and created to publicize that show. His images rapidly caught the popular imagination and indelibly inscribed a linkage between jazz and the nearly-nude dancing black body into Parisian popular culture. A year later, when Baker followed the Revue nègre with another large-scale production at the Folies Bergère in which she wore the (in)famous banana skirt that association was firmly embedded in popular culture. Josephine Baker was now defined by her ability to dance the Charleston and also by the provocative style in which she danced it. European newspapers reported that Baker had “introduced the Charleston to Paris” and the dance had been renamed the Banana dance “on account of the banana garment worn by the Colored dancer at the Folies Bergere.”

The “celebrated banana garment” was sexually suggestive as is evident in the photographs and in surviving footage of it.

292 ‗Josephine Baker,‘ *Chicago Defender*, Jul 31, 1926. This is a report from a European newspaper which was translated and reprinted, with a brief introductory comment, in the *Defender*. 293 See the hyperlink in the text, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmw5eGh888Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmw5eGh888Y) accessed 02/20/2010. See also Terri Francis’ discussion of Baker’s complicated legacy in her review of Beyoncé’s homage to Baker on *Fashion Rocks*. Terri Francis, ‘What does Beyoncé see in Josephine Baker?: A Brief Film History of Sampling La Diva, La Bakaire,’ *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, 6.1-6.2: Fall 2007/Spring 2008, [http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/baker/print_francis.htm](http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/baker/print_francis.htm) accessed 02/20/2010.
Reports generated in black papers, as well as white, recorded the impact of Baker’s nudity, the style and energy with which she danced the Charleston, and her banana skirt, upon the Parisian and wider European audience:

Now Mademoiselle Josephine Bakaire is the ‘black star’ of the Folies Bergere, the greatest attraction since Mistinguett in her prime, drawing a princely salary and owning a bushel basket full of diamond bracelets and anklets, some of which she wears when she dances. She does not wear much more than that, which is the requirement of the Folies Bergère. Between the anklets and the pearl necklaces she wears a string of bananas. If she wore more than that the Parisian public would object and the traditions of the theatre would be seriously compromised… In one of her numbers she was lowered from the upper regions of the stage on a huge mirror upon which she danced the Charleston as the Parisians and even the tourists had never seen it danced before. They all gasped – for Josephine wore very little beyond her birthday clothes …Her lithe young body…was a wild thing… a demon unchained yet graceful and harmonious.²⁹⁴

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As that article – printed in a black newspaper – shows, Baker’s success was in part due to her physical genius but she also utilized nudity, provocative costuming and frenetic dance stylings, to add to her impact. Her performance made audiences “gasp at her lithe young body.” The author’s tone was ironic when he noted that the light-skinned Baker had been hailed as a black star and that “the traditions of the theatre” required her nudity. But he then echoed a prevailing European sentiment that equated black music and dance with wild and even voodoo (demon) like qualities when he compared her to a “demon unchained.” Josephine Baker danced in large venues with a wild energy onstage and commanded huge amounts of publicity. This meant that her performance of black femininity affected the image of black women throughout the Atlantic. The problem Baker created for other black women of the diaspora was compounded by the fact that her image was everywhere and her look captured the imagination of elite white audiences. She also captivated journalists, printmakers, and popular cartoonists who then created images of black femininity that were widely disseminated during the interwar period.

This explains why the Nardal sisters, although they listened to, and performed black music of America in their salon, were very disparaging about the Charleston. It was associated explicitly with Baker, and with the free expression of sexual desire in the interwar period in Paris. The Nardals were understandably concerned when confronted with descriptions of black music that attributed qualities of primitivism, sensuality, unrestrained and animalistic passion to

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295 Jody Blake discusses this association of voodoo, and demonic powers with jazz and its “uncanny” appeal, Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir* Chapter One.
both the music and to performers. The writer Marcel Pays, for example, conflated Caribbean music at the *Bal nègre* with jazz, and went on to describe it in the following passage:

An animal joy, primitive, naïve almost, breaks, like a wave on the shore, at each syncopated beat of a jazz band without ambition. The clarinet meows like a cat on the roof. The banjo crackles like hail. The comical bugle, groans, laughs and coos. The drum and the Xylophone mark the beat, along with a bizarre cylindrical instrument, which could well be nothing more than a jam-jar, filled with old keys… but this music of the blacks will fill you with a poignant nostalgia.  

Black men and women living in France were understandably aggrieved by these persistent links between ‘blackness’ and such characteristics as “animal joy,” primitivism, and naïvete, not to mention the implicit association between the sounds of black music and that of animals.

The Nardal sisters and Gisele Dubouillé tried to engage with the jazz influence by firmly differentiating ‘their music’ and dance from jazz. They specifically championed the biguine a Caribbean style of dance music, over the Charleston in printed comparisons. For example, Dubouillé praised the “Antillean rhythms of the biguine” over “the virtuosic but less flexible rhythms of continental American.” Some of the implications of this stance in relation to their cultural and political status as French Caribbeans in the métropole will be discussed in chapter five. However with regards to black femininity and respectability their bias toward the biguine had a moral agenda. They wanted to identify the biguine as respectable in the face of the popular images of jazz as a sensual dance practice. Jane Nardal’s article “Pantins Exotiques” or “Exotic

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Puppets” attempted to do this as well as lay out the literary and cultural agenda for the French “New Negro.” She critiqued author Paul Morand’s character Congo, an African dancer imported into Paris. Morand described Congo as a force of nature who had enlivened the “tired cynical” city with the “primitive merriness of her lively limbs,” and her “immense vitality” which was transmitted through a current “more violent than the electric chairs.” Morand’s imaginary dancer referenced both Josephine Baker and Napoleon’s consort, the other Josephine who was a white Creole from the Antilles and enormously fond of dancing. Jane Nardal lambasted the author for this one-dimensional portrayal of black women. She included a telling little phrase in which she asked what on earth the stereotypical “blacks” of Paul Morand and Carl Van Vechten, European male authors who were both acclaimed for writing about black men and women and the world of jazz, have to do with “the calm grace, the slow dances” of her community. Her emphasis on the slow tempo and the graceful demeanor of Antillean dances contrasted markedly with Morand and Van Vechten’s description of jazz dances and dancers as frenetic, savage, primitive and uncontrolled.

Paulette Nardal, Jane’s sister, described couples at the Bal glacière dancing the “true biguine” they “undulated harmoniously” although “barely moving their feet” and conveyed a sense of the “eternal sensual struggle” between men and women. She allowed that the waltz and the mazurka – both imported into Martinique by Europeans – were “appropriate” as danced at this particular dance hall. She then qualified her approval with a terse observation that the

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298 Nardal, “Pantins Exotiques.”
299 This discussion draws on Sharpley-Whiting’s discussion of Nardal’s article but extends it, Sharpley-Whiting, Negritude Women, 49.
300 Jane Nardal “Pantins Exotiques,” LDA, Oct 1928, 2.
301 Paulette Nardal, « le Nouveau Bal Nègre de la Glacière, » LDA, May 30 1929, 3.
“Tango doesn’t suit the atmosphere although correctly danced, in general.” The inference was clear. This space was for the dance styles of the black Francophone diaspora in Paris and not for overly exotic and “Europeanized” dances. Anyone who wanted to dance the Tango (which was originally Argentinian but well entrenched in Europe by 1928) or the Charleston (which emerged from African American dance styles but was now Europeanized) both of which were associated with overt sexual expressiveness could look elsewhere for their dancing pleasure.

Paulette’s sister Andrée, closely echoed these sentiments in a later study that compared the physical elements of the Caribbean biguine and American dance styles:

However, it is to be deplored that the biguine should be presented to Parisians only under an obscene interpretation when it can express both a languorous grace and an extreme liveliness according to the changes in its tempo. Two short gliding steps (barely visible) resulting in a supple swaying of the hips form its essential principle. The biguine differs from the “blues” characterized by a swaying of the whole body and from the “Charleston” which is nothing more than a rhythmic exercise.302

Both sisters described almost invisible sliding steps and the subtle but sensual swaying of the hips that reflected the eternal push and pull of heterosexual attraction but did not cheapen it.303 Their emphasis on the restrained sensuality of the “true” biguine betrayed their anxiety about the persistent linkage between blackness, dance and eroticism in interwar Paris (and beyond.) Andrée Nardal expressly commented on the fact that her article was a response to the sudden enthusiasm for the biguine that had blossomed as a result of the Colonial Exposition and

302 Andrée Nardal, « Etude sur la Biguine Créole/Notes on the Biguine Créole (folk dance), » "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World," 121-123. The original is in both French and English. I have used the English translation here but it is not as descriptive as the French.
303 The dominant heterosexuality in all of these images and discussions highlights the need for more investigation of the role of homosexuality within racial and sexual identity in the black Francophone community at this stage.
that had, deplorably, led to an “obscene interpretation” of the dance. She also mentioned that its popularity had grown as a result of Josephine Baker’s performance in the 1931 show Paris Qui Remue which played at the Casino de Paris. Here again we see the highly ambivalent reaction of black Francophone women to Josephine Baker’s performance and to her popularization of black cultural forms. The Nardals and Gisele Dubouillé reveal a contemporary black Parisian concern to deconstruct, dis-articulate, undermine, or simply contend in print with the linkage between black women, dancing, and eroticism.

The Nardals’ commentaries on Baker give a somewhat skewed view of the entertainment world in interwar Paris. There were more models of successful black femininity available than the dominance of Baker’s image might suggest. Bricktop and Florence Embry Jones were mentioned above. Singer Florence Mills never lived in Europe long term but she toured for months at a time and she joined Bricktop, and Baker, in being one of the most celebrated female figures in the black Atlantic. This may be partly attributed to her tragically young death. She plays yet another interesting set of variations upon the successful black feminine transatlantic theme. While Bricktop signified glamour, connections, and cosmopolitanism, and Josephine Baker, represented success predicated upon performing stereotypical exotic and primitive roles,

304 In a search of the three major black American newspapers of the era, between 1918 and 1940 (Chicago Defender, Pittsburgh Courier, and New York Amsterdam News) a search using each of these three singer’s names generated the following results: ‘Florence Mills’ got 1570 hits, ‘Josephine Baker’ 861, ‘Bricktop’ 360, and American star ‘Bessie Smith’ – who never toured Europe but was very famous in America, got 954. ‘Adelaide Hall’ a star who toured and did big shows, got 885 hits, and Florence Jones, a nightclub owner-manager got 269. This was a very crude search but does indicate the relative popularity of the women. Note that Bricktop and Jones played in more intimate venues and didn’t tour, so they generate fewer hits. Note also that Bessie Smith and Florence Mills both died within the time period so their hits include obituaries, death notices etc.
Florence Mills emblematized a more sweetly feminine, utterly respectable performer possessing both virtue and charm.

This is evident in her attitude to dance as well as every other aspect of her career. Mills, for example, publicly admired the “nice new quiet” way the English danced the Charleston when she toured England and took it as evidence that there was a shared sensibility between the races which offered hope that black men and women (presumably through learning to dance the Charleston with restraint) could “level up to the white races” in time. Mills danced the Charleston, and other contemporary American dances, and some European commentators identified her dancing as wild and exotic. But she was far more often noted for her tap dancing skills, and her charm. The Nardals didn’t mention Mills but the America press adulated her and this is partly because she represented the ideals of the race uplift movement. In dance, as well as in dress, she showed a modesty that accorded with race uplift principles. This was in direct contrast with Josephine Baker.

**Dress (and lack)**

The problem Baker posed for other black women was related to dress as much as to dance. Many years after Bricktop and Baker had enjoyed their heyday in Paris Jack O Brien (a white male gossip columnist) took a retrospective sideswipe at Baker that revealed how the two women had been received and memorialized differently. O Brien lauded Bricktop in the piece

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305 Florence Mills, ‘Magic Moon that Brought me Money,’ undated clipping, Florence Mills Collection, Schomburg Center for Black Culture, NYPL, New York.
which brutally compared the two women stating: “Bricktop has been a legendary international star since she steamed off to Paris where she reigned before Josephine Baker packed her stalk of bananas-costume and nuded her way to quasi-fame.” The damning comparison continued: ‘Bricktop did it an even harder way – she kept her clothes on, in public performance anyway and owned her highly chic salons in Paris and later in Rome.” Jack O’Brien was a harsh commentator and exhibited a number of prejudices in his columns over the years. Bricktop, however, was a friend of Josephine Baker’s, and yet in her memoirs she echoed O’Brien’s assessment of her colleague and friend. She discussed Baker’s elegance and beauty and exclaimed “Oh how she could wear clothes” but quickly added “although her fame would rest a lot on her ability to perform without them.” For black women invested in a middle-class sense of respectability or, like Bricktop, engaged in a lifetime trajectory of upward mobility the “kept her clothes on in public” category was infinitely preferable to the banana-clad Baker image.

The problem presented by Baker’s enormous fame and the subsequent expectations of black women in Paris became evident in relation to a black revue that toured Paris several years after the revue nègre. The female chorines who toured Europe with the Blackbirds of 1928 were portrayed in numerous cartoons and caricatures in the contemporary French print media. In many of these cartoons the women chorus members were portrayed in primitive attire (see figure 5 below). One reviewer expressed great surprise at the absence of nudity in the show given the

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307 Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 106.  
308 Jack O’Brian remarked upon Bricktop’s social advancement: ‘Upward mobility was her beaded bag.’ Jack O Brian, ‘The Voice of Broadway,’ 1974.  
309 This generated huge publicity. Almost every significant newspaper reviewed, previewed or remarked upon the show, ‘Jazz’ RO Coupures file 98531, Dept des Arts et Spectacles, BnF Richelieu, Paris, France.
costumes in the Revue nègre.\textsuperscript{310} The problematic legacy of the Revue nègre comes through even more clearly in a curious anecdote about the show reported by le barman at the Moulin Rouge where it was staged. Adelaide Hall, star of the show, was rehearsing her dance number and had entered “like a whirlwind,” when the music stopped. A voice (the French director) coming from the darkened theatre demanded that the star dance bare-breasted (\textit{au seins nus}). When Hall protested the “voice insisted” and Hall, close to tears, announced she would feel too ashamed to dance \textit{ainsi dénudée} (so unclothed). Eventually the producer intervened promising her she could dance freely and clothed, according to her will.\textsuperscript{311}

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure6.png}
\caption{Adelaide Hall and the troupe in Blackbirds of 1928 live in Paris.\textsuperscript{312}}
\end{figure}

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\textsuperscript{311} ‘le Barman’ column in \textit{Soir} (Paris), 10 July 1929.
\textsuperscript{312} This illustration accompanied a positive review of ‘Blackbirds’ in \textit{Paris-midi} review, July 1 1929. See also the caricature of Adelaide Hall, featuring a similar costume, in \textit{Ami du Peuple du Soir} (Paris), July 1 1929.
\end{flushright}
This incident unfolded three years after Josephine Baker’s debut and reveals how extensive her influence was, particularly for black women on the stage. Adelaide Hall and her fellow chorines performed in costumes based upon stereotypes of black women on a plantation and in a jungle thus playing into the stereotype of the primitive. But Adelaide Hall’s protest against performing topless was a refusal to surrender her private moral standards to the public demand for stereotypical performances of primitive black femininity. At the same time, the fact the demand was made underlines the very real basis for Jane Nardal’s concerns that black women would win fame and visibility as exotic puppets prized more for body than brain.

This situation was particularly challenging for black Francophone women as some of them were from Africa and the French colonial vision of a topless African women was very prevalent in France. Francophone women from the Antilles frequently had to assert their difference from African women. As French colonial subjects they were more defensive about images of grass skirts, or feathered head-dresses. In a survey of what French black men and women should wear, for example, one of the responses from a white contributor was that given the “recent fad for everything colonial” a loincloth for the men would “undoubtedly would be very good.” Black Americans, however, could parody or perform the primitive jungle dance on stage, confident in the knowledge that most Americans, white or black, would recognize it as fictive in relation to the black American lifestyle. Given this context it is not surprising that the Nardal sisters looked at Baker in dismay and tried to find an alternate role model congruent with race uplift ideals.

In her onstage dress, as well as in her attitude toward dance Florence Mills shaped her public image very differently from that of Josephine Baker. Paul Colin, for example, draws Florence Mills in one of her signature costumes – that of a high stepping cross-dressed gamine. This is the image that frequently surfaces in French caricatures of the star as opposed to the suggestive portraits of Baker. Both women dressed as young ragamuffin boys, and also cross-dressed in tuxedoes for some numbers. Yet Florence Mill’s body was more angular than Baker’s and her costumes were much more conservative. Mills appeared onstage in a parodic Native America/African costume with a grass skirt and a revealing top.

315 See their respective photograph collections, both held in the Photographs Division of the Schomburg Center for Black Culture, New York. Some sense of the difference is evident in the photographic sections of their respective biographies, Egan, *Florence Mills : Harlem Jazz Queen*; Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra*. 
And yet as these images show the ethos she created was entirely different to that of Baker. This combination of differences in their respective physiques, and the different choices each woman made about repertoire, dance style, and portraiture, contributed to their very different public images. And that difference became an important factor in the way they were reviewed by black papers, and received by black audiences. Public reactions to their image varied because of the strong race uplift ideology found in both Europe and America.
This judgment of a star’s image was made on the basis of offstage dress as well as their stage costumes. A report of star-studded party held in Paris in 1925 shows very clearly the role of dress in perceptions of black female respectability and reputation. Florence Mills hosted this event for her husband Ulysses “Kid” Thompson in Paris. The black papers in America reporting on it described Mills as a “race leader” and noted that Josephine Baker was there in a stunning

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316 Florence Mills, ‘Magic Moon that Gave me Money,’ Undated clipping, Florence Mills Collection.
couture gown. The troupe of dancers from the *Blackbirds of 1926* also showed off the fashionable Parisian gowns they had acquired but Florence Mills, although dressed elegantly, was “sedate in black and silver.”317 The paper clearly approved of her choice. Furthermore Josephine Baker was known to accept free gowns from haute couture designers and wore them to publicize the designer.318 Florence Mills, however, at least according to admiring reporters, refused to model at fashion parades, stating “I don’t think actresses should do that sort of thing,” and that it was “beneath her dignity,” before contending that it would “deprive the mannequins of work.”319 The difference in their attitude toward dress signified more significant differences in their public demeanor. Such different attitudes had ramifications that stretched well beyond the lives of the performers themselves.

The linkage between fashion and ideas about racial equality and success in the interwar black Atlantic stretched beyond these two stars. For many successful black women haute couture functioned as a signifier of international success. It served to controvert the association between African womanhood and nudity stating rather that black women not only wore clothes, but wore the best, the most elegant, and the most expensive clothes. Josephine Baker herself used couture as a form of self-defense against being seen as an animalistic object of desire. In the whirl of publicity following her Parisian debut she was dragged around from party to party and she

318 Bricktop and Haskins, *Bricktop*, 106. See also “she was the rage of Paris which meant she could have anything she wanted in the way of clothes … in Paris when you are a star the trades people are happy to be able to say you are able to wear their clothes… and they’ll give them to you for free.’ Carl de Vidal Hunt, ‘How an Up-to-Date Josephine won Paris,’ *The New York Amsterdam News*, Jan 12 1927.
319 ‘Florence Mills Dead,’ *Chicago Defender*, Nov 5 1927. Of course modeling in a fashion show goes a step further than simply accepting designer dresses and conspicuously wearing them to promote the designer but the underlying refusal by Mills to use her body, personality, and image, as a marketing tool for the public display of fashion does get at a very real difference between her and Baker that linked to the very important perceived difference between them in the mind of the wider black community.
donned couture “to ward off the feeling that she was on display like a circus animal.”\footnote{This quotation is from the most thorough and well-researched biography of Josephine Baker, Rose, Jazz Cleopatra, 81-82. It is not substantiated but it fits with the weight of evidence in numerous biographies and reports on Josephine Baker and also with the photographic evidence from the archival collection of her photographs held at the Schomburg Center. Soon after her arrival in Paris Baker shifted her image in stills and publicity shots and posed almost exclusively in couture gowns and glamour set-ups with the exception of publicity shots for specific shows, and the Paul Colin pictures (poster designs for publicizing the Revue Nègre).} After 1925 Josephine Baker wore couture in public almost exclusively when off-stage and adopted more and more glamorous, sophisticated, and less revealing costumes on stage. Adelaide Hall, the singer and star of the Blackbirds of 1928 who objected to performing topless did not appreciate the expectations surrounding black stars in Paris generated by Baker. She nevertheless admitted that her ultimate aim would be to be as successful in Paris as Baker had been and specified that one of the things she loved about Paris and wanted to take advantage of was the opportunity to spend lots of money on fashion.\footnote{Les Blackbirds, Comoedia, July 1 1929.} Adelaide Hall, Bricktop and Baker, although occupying very different niches in interwar Paris, shared a common appreciation for the work that couture could perform for them in French society.

Bricktop’s memoirs, for example, include a passage in which she explains how her eyes were opened to the necessity of fashion for success in the interwar Paris jazz club scene especially as she was facing stiff competition from the vivacious (and occasionally vicious) Florence Jones for patronage:
I was learning other things in Paris. How to dress for instance. There was nothing to be ashamed of in the wardrobe I’d brought from America, but I could still see a difference between my wardrobe and Florence’s. An old friend, pianist Kid Cole, took me in hand and said bluntly. “Brick, you’ve got to get some clothes.” I protested that I had clothes. “No, no,” he said, “not those things you’re wearing. You’re in Paris now. I’ll send my girlfriend over and she’ll take you shopping.” When I stepped into those Paris gowns, I understood what Kid was talking about. They bring assurance to a woman and on the floor I found new poise and confidence. 322

As a host to the extremely wealthy, talented, or well-connected who frequented their Boîtes Florence Jones, and Bricktop, and the women who sang at their clubs – Alberta Hunter and Mabel Mercer among others, felt they had to maintain an elegant standard of dress and behavior. The expectation is implicit in reviews of these nightspots – and their hostesses. Time Magazine, describes Florence Embry-Jones as chic, her clients as “smart” and Florence as managing one of the “smartest Boités” in Paris. 323 French fashions therefore served as a form of costume, armor, protection, or even uniform, for black American women in the entertainment world, hence Bricktop’s contention that her dresses gave her “assurance, poise and confidence,” or Josephine Baker’s resort to couture to offset being “paraded like a circus animal.” For the woman herself stylish and elegant self-presentation was an outward and visible sign of social and financial success.

Bricktop, Josephine Baker, Adelaide Hall and other successful black women performing in Paris during the jazz era grappled with fashion at the elite level. Another example can be seen in the career of Fredi Washington, a beautiful African American screen star who began her

323 ‘Chez Florence,’ Time Magazine, June 20 1927.
career as a singer-dancer in Harlem, enjoyed great success in Europe and, upon her return to the States became typecast in plays and films as “the half-white fast woman.” It is no coincidence that she was known, offstage, for her “strictly tailored” and conservative dress and was apparently frequently asked whether she was in mourning due to her predilection for wearing black.\textsuperscript{324} Her story is illustrative of the strict delineation that those who worked actively for race uplift (a group that includes both Fredi and Florence Mills) made between stage and street. It also illustrates the social pressure due to the discourse of respectability. Their concerns, their choices, and the differing images they created for their public persona found their counterpart at street level.

The success of black performing women in interwar Paris offered inspirational narratives of women who had made money and learned to wear couture. These performers – even the most refined of them, however, relied upon costume and exaggerated performances of black femininity to succeed. Discussions of self-presentation across the Atlantic show how non-performing women negotiated the intersection of success, race uplift ideals, and attractive self-presentation. These discussions clearly indicate that the world of entertainment, and its influence on female fashion, was regarded with caution by respectable black trendsetters who warned women to beware the dangers of imitating the public style of stars such as Josephine Baker – and even Florence Mills. Onstage the stars were dressed in very bright colors and this, combined

\textsuperscript{324} Lou Layne, ‘Moon Over Harlem,’ May 6 1935, typed proofs for press release, Fredi Washington Collection, SC-micro R-5002, reel 1, Schomburg Center for Black Culture, NYPL, New York. Washington made much of the fact that she really ‘had to act’ in the ‘fast woman’ roles. She was an active member of the NAACP who worked on equity issues for black actors.
with the type of role they might be playing, signaled danger if such portrayals of “bright” (a synonym for gaudy) attire was projected onto non-performing black women.

Miss Elisevans, an African American fashion columnist was explicit about the importance of recognizing the difference between gaudy costumes and tasteful dress:

Two or three years ago, when Florence Mills appeared in “Dixie to Broadway” the costumes were an artistic triumph... with the brightest combination of reds, blues, yellows, greens, orange, they produced a color spectacle that was sparkling, startling and ravishing but that was onstage. Bright colors are to attract one’s attention. We are conspicuous enough in being Colored without adding a red dress or hat or yellow blouse that matches the boulevard stoplights. Bright colors are intriguing and bewitching... but they are far more attractive on the stage where they produce a riot of color effect, than on the street where the effect is the same. Let us remember that unless our complexion and type assures our safely wearing a red dress or hat, to stay within the bounds of the more conservative colors and use the favorite bright ones only in small spaces such as a flower here or a belt there.  

Miss Elisevans was writing a fashion column and thus commenting upon ideals rather than realities but her advice demonstrates the intersection between fashion and race uplift for the African diaspora. The columnist had the cachet of Parisian chic behind her as she had “spent a year in Paris studying costume designing and the art of dressing properly.” The emphasis upon her Parisian experience shows the way in which African-Americans, like all Americans, considered Paris as the center of the fashion world and thus underscores the influence of the women of their community – broadly conceived - who enjoyed success and couture there. She didn’t hesitate to mention this in her advice to wear black as it “is the color that the Parisienne wears,” and “the woman on the boulevard finds it chic and smart while the working class finds it

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326 Miss Elisevans, “The Trend of Fashion.”
serviceable and economic.” Miss Elisevan’s advice showed a clear recognition of class; women of a higher socio-economic standing can aspire to international chic while the working class can also aspire to be smart although they are limited by their station.

In her recognition of class differences as well as in her emphasis upon conservatism in color the columnist articulated a transatlantic vision of race uplift and advancement through adhering to conventional middle-class values about color and style in dress. She identified the stage as a performative arena where gender signifiers like female dress were exaggerated. She advised her readers to wear black as a sign of respectability, modesty, and style – an equally performative gesture. The material reality of costume whether both stage and street therefore became translated, in a process similar to that described by Butler, into a set of signs that constructed a woman as respectable. The columnist stressed that one could never be too conservative with colors because “upon this depends entirely our appearance as a group.” When she referred to the “group” Miss Elisevans was using the word in the larger sense that race uplift advocates used the word “the race.” As such her advice was targeted not just at African-Americans in America but all those who read the black American newspapers around the world, and also all members of the African diaspora who participated in a pan-African vision of “the race” where the fight against racial oppression transcended national identities.

The conservative approach to fashion and respectability was shared by men and women of African descent throughout the Atlantic as can be seen in the very serious attention devoted to the issue by the bilingual, transatlantic, publication the Revue du Monde Noir. This journal,

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327 Miss Elisevans, “The Trend of Fashion.”
328 Miss Elisevans, “The Trend of Fashion.”
founded to stimulate literary, cultural, and above all intellectual discussion throughout the black world, devoted several pages to an investigation of fashion because getting it wrong, in their opinion, exposed black men and women to ridicule, or undermined their efforts to appear civilized. The editors challenged contributors to submit responses to the question “How should the Negro living in Europe dress?” The whole piece was founded upon a fear that “the sight of a negro dressed in European fashion always provokes the laughter of the White man.” The review mocked this attitude but clearly felt the need to confront it in print and offered sincere advice to their readers on how to dress appropriately. It asked both French and American commentators to contribute to the investigation.

Clara Shepard, contributing from America, attacked a French short story that had presented a “dreadful nightmare created as an authentic picture of a Harlem wedding” in which the attendants were “garbed in glaring pink.” Springing ferociously to the defense of African American feminine taste Shepard countered that the author clearly hadn’t ever been to Harlem because young women like her, of “unerring good taste,” would never don such colors. She then cited the “society column of a Negro newspaper,” that reported a wedding where the bride wore “a French creation of eggshell velvet” and the attendants wore “gowns of Autumn shades.” Shepard noted that as far back as she could remember “young ladies of color in America have been very seriously concerned with the choices of tints and shades becoming to their complexion.” Her choice of language here underlines the link between fashion, self-presentation...
and race uplift. The African American bride wore a French couture gown to signify style, success, and glamour at her wedding, just like Bricktop and Baker, yet like Florence Mills’ choice of couture it was sedate. That choice illustrated the bride’s bourgeois socio-economic standing, her respectability, and consequently the status she enjoys as a “young lady” who has made it into the “society column.” Clara Shepard and the men and women she represents in her account of the wedding display very clearly the race uplift approach to achieving equality through adopting the values of middle class European social mores.

Like their American counterparts the French contributors to this discussion shared a belief in race uplift. Contributors mention that women and men should exhibit good taste and “know how to choose” which aspects of fashion they should follow.332 This underlines their intent to fit in and to present themselves as appropriate and stylish, and above all neither laughable nor crass. The journal’s investigation of appropriate fashion for noirs stretched over two issues and an insistent refrain emerged. The constant assertion was that style was independent of skin color, and was defined by good taste which consisted of the ability to “pay attention to complexion… and other conditioning factors of smartness.”333 Just as a Nordic blonde “would rather give up being in style than choose designs or colors which would not add to her charm” so must women of the African diaspora living in Anglo-European societies make similar adaptations.334 The claim to “good taste” was, self-evidently, short-hand for an unspoken and arbitrary set of standards that contributed to a discursive system within which and through

334 This comment comes from Magd Raney’s contribution to the discussion, "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World," 182-183.
which perceptions of gender and race were created. The fact that members of the African diaspora felt they had to consider how to wear European fashion with good taste as opposed to the fashion that counted as good taste in their home countries illustrates just how arbitrary such standards were (and are). Yet the expectations and perceptions that were linked to them had outcomes in labor practices, employment opportunities, and that affected every black man and woman judged according to those standards.

**Repertoire**

The dictates of respectability didn’t simply affect what black women wore, or how they danced, it also affected what styles of music they performed, and where they performed it. Josephine Baker, Florence Mills, Bricktop and the Nardal sisters again offer a representative variety of repertoire choices here. The question of appropriate repertoire also exposes one of the great differences between the French and American versions of the race uplift discourse. While black French women were cynical of many forms of American jazz, their American counterparts seemed to be more worried by blues than jazz. By the late nineteen-twenties, many black Americans were inclined to accept jazz as a vibrant form of cultural production that had merit

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335 Bourdieu discusses this in relation to class in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984). In the case of race uplift ideals it is ethnicity and place of birth as much as class which shapes taste and is cultural capital that needs to be acquired to move into a different world. But the process works exactly the same way and has changed little since George Bernard Shaw lampooned it in *Pygmalion* which became *My Fair Lady*.

336 For a wonderful take on (mostly white) French bourgeois culture and how it is constructed with a whole set of ‘signs’ relating to place (suburbs), education, dress style, etc see Béatrix Le Wita, *French Bourgeois Culture* (Cambridge :: New York : Cambridge University Press, 1994).
within the “New Negro” aspirations. Although “two cultural universes existed: one based on the values of the jook (rent parties, cabarets and after hours joints), and the other on those of the concert hall,” many Americans viewed jazz as a potential third musical way that expressed black creativity and would win mainstream white and black admiration. In France, however, the Nardals preferred French Caribbean styles to American music, as discussed above, although they also embraced respectable black music such as the spirituals in their salon in Clamart. The following section discusses these similarities and differences and shows how they intersected with the transatlantic doctrine of race uplift.

One key difference between American women who made it big across the pond and those who were famed but never made it out of America was that the women who went overseas tended to be jazz and cabaret stars rather than blues artists. The blues, furthermore, were less popular than jazz in Europe in the nineteen-twenties. Furthermore the blues queens sang ribald lyrics and embraced a sexually suggestive persona. They were viewed with concern by middle-class black Americans and some of the promoters who bought tours into Europe felt the blues queens might be too raw for European audiences.

The women who succeeded in the nightclubs calibrated their lyrics to a much more respectable register than the blues that the black American blues queens sang on the “chittlin” circuit. Bricktop, Florence Mills, Mabel Mercer, and later Adelaide Hall and Alberta Hunter, were known for their light jazz renditions of songs with sophisticated Cole Porter numbers being

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337 Floyd also follows this line of reasoning, Floyd, The Power of Black Music, 132-133.
338 William Shack noted that “raunchy blue music did not enter the repertoire of Bricktop and Florence (Embry) Jones whose sultry, seductive, jazzy, lyrics aimed to delight, not shock, tourists and provincials.” Shack, Harlem in Montmartre, 59.
representative of the general tone. Bricktop, for example, sang “Miss Otis Regrets” as her trademark and legend has it that Cole Porter had written it for her.\(^{339}\) This is a classic blues narrative – a woman, betrayed by her lover, who then takes her revenge, and prepares to meet justice. She regrets she is unable to lunch because she knows she will be arrested for her crime. The content, therefore, replicates that of the singer’s persona in one of Bessie Smith’s most successful numbers, *Send me to the ‘Lectric Chair*, but the tone and musical styling is vastly different. The songs need to be heard for the full differences to be appreciated but Smith’s song is often characterized as “raw” while Porter’s is masterfully understated and the ethos is wistful and filled with a slightly ironic pathos.\(^{340}\)

Both songs are among the best representatives of their genres and exemplify the difference between jazz-cabaret and the blues. The blues songs tended to be sung in a lower voice than the jazz cabaret numbers whereas the lighter jazz numbers were sung at a higher pitch and now sound a little whiny as they didn’t record well.\(^{341}\) In “Send me to the ‘Lectric Chair,” Bessie Smith’s voice is driving, it is often described as “moaning,” and she frequently slides from note to note, her timbre giving the whole song a weighted, heavy, ambience with a corresponding impression of lived experience. “Miss Otis Regrets” is lighter in tone. In Ethel Water’s recording (the closest in style to Bricktop’s interwar version available) the singer’s voice


\(^{341}\) There are a lot of musical and mechanical recording reasons for these differences but it also spoke to the different venues in which the music was sung and a tendency in music to associate higher voices with a more heroic and refined persona. The blues are much more engaging to a modern ear and they speak more directly to social issues in a compelling musical form.
has a more languid feel with a sophistication and subtlety in the musical styling. The song calls for a “high society” accent that typifies the singing of the jazz-cabaret singers who appeared at the boites in Paris during this era.\footnote{Ethel Waters was a much better singer than Bricktop, as the nightclub owner herself would have acknowledged. Nevertheless the use of this recording is justified by the similarity in era, interpretation (as can be gleaned from Bricktop’s memoirs, and the comments made by others about her voice and style), and Water’s fidelity to the ethos of Porter’s song.}

The lyrics of the two songs (see table below) have completely different linguistic registers. Bessie Smith’s number featured urban working class slang, and graphic references to knives, and her lover “wallowing” in his blood. The song is a gritty first person narrative framed as a plea to the judge. The singer of “Miss Otis Regrets” however, is a servant, conveying the regrets of Miss Otis that “she’s unable to lunch today.” Bessie Smith “done cut” her “good man’s throat,” while Miss Otis has been “led astray” and “drew a gun.” The musical interpretation, the style, and the timbre are worlds apart and like the lyrics they indicate the gulf between the singers, these particular songs, the repertoire they represent, and the social position of the women singing that repertoire.
Table 2. Lyrics of “Miss Otis Regrets” compared to “Send me to the ‘Lectric Chair”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Miss Otis Regrets,” Cole Porter, 1934.</th>
<th>“Send me to the ‘Lectric Chair,” vocals Bessie Smith, composed by Shelton Brooks, (first recorded 2 March 1927)(^{343})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today, Madam.</td>
<td>Judge you wanna hear my plea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today.</td>
<td>Before you open up your court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She is sorry to be delayed, But last evening down in Lover's Lane she strayed. Madam.</td>
<td>But I don't want no sympathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today.</td>
<td>'Cause I done cut my good man's throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When she woke up and found, that her dream of love was gone. Madam.</td>
<td>I caught him with a trifling Jane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She ran to the man who had lead her so far astray. And from under a velvet gown, She drew a gun and shot her lover down, Madam.</td>
<td>I warned him 'bout before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today.</td>
<td>I had my knife and went insane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the mob came and got her and dragged her from the jail, Madam, They strung her from the old willow cross the way. And the moment before she died, She lifted up her lovely head and cried, Madam. Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today. Miss Otis regrets... she's unable to lunch today.</td>
<td>And the rest you ought to know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Judge, judge, please mister judge, Send me to the 'lectric chair Judge, judge, good mister judge, Let me go away from here I wanna take a journey To the devil down below I done killed my man I wanna reap just what I sow Oh judge, judge, lordy lordy judge Send me to the 'lectric chair Judge, judge, hear me judge Send me to the 'lectric chair I love him so dear I cut him with my barlow (?) I kicked him in the side I stood here laughing o'r him While he wallowed around and died Oh judge, lordy judge, Send me to the 'lectric chair

A further aspect of the lyrics of these two songs in particular, and the larger repertoire they represent is whether they reference sexual activity and how overtly. Many blues lyrics were noted for their very blunt double entendres. Several examples have been mentioned above, but the barely disguised references to sex in “I want some Sugar in my Bowl,” or “Hot Nuts (get ‘em from the Peanut Vendor,)” are potent examples of the no-nonsense approach urban blues women took toward articulating their sexual desires, disappointments, and recommendations.\textsuperscript{344} “Sugar in my Bowl” is one of the most famous female blues numbers and it has been re-recorded by stars as diverse as Nina Simone and Queen Latifah. It is also sexually suggestive although many singers omit Bessie Smith’s line “I want a little hot dog in my roll.” The point of this quick survey of the very direct lyrics of some of the blues songs is that they articulated exactly the perceived association between black men and women and hypersexuality that the race uplift advocates tried so hard to counter. Although Florence Mills, Bricktop, and Alberta Hunter occasionally sang the blues in performance and even recorded them they did not become associated with the lifestyle and the content of the blues in the same way as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey did. This made them more likely to be selected to star in touring revues and more likely to be perceived as “race leaders” and worthy representatives of black men and women overseas.\textsuperscript{345}

\textsuperscript{344} For ease of reference, those interested in these lyrics can find them collated at Blues Lyrics online, http://www.geocities.com/BourbonStreet/delta/2541/blbsmith.htm, accessed August 8 2009. The blatant sexual references in many of these songs won them inclusion on a very odd CD, entitled Sugar in My Bowl: Vintage Sex Songs 1923-1952, Buzzola, August 2004.

\textsuperscript{345} This is a complicated issue. It is possible the blues queens didn’t want or need to tour internationally. Their heavy double entendres may not have translated well although their records did sell to an enthusiastic group of jazz fans in Europe (see le Jazz Hot). Black performers who broke through into the classical and opera scene were most highly valued in the race uplift model.
The preference for refined and respectable women to be promoted as “race leaders” and international stars made perfect sense given transatlantic developments in black culture at the time. The black cultural renaissance that took place in interwar Harlem and Chicago “accelerated a process of social differentiation among African-Americans.” This process was driven, in part, by the context of the Great Migration as a result of which economic, social and artistic success were obtained on the basis of skills that were marketable in urban setting. It also privileged forms of creativity acceptable to whites. And many prominent leaders of the Harlem renaissance believed that acceptable creativity that would “level up” the races fell under the rubric of high art and excluded populist and ribald entertainment such as the blues. The Harlem and Chicago flowerings of black culture were “aspects of a worldwide movement… [that] embraced cities that served as bases for the dissemination of the art and ideas of Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, James P. Johnson, Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Roland Hayes, Richard Wright, Edmund Jenkins, Wm. Grant Still, Thomas Dorsey, Florence Price, Earl Hines, Alain Locke, and all the other important figures of the movement.”

These figures were stars in the race uplift pantheon, most of them known to this day for their intellectual, literary, and musical contributions to great American art. In terms of music Roland Hayes was a black opera singer, Paul Robeson one of the greatest intellectuals and actors of the day who also played breakthrough roles in black musicals and made the spirituals a central feature of his classical concerts, William Grant Still was a classical composer, Duke Ellington’s style of jazz was praised in elite circles and he was renowned as a musically literate composer

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and one of the greatest jazz band leaders around. Although Langston Hughes expressed cynicism toward the high art/low art distinction regarding race music in his cry to “Let the blare of jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith penetrate the ears” that poem was reacting to the prevalence of the race uplift concentration on forms of cultural production that accorded with bourgeois values.

Florence Mills became the perfect example of how jazz and cabaret artists could accomplish these cultural aims. She was most famous for a song that touched upon racial discrimination, and was universally described as sweet, lyrical and haunting – “I’m a little blackbird.” She therefore fulfilled the mandate of the race uplift movement to address injustice through appropriate artistic performance. Although she did perform in racially stereotyped roles she also became one of the first black women to perform at a concert series at Aeolian Hall, making history by singing the “jazz-style” but thoroughly classical compositions of William Grant Still. Her performance was seen as a breakthrough for African-Americans and the NAACP released a press statement to that effect. These repertoire choices all identified Florence Mills as a respectable role model for black women across the Atlantic.

The repertoire and musical style on show at the Nardal’s salon showed very similar preoccupations as those espoused in the New Negro ideology. This is hardly surprising as the Nardal sisters and their friends were in regular correspondence with Alain Locke and sought to imitate his vision. The transatlantic valence of ideas about appropriate repertoire is absolutely

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349 For Aeolian hall, see Egan, *Florence Mills : Harlem Jazz Queen*, 147. The obituary printed in the *Chicago Defender* also mentions her ‘Sunday concerts at Carnegie Hall,’ which may have been a conflation with the Aeolian hall concert. ‘Florence Mills Dead,’ *Chicago Defender*, Nov 5 1927.
evident in the salon hosted by the Nardals at their home in Clamart. The Nardal sisters played classical piano solos and they also formed an impromptu choir from time to time to sing black American “blues” or “spirituals.”\textsuperscript{350} The choice of the spirituals makes sense as they were universally recognized as the creation of African-Americans under slavery and thus the “hopeful lamentation of a soul in anguish.”\textsuperscript{351} As mentioned above Paul Robeson won widespread approval for incorporating them into his classical concert recitals, and W. E. B. Du Bois chose them, of course, as epigraphs for the chapters of \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}. They were, and are, understood to reference the suffering and agony of a people unfairly treated due to prejudice. Those gathered at the Nardals’ salon could have had no trouble making the connection between racial prejudice and the search for equity which linked them all together, and the significance of the spirituals.\textsuperscript{352}

The extent to which jazz was in transition as a worthwhile cultural product that reflected race uplift ideals is evident in Noble Sissle’s explanation of it for \textit{La Dépêche africaine}, to which the Nardal sisters contributed as authors. Sissle argued against the accusation made in many black American church congregations that jazz was “Low Down Music” (the devil’s music) and claims, instead, that the “real article” has “universal appeal” because it “is on as high a plane as regards to the spirit of human inspiration as any music that was ever born in the souls of a race of

\textsuperscript{351} Noble Sissle, ‘Why Jazz has Conquered the World,’ \textit{La Dépêche africaine}, no 8, Oct 1928, English Language page (unnumbered.)
\textsuperscript{352} The reference to the blues is a little less convincing. It is highly unlikely that those gathered around the Nardal family piano in Clamart would have been belting out “I want a little sugar in my bowl” or any of the other less-than-subtle lyrics that made Bessie and Ma Rainey so famous. It is far more likely that by ‘blues’ Louis-Thomas Achille meant a slightly gentrified version of some light jazz classics, and perhaps cabaret songs.
people.”\footnote{Sissle, “Why Jazz has Conquered the World,” \textit{LDA}, no. 8, Oct 1928.} This is not the blues as black working class Americans knew them. At their gatherings the Nardals probably sang music that fell within Sissle’s characterization of jazz as the expression of “faith in the Almighty to see them safely brought through...trials and tribulations.”\footnote{Sissle, “Why Jazz has Conquered the World,” \textit{LDA}, no. 8, Oct 1928.} Noble Sissle was known among black American communities for creating artistic work that conveyed a political message. His defense of jazz was in alignment with race uplift thinking and in it he tried to show that jazz music in its original form was noble and ennobling. Sissle’s reputation legitimated light jazz for attendees of the Nardals’ salon, and readers of the \textit{Dépêche Africaine}.\footnote{He was widely admired as a “race leader” and applauded in numerous articles such as one in the \textit{Baltimore African-American} in which he engaged in a ‘telling piece of racial lecturing,’ cited in Egan, \textit{Florence Mills : Harlem Jazz Queen}, 113.} Guests at the salon were singing for enjoyment and fun but as Louis Thomas-Achille points out it was fun with a pan-African agenda and the music was carefully calibrated to those noble upright ends. The Nardals sang some variant of jazz classics at home even as they condemned the widespread image of Josephine Baker as a jazz dancer and singer in public. This shows how the spaces as well as the specific songs, also made a difference to how jazz was perceived in race uplift ideology. An age old perception of respectable women pursuing cultural activities in the private sphere versus disreputable women who became public professionals in the entertainment world was thus incorporated into the pan-African world view.

The large music-hall and revue-style performance of Josephine Baker (or Adelaide Hall, or even Florence Mills) were very public spectacles. The work of women such as Bricktop, and Florence Embry Jones, in contrast, was to host and entertain the elite in the intimate and often physically cramped space of the nightclub. They modeled an important career path to black
American women in Paris. Although Ada Bricktop Smith and Florence Jones claimed to be the only African American manager-hostesses in Paris prior to 1925 at least one other woman (Maisie Mullins Withers) was doing the same thing.\(^{356}\) In 1925 when Josephine Baker realized her success with the *Revue Nègre* in 1925 she lost no time in opening a little nightspot of her own.\(^ {357}\) As a host to the extremely wealthy, talented, or well-connected who frequented their *Boîtes* these women felt they had to maintain certain standards of dress and behavior. The nightclub also more closely resembled the private and domestic sphere and the actions of a hostess bore some resemblance to the work of the Nardal sisters in hosting their Salon in Clamart. Nightclub hostesses kept their guests comfortable, attended to their needs, facilitated discussion, offered entertainment, and conducted themselves appropriately so as not to inconvenience their guests or sully their own reputation.

Black Francophone women recorded their concerns about the Charleston, and about Josephine Baker in print but they invited Bricktop to perform at pan-African soirées. They didn’t criticize her in print.\(^ {358}\) The space in which she performed, and the role she undertook within that space, linked her more closely with the age-old French role of a *salonnière*, with middle class beliefs about the private sphere, and her proximity to the elite also aligned her with some aspects of race uplift ideals. Bricktop herself referred to the gendered role she played in that space,

\(^ {356}\) *News from Abroad,* *Chicago Defender,* Oct 22 1921, reports Maisie Mullins Withers as running the Tempo club with Joe Boyd.


\(^ {358}\) Bricktop was present at a concert hosted by ‘Prince Kojo’ as reported by Evans, in George H. Evans, “Letter from Paris: American Express Co., 11 Rue Scribe, Paris France, June 18 1925,” *Chicago Defender,* Saturday July 18, 1925. See also *Les Continents.*
commenting that she “was like a mother” to her clients at times, and would hold their mail for them, lend them money on occasion, and make sure they were entertained and got home safely.  

In this respect her role somewhat akin to the role the Nardals played in their very bourgeois and race uplift oriented salon. The Nardals fostered lively conversation, on political and intellectual topics relating to black life. They served light refreshments but no alcohol to their guests. The salon thus possessed a “genteel feminine atmosphere”, in every respect, Louis-Thomas recalled later. The acceptance of the Nardals input in the context of the salon, and Bricktop’s celebrity in elite circles may owe something to the long tradition of brilliant women hosting intellectual salons in France, and – if so – it offered a notable twist in that these women were black and Bricktop, in particular, was cultured but not intellectual. The spaces in which women performed and their repertoire were both relevant to how they were perceived by race uplift advocates. There were, however, far more contentious aspects of behavior and self-presentation that affected the reception and status of these highly achieving black women. Their sexual behavior was perhaps the most important factor that affected their suitability to be race leaders as well as race artists.

Sex

The suggestion that a black female performer might enact a fluid sexual morality in public caused a great deal of concern in race uplift circles as mentioned in relation to the blues

Queens. And another interesting difference here between Florence Mills, for example, and Bessie Smith was that Mills was monogamously and mostly happily married and acknowledged to be so by the black press. Bessie Smith, in contrast, was renowned for her many affairs and her open-ness to affairs whether heterosexual or homosexual, marriages notwithstanding. Like Mills, many of the women who made it on the international scene were monogamously married (to the public eye at least) and seen as upholding the values that were cherished by advocates of race uplift. Florence Mills herself was always attended by her “very devoted,” husband Ulysses S. Thompson, while Nettie Compton performed in a double-act with her husband, and Florence Embry Jones and her husband were bastions of the early black American community in Paris. These women did not generate the scandal and gossip that accompanied some of the most famous and multiply married blues queens such as Ma Rainey, or Bessie Smith. They were sent overseas with pride and represented a range of female models of success to the black community that have been obscured by the arresting presence of Josephine Baker which dominated the stage in the 1920s and has also dominated the historical record of that era.

One of the most insidious and intriguing sources of concern about black female performers (particularly Josephine Baker) related to crossing the color line sexually. This was

360 ‘Very devoted,’ is from “Echoes of the Town,” *The Daily Sketch*, London, January 12 1927. But there are numerous references to Florence Mill’s husband, Ulysses S. Thompson in this role as, for example, “Across the pond,” *Chicago Defender*, Sept 24 1927, or “Timely Topics,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov 12 1927. For Nettie Compton see *Chicago Defender*, (numerous) and for Florence and Palmer Jones see not only the *Chicago Defender*, but also Bricktop and Haskins, *Bricktop*; Lloyd, *Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris*.

both a signifier of racial freedom and equality and paradoxically a potentially damning reflection upon one’s loyalty to the race. It was an issue that engaged Americans more than many Francophone black men and women where the colonial past had shaped a slightly more fluid and forgiving attitude to sexual relationships between men and women of different ethnicities. Yet the history of sexual abuse of black women, the very real socio-economic inequity and power differential between black men and white men in colonial America and the Francophone colonies, and the related but separate issue of the perceived hyper-sexuality of black women had resonance for both Francophone colonials and African-Americans. Cross-racial liaisons had historically caused comment, concern and sometimes trouble in both Europe and America – particularly among white communities. When well-known female stars became romantically involved with white men, therefore, it was not necessarily seen as a breakthrough for the race.

The way Florence Mills has been memorialized gives us a telling example of this set of reservations about crossing the color line. Toward the end of the very successful run of the *Blackbirds of 1926* in Paris she threw a big birthday party for her husband Ulysses S. Thompson. This was the party at which she was conspicuous in her “sedate gown of silver and black.” It was also noted by commentators that she danced only with men of her own race in contrast to Josephine Baker who – thoughtlessly according to one report – danced principally with white men. Again the differences between these two particular women exemplify a set of larger ideals and expectations among the black community which become even more marked because

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362 This sexual anxiety was referenced briefly at the outset of this discussion. See also Susan Kay Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois*, Critical American Studies Series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); David A. B. Murray, *Opacity: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and The "Problem" Of Identity in Martinique*, Gender, Sexuality & Culture (New York: P. Lang, 2002).

of the similarity of their careers, their specific skills, and their level of fame during the interwar period.

Both women, for example, attracted white male fans yet they handled the attention in characteristically different ways. Josephine Baker has been portrayed as enjoying numerous liaisons with white men among them some of the white male fans who showered her with flowers, dinner invitations and sent many a hastily scratched “mash” note back to her dressing room. Josephine Baker accepted several such offers and enjoyed several flings – although Bricktop points out not as many as rumor would have it - before marrying Pepito a white male dancer posing as a European count. Florence Mills was in a different position, as a married woman, but she, too, had white admirers. There is an amusing contrast between the “mash notes” of Baker, however, and the letter from a star struck admirer that advised Florence Mills to:

keep the ‘Smile’ your greatest charm, childish, innocent, free from harm,

Be earnest, be true to yourself and then – you will reach the hearts of Real White Men.
Through all, keeping natural and good as you can.
In fact be a woman and you will be master of man.  

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Florence Mills’ admirer seemed to appreciate exactly the type of goodness and fidelity that would mitigate against her accepting or acting upon the type of mash note sent to Josephine Baker.

Mills’ behavior at the party she threw for her husband emphasized her adherence to race uplift ideals and to showing race loyalty by “only dancing with the black men.” Papers at the time never failed to compare the two artists and one remarked that on this occasion “The Paris notabilities, who were her guests, did not perhaps understand why Florence Mills always sat with, as well as danced among, her own people.” The black American journalist Potter took some “potshots” in his eponymous column that engaged with this issue in the American context. He commented that there seemed to be trouble with our organizations travelling through the South. He attributed this trouble to the female artists in those shows:

There is no need for this writer to beat about the bush. It is simply this – that managers who are carrying female artists with them, who are found to be familiar with white men in the various towns in which they are playing should drop them. Leave them cold wherever this happens. There would be no contract binding them to hold such women with the company. Just the way this news has reached us it has reached others. And it wouldn’t take very long for this sort of thing to tear down all that has been built up in the line of our theatricals. If the women who would do these things have no higher moral standard than to receive the attention of white men anywhere, but especially in the South, they should be dropped from the company’s payroll.

The language Potter uses – “such women,” and “moral standard” shows that the doctrine of respectability is being applied here and his concern that “if the news has reached us it has

368 “Potter’s Pot Shots,” *Chicago Defender*, Saturday, 18 July 1925.
reached others,” and that” this sort of thing” will destroy the good reputation (“all that has been built up”) of black entertainers wherever they may be.

Mills was very conscious of her image as a “race leader” and with the benefit of hindsight it seems easy to see that throughout her career, she made choices (whether intentionally performative or not) such as dancing only with black men in public, which carried moral weight to her fans and followers throughout the black diaspora. She avoided any hint of the kind of accusations that began to follow Josephine Baker from this time forward. Baker ran into accusations of betraying her race once she had won fame in Paris. Her friend and colleague Bricktop was one of many commentators who felt Josephine Baker moved away from the black community after 1926 in her romantic and social connections.369

This perception offers a marked contrast with the general perception of Florence Mills who maintained ties with both black and white friends and fans and was scrupulously careful to maintain her presence and reputation as a lady and a “race leader”. Some aspects of the contrast could simply be an accident of historical selection – Florence Mills chose to keep certain fan letters and may well have jettisoned more suggestive ones. Of course Mills was married, and her husband traveled with her, but the behavior of other members of the cast of the blackbirds shows that it wasn’t necessarily the presence of a husband that guaranteed upright behavior – one of the women in the Blackbirds got into a brawl with her husband and a third cast member who had

369 Jonny Hudgins’ wrote an open letter to the Chicago Defender in 1927 in which he mentioned that he had been to see Josephine Baker’s show several times, but although she had sent him a big basket of flowers upon his arrival in Paris she ‘has yet to visit.’ He “supposes she is too busy,” “Hudgins and Wife Write to Whitney,” The Chicago Defender, Mar 10 1928. See also Bricktop’s memoirs in which she noted that Baker spent much less time with her black friends and colleagues after marrying Pepito, which laid her open to charges of racial elitism and betrayal of her own folk Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 110
insulted her which landed them in police custody and hospital.\textsuperscript{370} In Mills’ case her respectability was perceived innate an inherent part of her personality. One of the more sentimental obituaries of the star noted that “she lived her life so the vicious tentacles of gossip and slander could never touch her.”\textsuperscript{371} Josephine Baker’s single status, her fame and visibility, and her lack of interest in discretion ensured that her liaisons became a matter of public knowledge and were exaggerated if anything. Yet the fact that the memory of these stars continues to show a divergence in how they are celebrated as “race leaders” shows the power of the perceptions that were created by their personal choices in matters such as dress, and who one danced with at a party.\textsuperscript{372}

Bricktop provides an interesting third case which enables further comparison and analysis of why cross-racial liaisons between black women and white men generated ambivalence among black communities. The star, beloved hostess to the elite, commented that she “never fooled around with any of my male clients” although she could have as they “were sure after me, and I’ll say it myself I was a pretty fast girl and very well made.”\textsuperscript{373} Like Baker, Bricktop accepted gowns from wealthy white friends and clients. One of the more memorable photographs of Bricktop noted shows her in a couture dress. On its reverse contains a comment written in her own hand, stating: “Me wearing a Molyneux gown. Thanks to my friends I was always well-

\textsuperscript{372} The ‘Flo-Bert’ awards for Tap dance are named after Florence Mills and Bert Williams, Duke Ellington wrote his number ‘Black Beauty’ for her, and the web abounds with respectful sites dedicated to promoting her memory.
dressed – ‘the best kept woman in Paris,’ Elsa Schiaparelli said.”\(^3\)\(^7\)\(^4\) In an interview later in life she claimed she realized very clearly, however, that she would only ever be a “backstreet mistress” to a client due to the gulf of race and class that separated her from them.\(^3\)\(^7\)\(^5\)

In her biography she goes further and states that although she had had white male lovers she’d “never marry a white man” because he “wouldn’t mean to care” for a black woman. This suggests that cross-racial liaisons for Bricktop involved a shrewd assessment of the costs in terms of status, reputation, and emotional risk, all of which had to do with racial prejudice and some of which, in addition had to do with class and occupation. Bricktop was noted for her discretion both on her own behalf and that of her clients so it is difficult to verify her claims that she would never sleep with a client. Whatever the truth was Bricktop’s reputation counted because while both women were admired throughout Europe Bricktop did not suffer the kind of implications about her respectability as did Baker.\(^3\)\(^7\)\(^6\)

\(^3\)\(^7\)\(^4\) Bricktop Ada Smith, Photograph Collection, see photograph of Bricktop with two dapper gentlemen, circa 1926, photo #SC-86-2-201, held at Schomburg Centre for Black Culture.
\(^3\)\(^7\)\(^5\) Bricktop is extremely disparaging about the moderately successful singers, dancers, and chorines who did become romantically and sexually involved with elite white men and notes scornfully that they deserved it when the wife in question humbled them in a variety of ways. Remember this is her account, so, as always, needs to be read with caution for the way Bricktop – many years after her heyday – characterized herself as ‘the’ example of how to behave appropriately with the white elite, Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 130.
\(^3\)\(^7\)\(^6\) Baker herself was eager to claim credit for all she had done for “the race” and writes a letter to the Chicago Defender in Oct 1926, describing her “tremendous success” and her pride at being able to “do something for her race” because “God knows I love my people. It makes me very happy to be able to pave the way for my people over here in the great and wonderful Europe. The French people just love me. Why? Because I am a great success and hold myself way up above the average actress. I love my work and put my soul into it.” Josephine Baker, “Josephine Baker Writes,” Chicago Defender, Oct 30, 1927.
Conclusion

Josephine Baker, Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith and Florence Mills were three of the most well-known stars among black communities in France and Europe in the nineteen-twenties. Their visibility as inspirational figures of international success meant that the contrasts between these women had wider ramifications. They offered black women throughout the Atlantic models of international fame, financial success, and mobility. The contrasts between them, however, and the difference in how they were presented by the black press reveals the presence of an active and influential ‘race uplift’ discourse that was gendered and that circulated throughout the Atlantic. Jane Nardal’s ambivalent assessment of Baker in the francophone black press is matched by plentiful evidence from African American newspapers, which were more numerous and more well-established by the nineteen-twenties than their Parisian equivalents. These reports suggest that Baker’s success was pleasing, somewhat puzzling, and slightly problematic, for the wider black community and her model of black femininity was set against those of Bricktop and Florence Mills both by the women themselves, women who admired them or felt the stars had an impact upon their own profile as black women, and by the press.

The publicity generated by Josephine Baker’s performance in 1925, for example, placed some black commentators in an awkward position because they admired Baker’s success, and her impact upon a European audience but they were aware that her image now reinforced pre-existing stereotypes about all black women, and particularly black performing women. Commentators explicitly attributed the expansion of opportunities for black men and women in Europe to Baker’s influence. In 1927 Ivan Browning – the voluble correspondent for both the
*Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* – noted that “the smartest and best revues are featuring Negro Artistes and I am sure it is the popularity of Madam Josephine Baker who has really brought on this condition and [is] causing the French managers to give Negro artistes the wonderful opportunities they are enjoying.” Ever since she had arrived in Paris in 1925, three years before Browning’s report Baker had been creating a wave of attention and admiration for black “artistes.”

Yet some of the reportage on Baker took on a defensive tone because the style of her performance (certainly initially) relied upon her mastery of sensual and evocative dance, and her willingness to don minimal costumes in order to further her career, and the impact of her performance onstage. Baker is viewed by many contemporary scholars, singers, and admirers of her work as a heroine who demonstrated physical genius and carved out a career by subtly manipulating interwar perceptions and expectations of black female sexuality. Yet there is an ongoing debate about whether Baker acquiesced to, and upheld damning stereotypes of black women or parodied, undermined, and negotiated them through her performance. Many contemporary scholars believe she made the performative aspect of her raced and gendered presentation so apparent that it subverted the image in the same instant as reproducing it. To reporters at the time however, this may not have been apparent. Between 1925 and 1930 black American print reactions to “little joe Baker’s” career expressed ambivalence because Baker’s performance provided fodder for some white American journalists to make derogatory comments about all black performers.

This compelled black reporters to leap to the defense of both Baker and other performers who were affected by such slurs. The mixed response is evident in the following report on Baker’s success:

The new Folies Bergère in Paris has opened and Madam Josephine Baker is the big star as usual and received a tremendous reception on the opening night. The Paris papers are universal in their praise and wonderful comment on the work of Miss Baker or little “joe” as we know her by in America, and it is indeed astonishing the way in which the French people idolize Miss Baker, and there is no doubt about the love and respect all classes of people have for her in France. A recent paper called her a beautiful Brown Goddess, another paper says that her work and appearance in the Follies is the very highest of artistry, and by no means whatever of vulgarity which Joio of the New York Variety says her work is. As I have stated before, the London reporters on the New York Variety are always ready to speak in a derogatory manner where our people are concerned. I wish Madam Baker continued success.  

The reporter here creates a clear distance between and his readers in the black community, who wish “Madam Baker” success, and the French audiences who “idolize her.” This rhetorical position characterizes many of the reports about Baker in the black press.

While clearly impressed by Baker’s success journalists felt the need to emphasize the positive comments of the French press, and offset the accusations of vulgarity surfacing in the white American press. The contrast made in the article between the French treatment of Baker and that of “reporters for the New York Variety” also speaks to the black American tendency to compare France very favorably to America. This intersects with the larger African American

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379 See, for example a very similar comment on Baker the year before which identifies her as a ‘clever comedienne’ and ‘the pet of Paris,’ “Baker goes Big in Paris,” The Pittsburgh Courier, Apr 17 1926.
380 Even Bricktop takes time in her memoirs to assert that Baker wasn’t ‘vulgar.’ She then, of course, establishes her own claim to irreproachable good taste, stating “I would have known if she were.” Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 108-110.
enterprise to promote racial equality in their press through condemning American racism and through showing that African American men and women were achieving great things and were equal to white Americans in merit and deserved to be treated as such.\footnote{See W. E. B. Du Bois’s disapproval of non-conjugal black sexual liaisons, shared by intellectuals such as Dunbar who characterized black chorines as problematic sexual symbols in his fiction, both discussed in Gaines, \textit{Uplifting the Race : Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century}, 166-167, 191.}

This broader context explains the awkward tone of black American reportage upon Baker’s progress after 1925. The race uplift movement sought heroes for whom one need not apologize, heroes who did not leave room for white prejudice to paint yet another damming picture of black vulgarity. The contrast between artistry and vulgarity is a coded reference to the issue of respectability. Furthermore it undermines the role of skill and training in a performance by downgrading art to a vulgar show and thus accusations of vulgarity implied primitive and innate exhibitionism. Journalists for black papers were well aware of the role of white prejudice in the presentation of “men and women of color earning their livelihood on this side (Europe).” They were cognizant that describing Baker and her colleagues “across the pond” as “vulgar,” for example, was a prejudicial judgment generated by centuries of racist thinking.\footnote{“French Nation Carried Away by Entertainers in Paris Palaces: Colored artists holding sway and being treated like humans by the French,” \textit{New York Amsterdam News}, Dec 22 1926.} They warned their readers not to believe the insinuations made by the “negro-hating representatives of the white journals in America.” But they were forced to do this because Baker had raised the danger of all “race artists” being defined as vulgar and thus jeopardized the reputation of “the race.”

This complex of feelings regarding international success, black female self-presentation, and the black middle class quest for race heroines, also characterized the reportage in the black
press that dealt with Florence Mills. Mills was absolutely idolized in comparison to the ambivalence evident in the coverage of Baker discussed above. The author who was puzzled by Baker’s success, simultaneously lauded Florence Mills as “achieving perfection” in all she attempted, and “providing the merriest and most exhilarating show in the West End.”

Countee Cullen took Mills on a walking excursion in Paris which distinguished her as one of the few black stars who moved in both the world of the literary black community in Paris and the world of entertainment. Cullen commented upon her intelligence and her gentle charm. His assessment is typical of many which collectively portray the star’s choices and actions as ladylike, and “a credit to the race.” In this, as in every aspect of her career, she both enacted herself, and admired in others, restraint in the performative gestures that signified black womanhood onstage. In doing so she observed one of the tenets of female respectability that applied to all black women whether entertainers or not. “Refined colored women” were subject to invisibility and expected to be restrained in their public demeanor. If they debated, reacted, or protested to gender restraints too loudly their ‘refinement’ might be called into question. Jessie Fausset commented, in the Paris Tribune, during the interwar period that “in order to offset criticism the refined colored woman must not laugh too loudly, she must not stare – in general she must stiffen her self-control even though she can no longer humanly contain herself.”

Florence Mills, although a performer, contained her public presentation at almost every stage of her

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384 For Cullen’s walking tour with Mills see Egan, Florence Mills : Harlem Jazz Queen, 169. See also Salem Tutt Whitney, “Timely Topics: Florence Mills,” Chicago Defender, Nov 12 1927.
career. She thus represented the race uplift ideal for Americans, and many black men and women in Europe who interacted with her.

The black newspapers frequently reported upon Bricktop and her café where “royalty gathered.” While Florence Mills is discussed with a tone of reverence in most reportage Bricktop is more often mentioned with a tone of admiration, affection, and approbation as a “charming hostess,” who radiated “good humor and laughter” and “has taught dance steps to the Prince of Wales.” She was “the only colored person who owned her place outright” and ran it herself.³⁸⁶ The black newspapers noted that “success has not gone to her head,” and she got especial praise for meeting the African American “Gold Star mothers” with a pleasant word, a smile, and an armful of flowers.³⁸⁷ The Gold Star mothers were very significant among black communities in America as their sons had died in Europe during the war. Their sons’ deaths thus invoked the concept of double victory (although the word had not yet been coined) and represented the claim to full recognition because of equal sacrifice on the battlefield. When Bricktop went to meet the women who had come to France to visit the site of their sons’ sacrifice she was doing an inherently patriotic black duty. Other reports upon Bricktop (and on Florence Embry Jones fellow nightclub owner) noted that they were “ladies” as well as “popular nightclub hostesses.”³⁸⁸

³⁸⁸ Chez Florence is owned by a colored lady from the States, and so is Bricktop’s. Bricktop is perhaps the most popular of the nightclub hostesses,” J. A. Rogers, “The Paris Pepper Pot,” Pittsburgh Courier, Jun 22 1929. This is typical of numerous such statements in the black American press.
The examples of these three very different women offer a set of gendered narratives of jazz success that intersected with the discourse of race uplift and respectability circulating freely through pan-African circles in the Black Atlantic. Black musical performers sustained, and disseminated some of the values of race uplift while complicating, challenging and undermining others. Bricktop negotiated her self-presentation and sexual practices successfully and consequently she was hailed as a notable black American woman that generated pride among every community in which she lived. Josephine Baker’s negotiation of her physical image, her performance and her sexuality was less successful among black audiences during the interwar period than among white precisely because she was perceived as having underscored the hypersexual, confrontational stereotype of the black woman and she married a white man thus “betraying” her race. Florence Mills exemplified the ideals of the race uplift movement and unified the worlds of jazz and respectability in her life and work. The way in which she was memorialized and idolized shows just how powerfully the race uplift discourse operated in the interwar period on a transatlantic level. It also affected men. The following chapter considers how the gendered expectations enshrined in race uplift discourse played out when black jazz men took Paris by storm after the Great War.
4. The Jazz Migration, Race Uplift, and Black Men

What I call *middle-class society* is any society that becomes rigidified in predetermined forms, forbidding all evolution, all gains, all progress, all discovery. I call *middle-class* a closed society in which life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt. And I think that a man who takes a stand against this death is in a sense a revolutionary. Frantz Fanon

**Introduction**

The issue of how the reputation of a black male performer might influence perceptions of race among the wider community took on added urgency when the market for black entertainers waned as the economic situation in Europe tightened. By 1928 European entertainers had adapted to jazz by adapting it into their own acts, or conversely by promoting the “native French chanson” and French performers. Florence Mills was dead, Josephine Baker was now established as a major Parisian music-hall star, and Bricktop’s club continued to be a draw card for the elite, although once the Depression set in times were harder for her as they were for everyone. The French franc was stronger than it had been since the war which affected the tourist trade upon which the jazz scene in Montmartre depended. High entertainment taxes were also

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390 For ‘push back’ see “Une page de la gloire de la chanson Française,” *Paris qui Chante*, August 1929, 15. The next issue launches a campaign to ‘renew’ the French chanson; « Le théâtre Français de chanson, » *Paris qui Chante*, 1 Sept 1929, 2, about a dream of a ‘true’ French theatre. That article is followed by Yvonne Yma, “Renouveau de la Chanson” 3. Note that Yma was, herself, a chanteuse.
391 Pierre Rael interviewed Joe Alex, a black French performer, about this effect of the *crise* constituted by fewer tourists coming to Paris upon black entertainers in 1927 and Joe Alex agreed that it was hard, contending that in many cases the director of a nightclub’s musical lineup would let a black jazz band go, before a white one. This may have been because black jazz bands were paid more, or could also have been an early indication of the industry competition and turn against black jazz musicians that set in ferociously after 1929. Pierre Ramelot, « Le Jazz et la crise, » *Canarde*, 1927, RO Coupures file 98531.
taking a toll on audience numbers and as a consequence black bands, paid more than white jazz bands, were in a more vulnerable position than they had been for years.392

Black entertainers working in Paris felt the pressure of this downturn in Paris’s entertainment industry. Some saw upright behavior and impeccable standards in both public professional and also private life, as the answer. This aligned them with advocates of race uplift throughout the Atlantic. 393 In 1928, for example, the great comic dancer Johnny Hudgins, who had performed often with Florence Mills, wrote to the Defender hoping that new performers arriving in Paris would “bring the goods” and “act like ladies and gentlemen” because “they are getting so hard on our folks most everywhere.”394 This situation affected both men and women but the number of black men working in the entertainment industry in Paris was considerably higher than the number of women and so they were proportionally more affected by the reduction in tourist trade.

392 They were also subject to the attempts of fellow musicians to institute foreign labor quota crackdowns, as documented in the “Main d’oeuvre étrangère” series of articles in Jazz-Tango (Paris), 15 Nov 1930, 3. The series and discussion continues in subsequent issues. The issue of this strong French pushback against foreign labor in the field of music – traditionally a cosmopolitan endeavor, is very interesting and testament to the dominance of black bands in the French jazz scene which had led to significant frustration on the part of white musicians.
394 Jonny Hudgins, “Hudgins and Wife write to Whitney,” The Chicago Defender, Mar 10 1928. Ivan H. Browning, “Across the Pond,” The Chicago Defender, Apr 16 1927, mentions that the café taxation is driving “race artists” away from Paris to Germany, Budapest, Italy, and Spain. Robert Abbott, comments on these job restrictions in Europe in Robert S. Abbott, “My Trip Abroad,” Chicago Defender, Nov 23 1929. Bricktop writes home (to the Defender) saying don’t come without a contract,’ as early as 1925, “Bricktop Happy,” Chicago Defender Mar 21 1925. Bricktop gives a big Christmas party in 1929 by which time she is commended for having helped many other “race musicians” out both financially and through giving them work in the past couple of years. See the report of her Christmas party in “Bricktop Gave Party to Friends,” New York Amsterdam News, Jan 23 1929. Note the political situation in France was volatile throughout this whole period. Under Poincaré the economy had stabilized but the franc had also strengthened making entertainment less lucrative as tourists found their bottles of champagne more costly. Poincaré’s right wing government and the bifurcation of politics into more virulent right wing and left wing factions also added impetus to the pro-French elements in the entertainment community who advocated a ‘return to order’ and a renouvellement of French chanson. Entertainent thus met politics on a field of post-war political infighting, and a conflict over national identity and rebuilding in culture, as well as in labor relations, imperial and foreign politics. The film industry showed a similar push-pull relationship between Hollywood and French film.
Where successful female jazz stars in Europe were associated with dancing and singing, men were associated much more often and much more strongly with instrumental music and with creating the music that inspired others to dance. They were seen as the true agents of jazz and any club in Montmartre worthy of the name was expected to feature black jazz musicians. Hugues Panassié, famed French jazz critic, showed a clear bias toward jazz played by black musicians throughout his long career. He constantly proclaimed that only black musicians could play “hot” jazz (improvisatory and complex jazz sometimes actually labeled *style nègre*). His opinions were shared by many and influenced even more which elevated the strong demand for black jazz men in Paris between 1919 and 1927.395 This conviction opened the French labor market up to both African-Americans and even those black colonial subjects who pursued a career in jazz.

Black American instrumentalists prided themselves on this aspect of their reputation and racial identification. J. A. Rogers captured the Montmartre atmosphere for the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1929:

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395 The writings of Panassié and Delaunay are full of these references to *jazz hot* being played best by black men. See the clippings files in the Hugues Panassié Collection held at the Médiathèque, Villefranche-de-Rouergue, France, and the Charles Delaunay Collection held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Tolbiac, Paris, France. See also Robert Goffin, who lays out this stance even earlier than Panassié and Delaunay, Goffin, *Aux Frontières Du Jazz*. Jeffrey Jackson documents how this perception alters as the French begin to adapt jazz into a French style, Jackson, *Making Jazz French*. 
Colored boys from the States give the pep to Montmartre, and they are to be found in pretty good numbers. All of the leading cabarets have them – Zellis, Chez Florence, the Palermo, the Plantation, the Grand Ecart, Florida, and Bricktop’s. In all these places the jazz orchestras are among the best in the world and when they hit the war path you simply can’t keep in your seat. It doesn’t matter if you’ve never danced before. Once on your feet they’ll make you dance. To make real jazz it takes colored folks.  

As briefly noted in chapter one this meant that “true jazz” became identified with skin color, and men, as well as women, were associated with dancing. In Europe, as a result, the perception was that jazz men were the generative power, the sine qua non, for others dancing through their instrumental talent whereas women danced and led others to dance through persuasion. Black men therefore were crucial to the Parisian dance scene through providing the music and the pep that energized dance floors.

Many black American columnists noted that the black American jazz player was one of the most visible and performative images of black masculinity available in European culture. It was also a persona adopted by many black African colonial subjects, like Wali Kané aka Jazz Williams who saw jazz as a route to financial success and a viable career in the French métropole. But there were other models of black masculinity circulating throughout the Atlantic.

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397 A sense of this persistent gendering of musical skill is seen in the reception of Valaida Snow, and also of several female instrumental groups active in interwar Europe, see, for example, the review of Ina Rae Hutton and her ‘all-fem outfit’ printed in Ballroom and Band, January 1935, 5, which commented that being all-female would ‘undoubtedly be a big drawing card from the point of view of the general public, but we are informed that the fans will get a surprise when they hear this all-fem outfit. The girls are good to look at – but they can play too!’

398 Apart from a few students, most of the Colored Americans who live in Paris are musicians. R. Abbott, “My Trip Abroad.” For Wali Kané see, André Démaison, « Jazz Williams, » unattributed clipping, Coupures; Jazz, R 98531, Collection Rondel, Département des Arts et Spectacles, Richelieu, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France
The election of Senegalese politician Blaise Diagne as black deputy to the national assembly was widely publicized among black communities. Other black men in France served in a variety of roles, from chauffeurs, to lawyers, journalists and doctors. The visibility of Senegalese tirailleurs who stayed in France after World War One and their influence in the shaping of Francophone ideas about citizenship and masculinity was significant in the interwar period. Their experience of exclusion became a potent source for political commentaries on the failures of French republicanism. The colonial soldier and the black American jazz performer, however, also functioned as stereotypes that associated black men with physicality (dancing/fighting) and ‘innate’ abilities whether musical improvisation and jazz genius, or strength and ferocity. Neither of these images really expanded the perception of black masculine skills, and professional potential in the way that advocates of race uplift hoped and believed would truly advance “the race;” law, politics, medicine, and higher education. Yet male jazz players, in particular, were able to find success in Europe in large numbers, as mentioned in chapter two. When they did

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399 The boxer Jack Johnson, black fighters in general, and also Eugene Bullard, the fighter pilot, are also significant but they could arguably be seen to fit within a white generalization of ‘innate’ black masculine qualities as being fighting/physical/warrior (tirailleur) and musical/instinctive/dancing. Blaise Diagne is really important in black communities as a politician, a respectable profession that entailed power, and got away from these stereotypes.

400 These were the professions that most often showed up in the detailed records of black Senegalese and Caribbean political activists in the surveillance records. See, for example, that of the founding executive officers of the Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre, two are students/office workers, two sales representatives, a chauffeur-mechanic, and a postal worker, “J. Gothon-Lunion, Secrétaire de CDRN a Monsieur le préfet de police” 48 Rue de Simplon, Paris, 26 Mars 1926, Dossier ASS 672, APP, Paris, France. A later committee includes a typographer, and Rene Maran (author) and Bloncourt (lawyer) were also heavily involved, and a later more moderate grouping included Georges Forgues (editor at Paris Soir) and Vincent Durand, a manager at a local factory (“Le Directeur des Renseignements Généraux et des Jeux a Monsieur le Monsieur le Préfet de Police, ‘A.S. du Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre,’” le 30 Mars 1931, Paris, ASS 672. Kouyaté was sent on a mission to Marseilles to gain membership among the sailors and dock workers there (“Le Préfet de la police a Monsieur le President du Conseil, Ministre de l’Interieur,” 19 Mars 1930, Paris, ASS 672) and later police reports noted that many members of the North African group the Etoile Nord-Africain, many worked as chauffeurs, (Untitled copy of report dated 15 Octobre 1934, dossier BA 2172, APP, Paris, France). La Vie Parisienne confirms this in a cartoon which shows a ‘cosmopolitan lady about town’ throughout her day, in which she has her nails done by a Cambodian, is served breakfast by a German maid, and is driven around by a black chauffeur before heading to the nightclub to listen to a black jazz band. “Autour d’une Parisienne la Société des Nations,” Jan 22 1921, 30-31.
they became subject to the expectations of a community that saw successful black men, earning well, and achieving international recognition, and hoped that those men would exemplify the “best” qualities of black manhood abroad.

Men were subject to many of the same expectations, concerns, and perceptions relating to black women and the performance of respectability and race leadership as women although the expectations played out differently due to gender roles and expectations. Men were associated with instrumental music and comic dance rather than the black female specialties of dancing and singing. Like women, black male jazz performers enjoyed enormous popularity. One of the earliest jazz fans and critics, Robert Goffin’s portrayed Louis Mitchell as a “handsome Creole beast” for example, and jazz men were the subject of almost as many caricatures, cartoons, and literary depictions as women. One gendered dimension of this context lay in the fact that black men were more likely to be observed fighting, drinking, and “living it up” in Montmartre than women. Collectively they represented a threat to African American respectability just as powerful as that which Josephine Baker’s style of black female stardom represented to the same rhetoric of race uplift and black moral rectitude.

Black jazz performers were noted for their style but so were most black men in Paris. Commentaries on black male style in the mainstream black press show that fashion was one of the fields upon which respectability could be displayed but upon which different versions of propriety, respectability, and success intersected. Elegance could easily segue into what was perceived as flashiness and the implication of bad behavior. Drinking posed a more extreme version of the same hazards. It was part of the successful jazz lifestyle and in a repudiation of
America’s temperance laws which could represent resistance to the American state and its racism. At the same time excess and flamboyance could embarrass “the race”. As a group black male instrumentalists were associated with the dangers of urban nightlife more than black women to the extent that some newspaper journalists used their columns as a virtual pulpit to chastise wayward musicians and their impact upon the reputation of “the race.” Finally the anxiety surrounding black male sexuality and cross-racial relations was as complex and contentious as that relating to black women. Musicians generated both admiration and concern when their public and performative black masculinity failed to adhere to standards of middle-class morality that race uplift advocates saw as the key to black upward mobility. Every aspect of their self-presentation therefore became a potential weapon in the fight against racial prejudice.

**Men in black: Style and respectability**

Jazz performers operated in formal dress when working. Performers who enjoyed success in New York were expected to dress smartly in order to maintain the tone of establishments such as the Cotton Club which hosted a nightly array of elite white patrons. Once they reached Paris the requisite standards of dress became even higher for men, as well as women: “Bullard’s Montmartre was a social setting in which cabaret personnel, entertainers, and patrons all wore formal dresses: the men tuxedos, the women, the latest gowns of Parisian designers such as Paul Poirot and Eddy Molyneux, who outfitted Bricktop.”401 In Paris male style was celebrated as one of the glamorous and dashing attributes of a good jazz player. Robert Goffin’s groundbreaking

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memoir of early jazz in Paris, one of the earliest accounts to be published, explicitly commented upon this aspect of the “marvellous jazz drummer” Louis Mitchell’s appeal. In addition to his being a “handsome Creole beast” Goffin notes that Mitchell was always “meticulously dressed in the latest fashion, which is the prerogative of all the blacks.” Clearly Goffin’s prose is suffused with the pejorative language of the day but it also shows that one of the attributes expected of black men – and particularly “marvelous” black jazz players like Mitchell was an elegance of dress and a display not simply of style, but the latest style.

The scrutiny of black male fashion in the French métropole extended beyond the world of jazz. The belief that style was a black man’s prerogative was applied to men from Africa, America, and the Caribbean. Keller, a French tailor, who had “seen at one time or another all the Negro students at his shop” commented that he admired black men because they “wear clothes with a real smartness” and are “easy to fit” because they have “well-built physiques.” He commented that although black African men in Paris were erred on the side of excess in their attempts to follow fashion they quickly “fell into step” and exhibited a “smart elegance” that won approval in the French métropole. Masculine dress, therefore, represented success and an ability to maintain civilized standards of dress and comportment and even set standards of style for non black men. As with women wearing haute couture it demonstrated financial viability as tuxedos were expensive.

402 Goffin, Aux Frontières Du Jazz. The Revue de Jazz was so impressed by this aspect of male jazz performers that it ran a lengthy article entitled which advised readers on the latest styles worn by the elegant jazz musicians and how one could emulate them. It included photographs documenting the modes of jazz collar that were then in style. “De l’élegance des musiciens de jazz,” Revue du Jazz, 7 Mar 2 1930, 13-14.
403 ‘Prince’ Kojo Touvalou Houenou here, was known for his immaculate white suits. Edwards has an image of him meeting Garvey, that shows this. Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora, 101.
The possession of evening dress also suggested a performer’s ability to entertain the elite and conduct themselves in an appropriate manner in venues such as Bricktop’s or to offset racial prejudice in less cosmopolitan settings. Rudolph Dunbar, a clarinetist performing with Florence Mills and the Blackbirds of 1926 remembered that it took evening dress to win the trust of the average British landlady:

The task of a colored man selecting a lodging room in the West End of London is not easy to accomplish. In several houses where there are ‘rooms to let’ signs, if a black man should apply for a room, the landlady with discriminating nicety would say, “I am sorry but the room I had vacant has just been let.” Others would say, “I am awfully sorry but I do not rent rooms to colored people.” I have discovered that in order to be given consideration in renting a room the colored man must put on evening dress and be immaculate in his appearance. This only goes to show that a great majority of these people who keep lodging houses are wallowing in the unfathomable depths of ignorance.405

Elegance in dress could clearly be used to be accepted by mainstream society and to overcome the prejudices of “ignorant” white landladies. However in popular portrayals of black masculinity the line between excess and elegance was porous and owning a tuxedo did not necessarily in and of itself contribute to race uplift.406

The two images shown in figures 10 and 11, for example, show an immaculately dressed jazz player, but also another black male who is simply labeled “l’élégant,” either to parody black masculine aspirations to style or to acknowledge this as one aspect of their image in contemporary French discourse. These images were published in La Revue Française, an

405 Interview recorded as part of the WPA program, cited in Egan, Florence Mills : Harlem Jazz Queen, 170.
406 The way that Rudolph Dunbar turns this prejudice around and defines the landlady as ‘ignorant’ and backward was a trope also found in the Revue du Monde Noir’s examination of fashion, analyzed in this discussion, in which they identified Europeans who ‘laughed at blacks in European dress’ as foolish and ignorant, thus reversing the colonial gaze.
eclectic, right wing, weekly review of current events, the arts and literature. The written article that accompanies the images swings from light satire, to acute social observation, to a slightly fearful prognostication of the impact of black people upon the French métropole. The combination of the words and the image here underscore the way in which style, occupation, and conduct, were all assessed as part of a racial identification and show why race uplift advocates believed that there was a need to try and encourage a respectable black self-presentation in order to be taken seriously – and by extension win full citizenship not just legally but in terms of social respect and status.

Figures 10, 11. Two images from ‘Série Noire’ in La Revue Française, November 1926

407 Very little information is available about this publication. Most of the authors for this issue, notably Antoine Rédier, and André de Poncheville seem to be conservative, even pro-fascist, but other sources, and other issues list Anatole France who was left-wing and similar figures as authors.
408 This is discussed at more length in Chapter One.
409 Whether race uplift advocates were correct in seeing this route as the best way to achieve racial equality is a different question.
410 « Série Noire, » La Revue Française, 14 Novembre 1926.
The contemporary European linkage of black masculinity with fashion and style evident in these sources contrasted with an alternate portrayal of black African men in France that did associate black men with visible difference. The “savage” costume of Joe Alex, in the *danse sauvage* (see illustration), although a notable exception to the usual appearance of black American male dancers on stage (see illustration), was paralleled by African dancers who performed in the *Exposition Coloniale* of 1931, and the “human cannibal displays” at the *jardin d’acclimation*. This type of “savage” representation of black manhood circulated within the French colonial context whether it was primitivism as in the case of Joe Alex in his feathered loin-cloth, or grinning childlike joy in the Banania advertisement, or the exoticism in novels and short stories such as those by Paul Morand that featured brutish black heroes sweeping Europeanized black women off their erstwhile civilized feet (see illustration).

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411 See Chapter Five. Although it is worth noting here that one of the more racist comments made about the black American jazz revue the *Blackbirds of 1928* starring Adelaide Hall, was that if the show wasn’t successful producers could recoup their costs by “showing the performers at the *Jardin d’Acclimation.*” “Au Moulin Rouge “La Revue des “Blackbirds” de M. Lew Leslie,” *Comoedia*, 14 June 1929.

412 Black Francophone disapproval of Morand has been discussed elsewhere. For more on the Banania advertisement see Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject*, 3, 104-105. The illustration of a novel shown below is an example of a pulp novel that disseminated in word and print French colonial image of a savage and primitive African masculinity. The author, André Dèmaison, was also the author of the ‘Wali Kané’ story.
Figure 12. Les Blackbirds at Les Ambassadeurs, Paris 1926. Florence Mills, Johnny Hudgins, Jonny Nit, and the Three Eddies are all represented here. 413

The *Revue du Monde Noir*’s survey into what black men and women in Europe was generated, in part, by the existence and popularity of these images of “colonial savages” notably by the comment that “the sight of a black person in European dress causes amusement.” The journal’s resulting “investigation” into how black men and women living in Europe should dress generated responses from a range of different men and women. One of the respondents jokingly wrote; “The Negro? Well he could go stark naked if he liked. People will always turn around to look at him.” Another suggested that given the “recent fad for everything colonial” a loincloth

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“undoubtedly would be very good.”\textsuperscript{416} Even the elegant jazz musicians came in for a dose of skepticism in \textit{La Vie Parisienne} which accompanied a cartoon of a tuxedo clad jazz band playing at a popular nightspot with comments that under their smart waistcoats the audience caught glimpses of \textit{douteux} (dubious or dingy) white shirts, and described the musicians as thrashing about like devils dressed in black.\textsuperscript{417}

The idea that jazz musicians “thrashed about like devils” was a reference to the very physical and sometimes showy stylings of band leaders on stage. Band leaders in interwar Paris did sometimes indulge in an onstage showmanship that verged on “clowning” or “acrobatics.”\textsuperscript{418} Emerging from an American minstrel tradition some band leaders used physical movements, dance, gesture and even sometimes showy tricks with instruments, to amuse the crowd and punctuate musical features of a piece as they led the band. Samuel Floyd identified such gestures as “signifyin’” (after the interpretation of ‘signifying in Henry Louis Gates’ work) and argued that they pay homage to the involvement of the body in music-making that informs music derived from African culture.\textsuperscript{419} The physical element of the performance might be comic or amusing, exaggerated for effect, or purely exegetical, serving to interpret musical developments to an audience through physical representation. As with Baker’s almost parodic and exaggerated female performative style, however, some audiences in Europe didn’t get the multiple layers of meaning in the performance. That meant they interpreted band leaders as comedic, or clown-like entertainers. While black American band leaders may have just smiled and tucked the lucrative

\textsuperscript{417} « Le Jazz-band, » \textit{La Vie Parisienne}, 1 Jan 1921, 16.
\textsuperscript{418} See « Cours Nouveaux, Musique Nouvelles — le Leader de band, » \textit{Intransigéant}, 10 Oct 1927.
\textsuperscript{419} Floyd, \textit{The Power of Black Music}, 7-8, 233.
contracts they won for their performance into their back pockets their sanguine attitude was not shared by some parts of the wider black community.

Paulette Nardal’s review of the *Bal glacière*, for example, features description of the male band-leader of an ideal Afro-Caribbean band. This “gentleman,” named Stellio, distinguished himself from the vulgarity of jazz band leader by dint of a classy physicality that contrasts with theirs:

> It is Stellio, the celebrated clarinetist, who leads the main orchestra... Don’t think that he thrashes about like a *noir* in a jazz-band, acrobat and juggler. Everyone else is a pale imitation of Stellio. It isn’t only his mouth that serves to disseminate the unique cadence [of the music] it is his entire body. His eyes, his head which he turns from right to left, his neck, his shoulders, his right foot which marks the tempo, everything in him emits such intensity, such powerful training, that he cannot help but let himself be carried away by the spirited rhythm of the biguine. However this devil of a man manages to retain the air of a gentleman.⁴²⁰

Despite Nardal’s insistence upon his distinctive air and gesture, however, many of the phrases she uses to describe Stellio echo those made by contemporary commentators about the leaders of other jazz bands. Each *chef du jazz* (and they were almost all male) in interwar Paris led his band in a *manière personelle* that might include swinging an instrument from left to right, energetically tapping the baton or making it “dance... blinking one’s eyes and dropping and raising the head on the beat, giving himself up to an exercise without end.”⁴²¹ Amidst these

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acrobatics the bandleader inspired his orchestra with his “musical eccentricities” whilst all the time safely guiding them and leading them.\footnote{\textit{Jazz a cr\'ee un artiste qui n\’est pas un danseur, qui n\’est pas un acteur, ni un clown ni un acrobate, ni un mime mais qui est plus qu\’un musicien, puisqu\’il chante, mime, danse, dit, fait de l’acrobatie, jongle, souffle…il anime son orchestre de son exaltation, l\’égai de ses excentricités musicales mais aussi le conduit, surveille sa m\'\eure, et le ramène toujours – apr\'es quelques fioritures, syncopes… dans le thème et le mouvement, » « Cours Nouveaux, Musique Nouvelles – le Leader de band, » \textit{Intransigéant}, 10 Oct 1927.}

Stellio – who also led the band that played at the \textit{Bal nègre} in the rue Blomet – seems fairly consistent with these band leading tics and tricks so why does Nardal make so much of his difference to the \textit{noir de jazz-band}? Because it symbolized a larger difference between the character of respectable musicians (a category that included her countrymen) and clownlike buffoons (Americans mostly). She was claiming something more for her people than what she perceived as trite and trashy tricks that \textit{noirs americains} used to woo the audience. Nardal probably did not understand the economic motivations and the minstrel/vaudeville tradition that infused the showy stylings of jazz leaders. Whether she understood or not, she did not approve of the resulting image of black musicians. And these performers were the most visible group of black men and women in Paris, Senegalese soldiers notwithstanding. Paulette Nardal’s insistence that Stellio was cut from a different cloth was linked to her pride in her class, her nationality, and her Caribbean heritage. It also, however, connected her with the black American middle class and the moral values they espoused.

These images of black masculinity were contradictory and confused in that they showed both a contrast in the white French mind between jazz players, and colonial subjects yet also some conflation of the two groups, as in the jazz player with banana fingers shown in chapter
The Revue du Monde Noir’s investigation into “what black men and women should wear in Europe,” complicated the question and addressed the racial prejudice implicit in it. The tailor M. Keller was commended for having “no desire to compare [black men] to monkeys because they are dressed in the European style.” Louis-Thomas Achille then rubbished the assumption that all “Negroes” hailed from some primitive or exotic cultural background. He pointed out that “many Negroes have no national dress other than European ones.” Jean Baldoui, a North African contributor, stated that “colored people can perhaps give more lessons than they have need to take from peoples who think that in all civilizations they alone are privileged.” The Revue du Monde Noir thus characterized Europeans who exoticized the black population in Europe as backward thus, in a sense, reversing the colonial “gaze.” These comments typify how French...

423 This paragraph and the following one quote extensively from that investigation, featured quotations are from two consecutive issues printed in 1931-1932 and reprinted in "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World," 183-184, 244-246.
authors responded to the claim that Europeans laughed at blacks in Western dress to turn the claim on its head and open up a much larger discussion of race and culture. The French here – as in the case of women’s images – are concerned to contend with the colonial savage stereotype and deconstruct the association of black men with monkeys while forging an association between colored men and “civilization.”

Figure 14. Pulp fiction novel cover

American commentators were not quite so concerned with the primitive images but both they and the French also had to contend with the fact that simply dressing with style in European
Clothing might not be enough to avoid racial prejudice and accusations of immorality. There could be a cost attached to being too eager to sport, or even launch, the latest fashions. The association between black men, jazz, sharp dress and city life meant they ran the risk of "flashiness." The *Revue du Monde Noir* praised M. Keller, the tailor mentioned above, for his balanced attitude toward black men and fashion. Yet he critiqued black men upon their "exuberant" style when they first arrived in Paris from the colonies:

Has he a particular sympathy for his Creole customers? I don’t know but he certainly has no desire to compare them to monkeys because they are dressed in the European style. Moreover, without hesitation, he indicated certain shortcomings in their taste. Because of the exuberance of their temperament or because of their youth, these young men are regrettably (facheusement?) prone to exaggerate the tendencies of fashion, was the substance of his remarks. But he made haste to add that although upon their arrival, their home-made suits leave much to be desired, these clients fall very quickly into step and always dress themselves with smart elegance.

His observation that black immigrants to Paris – and here he is discussing African, and Afro-Caribbean students - were “prone to exaggerate the tendencies of fashion” was a perception that affected black men throughout the Atlantic although it varied from black Francophone colonial subjects arriving in the *Métropole* with their “gaudy” African tastes, or jazz players from America who were sometimes viewed by Americans (whether black or white) as erring on the side of flashiness in dress.

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424 The association, and ambivalence, between musical success and male fashion has persisted within African American culture from the jazz age through into the conspicuously consuming hip hop stars of today.

425 He is contrasted to the ‘Parisians who must have their joke’ and issued ‘a thousand replies’ of the type cited above, that suggested loincloths or nudity. Magd Raney, “Nos Enquêtes,” “La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World,” 183-184.

426 An ardent British jazz fan recalled his shock at his first and only, awe-inspiring, sight of Thomas ‘Fats’ Waller in concert, and how he was stunned by the musicians girth – and that he wore the ‘shiniest’ suit the fan had ever seen.
Exaggerated and flashy style could sometimes be read as a synonym for “sharp’ dress and was thus linked to undesirable social qualities. When combined with the perception that black men “clowned around on stage,” and that they could be read as vulgar, both behavior and dress had the potential to undermine the possibility that black men (like Stellio) would be respected as gentlemen by white society. And the desire to be accepted as gentlemen or at least respectable citizens of moral worth, intellectual weight and artistic genius and skill, was very much a part of race uplift discourse.

Furthermore the perception that black men were prone to err on the side of flashy or sharp dress intersected with a set of fears about urban black males who dabbled in card playing, gambling, and various low level criminal activities. The popular American play *Porgy and Bess* (later an opera) features one of the best known examples of a stereotypical black character, “Sporting Life.” Sporting Life, true to his name, operates as a small time drug dealer and city boy who gambles, lies, and takes advantage of others for personal gain and he is played as a foil to Porgy’s simple honesty, devotion and goodness. The production still of Sporting Life talking to Porgy and Bess, taken from the 1927 production, shown below indicates the association between snappy dress, city sophistication, moneymaking and nefarious behavior.427

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Sporting Life was fictional but jazz musicians in both Harlem and Montmartre were viewed as potentially reinforcing the stereotype he represented. Black musicians operated on the fringes of respectability despite the elegance of men’s appearance because the profession inevitably involved performing and living in a late-night, hard-drinking, gambling and hard-living environment. This association travelled with the music and the performers onto the

Figure 15. 'Sporting Life' with Porgy and Bess in the 1927 stage production of Porgy.

428 Sharpness and style within the culture of jazz masculinity, however, never seemed to open performers up to charges of effeminacy or homosexuality. Black male homosexuality is underpublicized and a controversial issue within black communities as is evident in the world of hip hop, argued by many to be the grandchild of jazz. There is, however, an intriguing reference in the police report of Bechet and McKendrick’s fight, to the fact that the Grand Duc featured gay performers and very ‘queer’ made up, flamboyantly homosexual clientele. See “Sidney Bechet” dossier, Serie G/a Etrangers, Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Paris, France.
international circuit. Evelyn Waugh’s novel *Brideshead Revisited* depicts Florence Mills and her “blackbirds” at a fashionable party in London, with the male members of the troupe laughing and rolling dice. 429 Evelyn Waugh’s narrative was fictional, and he was openly critical of the *tumulte noir* but in this novel he captured a slice of British life and sentiment that recorded one contemporary view of black men as gamblers. Eugene Bullard, famed black aviator, war hero, and nightclub manager in interwar Paris had to return money to clients who had been cheated by African-Americans playing with loaded dice on at least one occasion. 430 Bricktop also recorded in her memoirs that she had to step in and institute her own billing system at ‘Bricktops’ in Montmartre so her club wouldn’t be associated with cheating the clients. This range of examples shows the widespread circulation of one stereotype of black men as stylish but dishonest. Jazz performers were at risk of this perception because of the parameters of their profession.

**Drinking**

Jazz performers in Paris, for example, inevitably ran the risk of being associated with some of the “lowlife” elements in Montmartre where most of the jazz venues were located. The area was renowned as the “most noted corner for nightlife in the world” and played host to a variety of disreputable activities – drinking, fighting, partying late into the night and sexual encounters both commercial and informal. 431 Drinking was one of the aspects of the international

429 Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, 193-197. Waugh specifies that the men are ‘squatting on their heels and throwing dice.’ His prose is quite racially prejudiced.
431 R. Abbott, “My Trip Abroad,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov 23 1929. There were numerous ‘rafles’ or police raids carried out with the avowed intention to try and stymie illegal immigrant workers, prostitutes, thieving and other
jazz lifestyle that was ubiquitous. It was viewed ambivalently and generated contrasting attitudes among different groups within the black community in America. Some observers of the jazz scene were concerned that public drunkenness would bring black men the wrong type of publicity. Others, however, discussed the freedom to drink legally as symbolic of the wider sets of freedoms available in “color-blind France.” Jokes about the drinking culture in France offered an opportunity to flaunt and taunt prohibition (and thus the government) in America.

This is evident in a number of joking, and collusive allusions to men drinking in private correspondence and in the popular black press. Earl Granstaff’s cheery letter, sent as a group update to his friends, began with a complaint about the “H.C.B.S” or the high cost of bootlegged stuff in the prohibition era United States. This humorous complaint about bootlegged liquor illustrates the type of joking masculine references to drinking, and evading the Volstead laws that formed one of the widely believed and enacted components of jazz masculinity. A similar tone is seen in a letter Willie Gauze sent to the Chicago Defender reporting on his Antipodean tour and noting that the “wet goods are on all sides.” This understanding is reinforced in the “Bungleton Green” cartoon that ran in the Chicago Defender during the twenties. One of the strips showed the eponymous Bungleton Green as a man about town having a couple of drinks, before going to meet the white woman with whom he had a date for the evening. The cartoon portrayed a sign above Green’s head at the bar saying “vive la cognac.” One can only assume

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432 His complaint highlights an interesting correlation between the large numbers of Black performers heading overseas and the era of prohibition, although it would be unwise to make too much of the connection as the jazz scenes in Harlem, and Chicago, continued to flourish, albeit in underground, or strictly supervised surroundings.


that Bungleton Green, like the trombonist Earl Granstaff was enjoying the “127 different brands of Aperitifs, Cognacs, Wines, and Champagnes,” available in the City of Light.\footnote{Earl Granstaff, to Florence Mills,” 3 June 1926, Constantinople, Turkey, Florence Mills Collection, Schomburg Centre for Black Culture, NYPL, New York.}

These men were not alone. A photograph of Fats Waller and his band taken at Bricktop’s club in 1932, shows the snappily dressed musicians clustered around the piano. Fats Waller grasps a bottle firmly, while other players raise their glasses to the photographer.\footnote{Fats was known to be a drinking man. A popular anecdote related an evening when he was so drunk he could barely stay upright on piano seat but played on through the gig. One version is recounted in Green and McCarthy, Kings of Jazz.} Sonny Greer, the drummer who toured with Duke Ellington in 1933 when he played for the Prince of Wales, remembered that they dealt with the pressure of performing for royalty by “taking our best shot – and then another double shot.” Greer ended up sitting drinking with the Prince of Wales and teaching him drums, until, in a compromised state, at the end of the night, he leaned over and yelled “Hey Wales man” in an attempt to teach him a new trick.\footnote{Spoken address by Sonny Greer to Duke Ellington Society, New York Chapter, 1961, SC-Audio C-475 side 1, Duke Ellington series, Schomburg Center for Black Culture, NYPL, New York.} The Prince didn’t protest the over familiar address as, by all reports, he had slid into a doze on the floor himself. The image of success typified by these men is fine suits, confident smiles, snifters and song. The \textit{tumulte noir} gave black performers greater access to the trappings of typical masculine success than they had ever had before, one element of which was high status luxury alcohol, consumed liberally and legally.
Drinking was the common occupation of all the habitués and performers of the clubs in Paris, the cabarets in Germany, the music halls in London, and speakeasies in America. It was by no means a purely black American pursuit. In fact the champagne world catered to a predominantly white elite, as was noted in the publicity poster for the “Blackbirds” which lured patrons with the promise of *Le champagne* *gorgéte d’or* and the hot sounds of *Un jazz à tout romper*.\(^{438}\) The difference was that in Europe, unlike America, black male musicians could conspicuously consume just like the white patrons, and do it legally, without apology,

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subterfuge, or the fear that it would give grounds for an arrest motivated as much by racial prejudice as by a transgression of prohibition. That freedom seemed to exemplify the absence of restrictions on black men and women in France. Drinking openly and joking about it served as a form of defiance and resistance to American rules and restrictions. Race uplift advocates, however, didn’t necessarily acknowledge that connection.

They were particularly concerned about successful jazz musicians whose behavior was liable to be noticed by the public. David Peyton, a well-known and socially conservative jazz columnist, outlined the necessity, in his eyes, for discipline and impeccable public behavior on the entertainment circuit in America. He yoked the pursuit of jazz and entertainment success with the doctrines of respectability and race uplift and argued there was a real material cost when players transgressed the bounds of respectability. In 1927 he noted a downturn in the number of gigs being offered to black jazz bands in America and offered his analysis of the case:

‘What is the direct cause of this situation? Are we ourselves to blame for this condition?’ In answer I will say ‘Yes, we are, bunch,’ … The white musicians may not be as good as we are in discipline, but their misbehavior passes by unnoticed. But when our musicians do anything, and it does not have to amount to much either, the whole world takes notice of it.”

The players in Europe were one step removed from active racial prejudices in hiring. Any hint of the discrimination Peyton identified was offset by the prevailing European desire to listen and view black male jazz players rather than white bands. Yet the concentration of black players in Montmartre, and their high profile both collectively and individually meant that their

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440 Although, as Jackson notes the white band leaders Paul Whiteman and Jack Hylton were extremely popular, Jackson, Making Jazz French, 94-95.
behavior was noticed and reported widely especially when it transgressed social norms. The famous fighter pilot-turned-drummer Eugene Bullard, for example, was subject to police attention numerous times and Bricktop mentioned his drunk and belligerent behavior in various Montmartre settings in her memoirs. She described a fight he got into with three sailors, motivated by a racial slur and recalled that when the fight began Bullard was “drunk but when one of the sailors knocked him down he sobered up the instant he hit the floor.” When Sidney Bechet and Mike McKendrick engaged in a bitter dispute over who was the better musician it ended in a drunken gunfight that represented the worst fears of race uplift advocates with regard to African American jazz men in Montmartre. The fight and the subsequent arrest, trial and expulsion of the musicians were well known sources of gossip in France and beyond.

This undoubtedly caused concern among advocates of race uplift who were trying to combat the prejudicial images of the boozy and brawling black masculinity portrayed in novels like Paul Morand’s *Magie Noir*, or Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven*. WEB Dubois disapproved of Van Vechten’s characterization of black urban life and many middle class black

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441 Bricktop and Haskins, *Bricktop*, 118-119. Bullard turns up twice in the police arrest records for 1927, both times as the victim of the incident reported, but in both cases the incidents were at night, and involved alcohol consumption. On August 27 he was involved in a confrontation with George Parrish of Virginia who pulled a knife on him (this is discussed in chapter two). On the 29th of that month he was duped by two English girls who accepted his offer for dinner then stole one hundred francs and his overcoat and ran away before being arrested. Bullard dropped the charges. Série C/b 33 32 (Arrests Saint-Georges precinct), August 1927, Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Paris, France. See also Lloyd, *Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris*, 80-85.


443 For ‘gossip’ In his biography, Craig Lloyd notes that Bullard’s fights were ‘the talk of the town for weeks,’ and he also discusses the high profile of the Bechet/McKendrick fight, Lloyd, *Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris*, 80-85, 103. Stovall notes that the incident between Leon Crutcher and his French wife ‘received ample coverage in the Parisian press,’ Stovall, *Paris Noir*, 75-76.

intellectuals like Du Bois frowned upon Van Vechten’s taste for inviting Bessie Smith and other unapologetically working class black entertainers to his parties.\textsuperscript{445} The same ambivalence fuelled middle class African American critiques of Claude McKay’s novel \textit{Banjo} which delved deeply into the life of the black working class of many nations in Marseilles. McKay noted with approval the propensity among black men to “laugh and love and jazz and fight.”\textsuperscript{446} Langston Hughes also celebrated the resistance of working class black men and women to race uplift doctrines and applauded in prose the “blare of the jazz band” as expressing true black character, the character of “people who have their hip of gin on Saturday nights and are not too important to themselves or the community, or too well fed, or too learned to watch the lazy world go round.”\textsuperscript{447} Hughes, of course, was romanticizing urban black life just as much as middle class “colored near-intellectuals” idealized embraced white middle class values. His accusation that bourgeois black Americans thought they represented “the better classes with their "white" culture,” nonetheless captured the set of values and aspirations that meant “booz-y and brawling” jazz masculinity constituted a problem.

Robert S. Abbott, exemplified the race uplift approach to gaining equality in America. Abbott, founder of the \textit{Chicago Defender}, used the occasion of his visit to France to wax eloquent upon the need for ‘right action’ and sobriety among representatives of “the race” there. He commented on the Bechet-McKendrick duel, the public behavior of black American

\textsuperscript{445} Davis, \textit{Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday}, 146.
\textsuperscript{447} Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain."
musicians in Montmartre and the negative work he saw it as doing for the image of all members of “the race.”

Most of the colored people from the States live in the Montmartre [sic], and if the truth must be told, some of them are everything but a credit to the Negro group. They indulge in fights and shooting scrapes and two of them were recently given a long prison term for shooting at one another and hitting three persons who were passing. It would be an excellent thing if there were some way of keeping out the riffraff, for, as the Negro is a marked man this type makes it bad for the respectable Negro… A man who will drink to such an extent that he becomes intoxicated upon his job should be given his ticket and sent back to America, because our good treatment depends on how we treat ourselves.448

Abbott’s paper expressed a variety of opinions about drinking and living it up in Europe. Some of his own columnists joked about flaunting the Volstead laws (prohibition) while abroad and Abbott’s reporters got a lot of mileage out of artists caught in scandalous situations.449 But the “lad about town” image of black jazz men coexisted in tension with the potential damage black jazz players represent to the “respectable Negro.”450

The celebrated fight between Bullard and James Paris the white American from Georgia, discussed above in relation to black cosmopolitanism, doesn’t contradict this analysis but reinforces it and reveals the complexity involved in establishing parameters within which one could be black, respected, and free to pursue what one wanted of life in modern Western culture. Brawling in a bar was interpreted as a disgrace when two “race men” like Bechet and

449 See the report on Florence Mills troupe and their fight, discussed in Chapter Three in relation to black women, or the column by “The Street Wolf of Paris,” “Montmartre,” Chicago Defender, Aug 4 1934.
450 This creates an interesting contrast with the white American expatriate avant-garde at the time who leave a literary legacy that exults in the trope of drunken genius. In some ways the ‘creative-self-destructive’ self-presentation of Anais Nin, or Henry Miller, or F. Scott Fitzgerald is actually closer to that of the jazz players than their black literary counterparts.
McKendrick fought and wounded each other, as well as innocent passersby. However when Eugene Bullard fought a “white man from Georgia” because of a racial slur he won a lot of respect as he did in another incident when he battled racially pejorative newspaper coverage of a bar fight and won a retraction and a sizeable payout from several papers. Robert Abbott, well known black American editor of the *Chicago Defender* reported on this fight and noted that the fight was motivated by racist treatment at a bar. He stated with pride that “Mr. Bullard knows how to fight.” So it clearly wasn’t just the fighting it was the context that mattered. In this instance the white American newspaper that had run the slanderous report of the fight was brought to account and numerous papers were forced to reprint the story in a way that reflected well upon Bullard. Ultimately “he made things so hot for this newspaper and the proprietor of the bar that a dark man coming into this place is now greeted like the Prince of Wales.” Bullard’s fight thus achieved a net gain for “the race” justifying the bar brawl as a racially uplifting action, not disreputable. It helped, of course, that Bullard was wealthy, owned a business, and was a war hero.

The Frenchman and colonial subject Prince ‘Kojo’ Touvalou Houenou took this logic further when he refused to back down from a confrontation in a bar (some suggest he even forced the confrontation) in order to test French laws against segregation. The laws had been created to deal with bars catering to an American clientele who demanded that blacks not be served at the same establishments. Paul Gilroy identifies the narrative of Frederick Douglass’s

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451 This and subsequent quotations are from Abbott’s report of his trip to Europe. Robert S. Abbott, “My Trip Abroad,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov 23, 1929. The ‘Georgia Man’ fight is discussed in Chapter Two.

452 Stovall, Edwards, and Zinsou all refer to this confrontation Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 227; Stovall, *Paris Noir*, 73. Zinsou clarifies that there were two incidents and Touvalou may have been testing the law : Emile
standing up and fighting his master as a key moment in black Atlantic modernity. If Douglas’ action can be read – as Gilroy reads it – as a crystallizing moment of refusing to bow down to the internalized sense of powerlessness and subjugation created in part by race prejudice then the narratives played out by Prince ‘Kojo’ and also by Eugene Bullard on the nightclub terrain of interwar Paris enacted Gilroy’s “Frederick Douglas” moment for a vastly more plebian group than the “talented tenth” of Du Bois. The numerous reports in the Defender and the Amsterdam News and the Pittsburgh Courrier that portrayed each of these as righteous fights, however, underlines the importance to the editors of black newspapers of editorializing on appropriate masculine involvement in conflict.

In addition to the gambling, fighting, and flashy behavior of many black jazz players, no matter how well-dressed, they presented another ground for unease to both white audiences and to black advocates of race uplift. The issue of cross-racial and extra marital sexuality occasionally intersected with that of drinking and along with drinking and fighting it was a constant feature of Montmartre nightlife. Leon Crutcher, the “well-known pianist” of the musical duo Crutcher and Evans got into a raging drunken argument with his wife, a white French dancer, in 1926 after he had stayed out very late (he was not noted for his fidelity) and she shot him, in a case that garnered a lot of attention in the French press. This was the type of bad publicity that incensed public advocates of race uplift doctrines such as David Peyton, and

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Tyler Stovall reports this story, working from an article in le Figaro, Feb 27 1926. Crutcher apparently died from the gunshot wound. Incidentally Crutcher’s wife was acquitted and let free, having pleaded her actions were motivated by love of her husband, and sympathy for him being diminished due to his non-payment of taxes on a sizeable income. Stovall, Paris Noir, 75-76.
Robert Abbott. There was a dominant association in the European mind between black men, whether Senegalese ex-soldiers or American jazz performers, and sexual appeal to white women. Black jazz players who perpetuated this association offered the same kind of challenge to black respectability as Josephine Baker did when she performed nearly nude in that they threatened to confirm or enact European stereotypes about black men and women that had led to racial prejudice in the past.

**Sex**

The popularity of jazz players in European society made the possibility of white female attraction to black men more visible than it had been prior to the war. When jazz fan Robert Goffin described drummer Louis Mitchell as a “handsome creole beast” he also described Mitchell as having an “astonishing” appeal for white women, some of whom “famously quarreled” over him. Goffin’s hyperbolic text is corroborated by the gossipy music trade journal *Paris qui Chante*, that reported a bitter fight over “a black musician in the jazz-band” at the Casino de Paris, in 1925, when Mitchell was leading the resident band. The report noted, with salacious delight, both the race of the man in contention and the nationality of the “young artists” involved:
Five or six days ago the stage manager of the Casino de Paris was called upon to separate two young artistes, a French dancer and an English dancer. The two young women were battling with shards of glass from drinking glasses they had broken. The weapon was dangerous and the blood flowed. Investigations showed that the motive of the quarrel was a black musician from the jazz-band, for whose favors the demoiselles were competing. ‘Come, my children,’ said the stage director to the duelers, ‘Make a decision. Take a life in black if you choose but don’t see red!’

The perception of a slightly uncontrolled and uncontrollable black male sexuality that could cause white women to “forget themselves” is apparent in both reports of the incident. It generated anxiety in European society despite the rhetoric of color-blindness and the well-publicized freedom to socialize across the “color line.” The unease expressed with regard to black male sexual appeal emerges in various cultural products produced in interwar France. It provided another ground for concern to members of the black community who strove to defend the upright morals and reputation of “the race.”

The grounds for their concern lay in wider European perceptions of black masculinity. Christian Koller’s work on racial and gender stereotypes in the Franco-German context cited a very revealing statistic, noting that in a survey conducted shortly after the Second World War the word “Negro” was associated with terms such as “strong, biological, sex, athletic, powerful, boxer, wild, beast, devil, and sin.” Koller attributed this to the presence of thousands of non-white troops in Europe twenty years earlier, during the First World War. He discussed the disruption caused by the fact that during the war “non-white colonials routinely exercised power

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454 “Coulisses,” (Behind the Scenes), Paris qui Chante, 15 Jan 1925, 4. Mitchell was playing at the Casino at the time, and it is safe to connect this incident to Goffin’s assertion that women quarreled over him.
on former colonizers in the colonizer’s own country.” Koller argued that German and French propagandists used images of colonial troops for different ends. Germans accused black colonial soldiers serving in the French army of “sexual savageness” and “staggering from rape to rape,” while the French countered with an image of the “noble and beautiful savage irresistibly attractive to white women.” The tone of each description differed but the underlying association of black men with sexuality and the body was very clear. The survey didn’t differentiate between African-Americans and colonial African subjects which suggests that some of the white anxieties arising around miscegenation and cross-racial sexual relations extended to both groups.

Interwar Parisian popular culture shows plenty of evidence of a vivid sense of anxiety generated by the perceived appeal of black men to women (of every race). The Hungarian photographer Gyula Halász, working under his pseudonym Brassaï, documented the mingling that occurred between black and white at the ‘Bal Nègre’ in the nineteen-twenties.

456 Koller, “Enemy Images,” 139.
457 Koller, “Enemy Images,” 144.
458 These anxieties took on particular resonance in France where the ‘native’ French birth rate has been historically low and at this point was a serious source of concern. See, for example, Roger Célestin and Eliane Françoise DalMolin, *France from 1851 to the Present: Universalism in Crisis*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 27.
The picture as a whole emphasizes the ease with which men and women danced and socialized across the “color line” in the context of interwar Parisian nightlife.\textsuperscript{459} The commentary that accompanied the photograph, however, betrayed a certain discomfort and unease with this situation. Brassai’s description of \textit{le Bal nègre de la rue Blomet} commented that white women were drunk on their own bodies and so “forgetting that contact with a Negro had once been

\textsuperscript{459}Brassaï, \textit{The Secret Paris of the 30's}. 
shocking” the “hordes of elegant society neurotics” would “throw themselves – quite literally – into the arms of handsome, athletic Senegalese, Antillean, Guinean or Sudanese men.”\textsuperscript{460} Brassaï noted that at these nightclubs couple “gyrated and pulsed as though they were naked together in bed.” His statements clearly delineated the link between jazz and Afro Caribbean style and the cross-racial sexuality. The photographer further qualified his observations by adding that he suspected a “hysterical sorcery” had been at work to create a scene that resembled that of a “voodoo rite.”\textsuperscript{461} Brassaï refused to acknowledge that the women he saw were genuinely enthusiastic to dance with the men at the bal. This phenomenon required a supernatural explanation. A supernatural explanation would also presumably offset any sense of inadequacy attributed to white European masculinity at the seeming female preference for the black colonial men at the ball.

Colin’s lithographs capture a similar association between black music, sexuality, and cross-racial liaisons, and they, too, show an underlying sense of unease and anxiety regarding black male sexuality. In this poster, for example, the white woman is twitching up her dress, to make herself more available to the suave black dancer quite literally sweeping her off her feet. The artistic result is incongruous because in doing so her sophistication and glamour is compromised by her naked curves presented for both

\footnote{Brassaï, \textit{The Secret Paris of the 30's}. Unnumbered pages, in section titled ‘Le Bal Nègre in the Rue Blomet’\textsuperscript{460} Jody Blake discusses the implications of perceiving black art and music as linked to ‘voodoo’ in Blake, \textit{Le Tumulte Noir} Chapter One.}
viewer and partner. The slightly grotesque slant this gives the image seems to indicate a discomfort felt by Colin. That unease extends to the reviewer RIP (Georges Thenon) who “placed his own considerable reputation” behind this portfolio. Like Brassai’s photographs it clearly tapped into a current in contemporary European culture – Colin’s lithographs were celebrated and sold well from the instant his poster of Baker was published. These were not isolated examples. Reports in the black American press commented on the fact that “Cartoonists depicting the “Charleston” and the “black Bottom” always use a Negro as the principal dancer, although his partner is more than likely Caucasian.”

This complex of anxiety and fascination that is evident in such images – in Brett Berliner’s words “ambivalent desire” - presented just as serious a cause for concern to race uplift advocates as drinking, gambling and fighting. The last thing they wanted was to reinforce the historic construct of the libidinous black male and fuel anxieties related to cross-racial sexuality. The black American press, in particular, hammered home the importance of behaving respectably in order to serve “the race.” Conservative columnist Dave Peyton, for example, advised players in America not to flirt because he felt it compromised the dignity of all black musicians:

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464 Berliner, Ambivalent Desire.
A bad habit of many musicians is the practice of flirting with the ladies who get near the orchestra pit. This writer has tendered many two-week notices to players during his 15 years as a conductor for this bad practice. There are many happenings that can arise from this liberty taken by the conceited musicians who think that when a lady smiles at them they are in love with them. Many people admire the artistic abilities of players and feel kindly toward them for the attainment and they may give you a pleasant smile which does not mean they are in love with you. In the orchestral pit dignity should reign.\textsuperscript{465}

His advice was an attempt to transcend the powerful discursive construction that linked black identity with unbounded sexuality by urging the players to neutralize any sexual dimension in their public persona. White Europeans evinced anxiety about black male sexuality and miscegenation in the interwar Atlantic context. But black communities shared this concern from the pragmatic standpoint of not wanting to add fuel to pre-existing racial prejudices even within the more liberal attitudes toward cross-racial alliances in interwar France.

This concern was interwoven with pride in the achievements of “race leaders” and that category potentially included entertainers overseas. In amidst her anecdotes about the rich, famous, and royal, Bricktop recalls a curious intervention she was called upon to stage on behalf of Paul Robeson, his wife Essie, and “the race.” Shortly after Paul Robeson’s arrival in London to perform in the musical \textit{Showboat} in 1928 Bricktop was apparently called aside by Cole Porter who asked her to go to London to meet C. B. Cochrane, the manager of the show – and thus of Robeson. Apparently Robeson had got into trouble by way of his “great appeal” to white women in London and the fact that in one case that appeal was mutual. Bricktop described her involvement in this scenario as follows:

\begin{quote}\textsuperscript{465} David Peyton, “Musical Bunch: Orchestral Discipline,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, 17 Dec 1927.\end{quote}
C.B. said, ‘Brickie, you’ve got to talk to Paul Robeson.’ ‘About what?’ I wanted to know. ‘You’ve got to tell him that he can’t divorce Essie and marry this white woman.’ ‘What’s that got to do with me?’ I demanded. I was furious. I wasn’t the keeper of the race. They’d already had me over to London once to talk to Hutch, the piano player, over the same situation. I thought that was enough. C.B. kept talking. ‘Paul Robeson is the greatest Negro in England. He’s the greatest Negro in America! You know what prejudice is, Brickie. You’re a girl and you haven’t felt it – we see to it that prejudiced people don’t get near you. You are for the private few. Paul is a man, and he’s on the stage. He’s a public figure. If he divorces his wife and marries this Englishwoman, it’s gonna ruin him. He’s got to be talked out of this.’ I said, ‘Well, I don’t know, that’s a big job…’ but they wore me down and I did wind up talking to Paul. I didn’t do it just because CB and Cole wanted me to. I had my own strong feelings on that issue of interracial marriage. Sure, I’d had white men, but I certainly never intended to marry one.⁴⁶⁶

Amidst the myriad of gender distinctions and moral judgments evident in this anecdote the one that sparks it all is the enormous complications for “the race” that arise from breaking the taboo operating among both black and white communities with regard to cross-racial marriages. Here Bricktop is defined as a maternal, caring, but stern agent of morality or “keeper of her race,” a role to which she objects but is nevertheless obliged to fulfill. Paul Robeson is a male very much in the public eye whereas Brickie is private. Robeson, even more than she, is a “great Negro,” indubitably one of W.E.B. DuBois’s talented tenth at this stage in his career. The gendered dynamics that cast Bricktop as mother but also “girl” and Paul Robeson as public hero, in this scenario obscure Essie Robeson’s role (and presumably personal distress) in the situation. Here “race leaders” try to contain a potential scandal that might “ruin” Robeson and disgrace “the race.”⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 128-129.
⁴⁶⁷Note here the compounding difficulty of Robeson’s enormous stature as ideal renaissance man, serious Shakespeare actor, opera singer, the man who made the spirituals an integral part of classical concert recitals. At this stage in his career he fulfilled the ideals of race uplift although later his involvement in radical politics drew
This was a conservative stance but also a deeply pragmatic, post-traumatic, and historically driven stance. One of the horrific consequences of the Civil War in the United States was the increase in lynching, perpetrated against black men by white communities as a response to a perceived sexual or social status transgression. The rise in lynching after the Civil War suggests it was actually a response to the erasure of the hegemonic structure of slavery within which power relations structurally, legally, and socially privileged white Americans. The fictive presentation of the black male as sexual threat which needed to be contained by lynching has been deconstructed many times including during the nineteen-twenties by the redoubtable Ida B. Wells. And yet the horror of lynching continued and increased throughout the interwar years. So the conservatism of black bourgeois advocates of respectability may not be attractive or creative but it can be explained by a particular set of historic circumstances. And those circumstances fuelled the rhetoric that sought to control and delimit the behavior of black men, particularly black men of international stature, and especially jazz men.

Thus, the historical context of racism and lynching in the United States added to a broader black American middle class concern that miscegenation and sexual activity outside of marriage (if not discreet) jeopardized the move to “level up” with “the white folks.” This attitude, however, was not shared by all. Some black men and women, performers, artists, and others, celebrated the opportunity to pursue love “across the color line” in France as a triumph

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469 Florence Mills’ phrase again. From “Magic Moon,” Florence Mills Collection, Schomburg Center.
for racial equality. Many black Americans and black French men in France did become involved in affairs, love matches, or casual flings with white women. Eugene Bullard married a wealthy and well-born Frenchwoman, while Leon Crutcher married a white chorus-dancer although their marriage was fraught with difficulties and infidelity. The “street wolf of Paris” reported in 1934 that Willie Lewis, noted band leader had “quietly married a French blonde,” while Herbie of the Five Hot Shots “is so nearly married to a very charming English chorus girl that there is no difference,” and “Clarence… is head over heels in love with a would-be colored girl who happens to be German.” Sidney Bechet’s relationship with another German woman was ended by his arrest and imprisonment following the infamous gunfight. He later returned to Paris and married a different European woman, living the rest of his days happily in France.

These complicated sets of sexual exchanges show that the tumulte noir had transatlantic impact and social and political outcomes. Inter-racial marriages could be seen as respectable even though there were strong reservations about them. However, casual non-marital relationships were particularly damaging to the respectable image of black men that race uplift advocates tried to promote. They also sometimes led to financial and personal difficulty. Elliot Carpenter, a jazz pianist active in interwar Paris felt that the unaccustomed freedoms of France carried some of his compatriots too far:

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471 Bricktop’s expresses her view that a white man might marry her but ‘wouldn’t have meant to fall in love with her,’ Bricktop and Haskins, Bricktop, 132. Black men who chose to engage in relationships with white women could also be accused of ‘selling out’ their own women and failing to express racial solidarity through their personal, sexual choices. This is part of the issue with the Paul Robeson situation described above. The idea also appeared in black newspapers and attitudes both prior to and subsequent to the jazz craze. It was an internally reinforced protocol among the black community as well as a response to white attitudes and resulting historical inequities.
The Negroes would go into them cafes up in Montmartre and they’d throw their money away as soon as they got it. Drinking wine and spending it on those whores they had up there… They had a freedom you don’t get here. Over there you didn’t have to hide away. So they were just out for fun. In a way they wasted themselves. They didn’t pick out the best women. They all had wives back in the states so they just went for the whores. And the whores took ‘em for everything they could get when they saw they were in demand.\textsuperscript{472}

Carpenter clearly had an active set of perceptions about women and respectability and what constituted the “best women.” In addition to these perceptions of respectable female sexuality he articulated the sense that disreputable behavior, lavish spending, and extra-marital affairs with white women who were sexually promiscuous and possibly prostitutes (whores) was not a joyous celebration of freedom from America’s sexual restrictions and temperance laws but a waste. However the very active consideration of these private and personal affairs as public and politically relevant actions that could affect contemporary race relations shows how the passion for jazz in Paris unleashed a set of complicated reactions that intersected with developments that extended well beyond the world of music.

\textbf{Responses and Strategies}

The American response to the threat black jazz masculinity represented to the enterprise of race uplift, is encapsulated in the commentaries of Robert Abbott and Dave Peyton both of whom were proud of jazz players for their achievements overseas but concerned that jazz men as a group were not taking advantage of the opportunity their success gave them to ‘further the race.’ In a column of December 1927 David Peyton divided his advice into sections on

\textsuperscript{472}Cited in Goddard, \textit{Jazz Away from Home}, 302.
“Flirting,” (don’t do it), “Gossip,” (don’t do it), and “The Leader” (be a good example). The advice not to gossip references a persistent worry about black verbosity and loudness, – a concern echoed by a fellow columnist who argued “Race actors” should learn the virtue of listening and “be sure you have something to say before you talk.” The conduct, and leadership, of James Reese Europe became a constant refrain in these columns and authors emphasized his admirable qualities – all of which fit very well with race uplift ideals. Reese Europe “held the ship together. He was a master musician and a natural born leader of men and was highly considered by the above named group of millionaires [Wannamakers and Vanderbilts].”

Peyton advised his readers that “race musicians” should exercise discipline in their personal behavior and presentation. He counseled musicians that their role was equivalent to that of the “doctor, the lawyer, the minister, and other artists and professionals.” The archetypal middle class professions selected by Du Bois as his target careers for the talented tenth – the lawyer, doctor, and minister – are here yoked to the world of jazz as Peyton tries to put it on the same footing as those ideal bourgeois occupations. Peyton ties this all together; morality, masculinity, cultivated conduct and conversation, sobriety and care with money, and excellence in jazz musicianship in the concluding paragraph of his column on “Orchestral Discipline:”

Going to social affairs, talking the topics of the day, and other forms of socializing are fine, but going around places of ill-repute, hanging around pool halls, drinking excessively, should not be indulged in by the leader. At all times he should advise his men against such evils. They will learn to respect him; they will look up to him as an advisor, and when the hour comes when he swings the baton over them they can give better service, for they are aware of the high qualities of manhood their leader is made up of. Don’t forget, leaders and players, be gentlemen and ladies, practice for perfection, and, above all, save your money.  

The reference to “saving money” and “being gentlemen and ladies” couldn’t be a clearer endorsement of the discourse of middle class respectability and echoes Du Bois’s rhetoric of the talented tenth. That rhetoric percolated into popular discourse through the words and opinions of jazz players, critics, and newspaper columnists. Elliot Carpenter, the jazz musician quoted above, was very concerned with the way his colleagues “wasted” their time in France. He echoed Peyton in his belief that sexual continence and not spending “wildly” signify appropriate masculinity and identifying the men he played with who spent lavishly and indulged in expensive affairs with “whores” as “wasting” themselves. Peyton was, of course, the “leading publicist for the establishment.” He may not have spoken for all jazz players but he did represent the portion of the black American constituency that believed that respectable behavior would smooth the path toward racial equality.

476 See also ‘players should listen not talk too loudly’ advice in; Buddy Bolden, “Coast Dope,” Chicago Defender, Dec 17 1927.
Robert Abbott, the founder and editor of the *Chicago Defender*, and Peyton’s employer at the paper, went further than Peyton and offered more concrete advice than Du Bois. Abbott suggested that a musicians’ organization be formed to monitor American musicians abroad (Abbott seemed most concerned with male instrumentalists here who comprised most of the black American population in Europe at the time). Furthermore Abbott suggested the organization hire a social worker to “look out for the welfare of musicians throughout the continent” and possibly even invite missionaries over to work with the musicians. This advice exemplifies the attitude that racial equality would come through social reform and “moral improvement,” an attitude that resonated with white middle class benevolence and reform efforts.⁴⁷⁸ One particular initiative resonated with bourgeois white reform efforts of the late nineteenth century. Abbott felt that if musicians maintained “regular clubrooms to raise the tone of the profession” it would prevent them from “hanging around saloons, cabarets, and other loafing places” and it could “lend dignity” to the profession by means of printed stationary, and a reading and writing room.⁴⁷⁹

The belief that a club would be beneficial for members of the African diaspora was shared by members of the black French community who saw it less as a response to immorality and more as serving an educational purpose and providing a physical center for racial solidarity and support. In 1930 the president of the society for colonial study, propaganda and action,

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⁴⁷⁸Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. See also Wells-Barnett and Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*. These texts engage with African American efforts to undertake the style of social reform that Jane Addams proposed at Hull House, a style favored by white clubwomen’s associations. See, for example, Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

proposed a *Maison des Colonies* a sort of cultural club, for French colonial subjects. M. Kouyaté (political activist and leader of the black left wing activist group the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre*) viewed that plan as paternalistic and contested it bitterly. Kouyaté instead proposed an *Institut Nègre* and a *Foyer Nègre*. Collectively the institute and the hostel (foyer) would provide meeting rooms, a library, and even a restaurant and lodging that would improve living conditions for black students in Paris, and, like a similar club proposed in Marseilles, would serve as a “meeting place and a center for moral improvement.”

The *Dépêche Africaine* mentioned that various *personnalités négro-Américaines* were following these attempts with lively interest. This sense that a club would help develop members of “the race” appropriately found support from a variety of diasporic groups in the *métropole*. The mission statement of the *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre*, (a much more mainstream group than Kouyaté’s) also advocated the creation of a community center for all black men and women in the *métropole*:

> After the collapse of the *Ligue Universelle pour la Défense de la Race Noire* black youth have understood the historical necessity of organizing themselves politically. Without any distinction of sex or of nationality the C.D.R.N brings together all the *nègres* living in Paris. We wish that the *nègre* would be treated with a little more humanity throughout the world! We don’t want our sisters and brothers to die, overlooked, in the hospitals. We wish that they will show solidarity, each with the other, like the men of other races are in foreign countries.

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480 Francfort’s proposal is discussed in *La Dépêche africaine*, where the journalist notes Kouyaté’s opposition and alternative proposal, and that black Americans are watching with interest. “La Maison des Colonies,” *LDA*, Jan 1930, 2. The proposal is also documented by police spies at the meeting of the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre*, “A.S. de la Ligue” 17 Février 1930, Ass. 802, APP. Gary Wilder mentions the Marseilles attempt in Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*, 182.
We wish to offer to each nègre, who becomes a member of the Comité, intellectual, moral and material advantages. We wish to put at the disposal of our members a museum dedicated to art nègre, a library composed of books, colonial studies, novels, periodicals, political journals, literary reviews and *collections diverses*. 481

The group’s mission statement offers a causal logic within which: they identify that racial exclusion poses a problem; they acknowledge that factional differences among black groups in Paris have undermined attempts to solve that problem; they offer a club to foster pan-African awareness and racial solidarity which they believe is necessary in the political struggles ahead; and they see education, art, and the right type of cultural appreciation as a mode for developing a group of black men and women who will be able to combat racial prejudice on every front because they have been equipped with the tools of racial solidarity, political organization, cultural pride, and intellectual skills.

The idealistic plans for a pan-African clubroom in Paris never came to fruition however and a year later, a concerned “Clubman,” demanded the reason why not in a letter to the *Revue du Monde Noir*:

481 “Les Opprimés noirs se groupent: Un appel du ‘Comité de Défense de la Race nègre,’ » *l’Humanité*, September 1926. Note that the excerpts from the Comité’s appeal are contextualized by the editors here, who remind readers that noirs can’t fully fight for their own rights until they understand the greater oppression under which all workers labor in a capitalist system. In another article, clipped by the police and undated/unlabelled the text adds that the group wishes to create a bar-restaurant with colonial foods and flavors, a salle d’armes, (boxing room?) and one for ‘jeux divers’ as in games and cards. Dossier ASS 671, APP, Paris France.
We want a club! --- Why isn’t there any place in Paris where Negroes could meet? Why don’t they think of founding a club where they could gather regardless of their origin? Mutual comprehension would arise from repeated contact with each other. We must confess that Negroes don’t know each other... The idea of founding a club is not new. But it falls in with the opportune creation of *Revue du Monde Noir*. Some of us are wondering about it. When will the creative spark kindle it into realization?  

The ‘clubman’ echoed the vision of the mainstream black political organization the Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre and the linkage with the *Revue du Monde Noir* simply underlined that this was a French iteration of the ideals that drove W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and their Harlem Renaissance colleagues.

The club in all of these visions, therefore, seemed to offer an ideal social setting in which to pursue both individual and group interests and improvement as ‘Negroes’ albeit linked more through a shared sense of oppression and struggle for racial justice in their own national contexts than through any profound mutual comprehension. Robert Abbott, David Peyton, Tiemoko Kouyaté, and the “Clubman” came from different social, national, and political perspectives. Kouyaté aligned with a much more left-wing perspective than either of the American commentators. And the national differences ran deeper than this. The French proposals, unlike the American one, were envisioned less as a guarantee against bad behavior and more as an opportunity for self-development and cultural expression as a form of racial solidarity. The two groups thus perceived different needs, and their proposed clubs served different aims, which demonstrates the difference in their experiences of France and her color-blind hospitality. And

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482 I have used the English translation printed in the RDMN here, "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World," 253.
yet their shared hope that a club or institute would provide a place of learning, dignity, and racial solidarity links them with each other and with groups throughout the Atlantic who felt that it was through education and maintaining dignity and “moral improvement” that true racial advancement would come. The idea that this was an appropriate response to the exclusions and reductive images of black masculinity circulating through the French métropole – partly as a result of the jazz craze – linked French and American pan-Africans in a race uplift enterprise and show how thoroughly transnational it was.

Conclusion

This examination of race uplift began with the work and writing of W. E. B. Du Bois in the early 1900s. The outrage he and other intellectuals like him felt against the racial injustice that he believed would “crush men who had reached the full measure of modern European culture back into the uneducated masses” strengthened pre-existing patterns of thought and behavior that espoused race uplift. This discussion, however, has exposed how the race uplift discourse, while envisaged as resistance to racial exclusion, was itself exclusionary on the basis of education, class, and gender. Du Bois offered yet another compelling response to racial injustice in his delineation of double consciousness. His statement of double consciousness as a “sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, or measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” describes the context in which discussions of jazz, race uplift, and appropriate black masculinity took place.\footnote{Du Bois describes the sense of “double consciousness” in Bois, \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}, 4-6.} Frantz Fanon
offered a wrenching vision of a similar experience in *Black Skin White Masks* when he, as a youth in the playground, was confronted with his visible difference from his white playmates and everything was changed. He now saw himself with what Du Bois had termed double consciousness. Incidentally both men, while noting the exclusions they suffered through constantly being judged and viewed by the standards of a hegemonic white middle class society, neglected to address the triple oppression of black women in their analyses.

One of the dangers of double consciousness was that of seeing oneself as an “other” in the eyes of the mainstream. One of the traumas lay in realizing how one’s complex self had been reduced to a reductive stereotype based on skin color. The doubly conscious individual experienced himself (and Du Bois is referring to men here) as a reasoning, autonomous individual yet recognized that others failed to perceive him that way. This created an enormous pressure to adjust and adapt and demonstrate the ability to exceed racial stereotypes in a ‘socially acceptable’ manner that would increase a positive view of both the self and the race. Langston Hughes wrote a vicious polemic about the cultural caution that ensued, pitying the “colored artist who runs from the painting of Negro faces to the painting of sunsets after the manner of the academicians because he fears the strange unwhiteness of his own features.”

The invidious position of the doubly conscious as identified by Du Bois explains how and why the race uplift movement stifled some expressions of black culture. The very concrete historical consequences of transgressing an accepted image explain why establishing the parameters of black masculinity became an important enterprise in interwar Paris. In the realm of

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484 Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain."
jazz this explains why initially the “raw” blues of Bessie Smith or Ma Rainey was glanced at askance by race uplift thinkers as was flamboyant, improvisatory, physical, showily competitive, “hot jazz.” Race uplift advocates wanted to acknowledge their African heritage and identify with a culture that was not “white American” as Du Bois makes clear when he lays out the problem of double consciousness. But many found it difficult to find a way of being African and American, incorporating aspects of each cultural heritage while simultaneously advancing within the terms of the dominant society. One response was to mediate the African-derived aspects of African American cultural production into an “acceptable” form. This rationale helps to explain why James Reese Europe and Noble Sissle became favored jazz figures among both literate French and American audiences. They were popular, they had served in the Harlem Hellfighters band and thus were associated with trying to “level up” the race through serving in a military capacity which, then and now, functioned implicitly as a claim and a proof of citizenship.

Reese Europe is still acknowledged to be an excellent musician who produced “ambitious, exciting, and sensitive renditions of some of the popular songs of the century’s second decade, reflecting social and musical changes, the beginnings of jazz dance, and the social optimism that prevailed in black society as a result of African American modernist thought and the participation of black men in World War I.” Reese Europe’s recordings, however, show the constraints, as well as the optimism, of the race-uplift-tinted Harlem Renaissance vision. Reese Europe controlled improvisation in his band’s performances heavily so as not to

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485Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. See also ‘African-Americans were inspired by a growing awareness of the African civilizations that had once flourished along the banks of the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers. They longed to restore African culture to a position of respect and they used what they knew of African and African American folk art and literature to create new cultural forms,’ Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 106.
sound too hot and alien to European audiences and he used very structured arrangements of many of the pieces he performed. Like Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake he created music that was widely popular in white culture. Noble Sissle (and partner Eubie Blake) wrote the musical *Shuffle Along* which gained fame and financial success for members of “the race.”

They were not, however, jazz innovators like Duke Ellington, or Fats Waller.

The “better classes” in America, and the editors of *La Dépêche africaine* were perturbed with the wild popularity of jazz but even they admired James Reese Europe and Noble Sissle. Furthermore the French Caribbean diaspora was eager to promote popular music of the Caribbean when the band was led by the “gentleman” Stellio. This type of qualified approval for black cultural production was seen by Langston Hughes as an indictment on black middle class culture. He saw it as a form of gate keeping, and also felt that it had stifled his creativity:

> The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites. "Oh, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are," say the Negroes. "Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously. We will pay you," say the whites. Both would have told Jean Toomer not to write *Cane*…

> Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know. In many of them I try to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz. I am as sincere as I know how to be in these poems and yet after every reading I answer questions like these from my own people: Do you think Negroes should always write about Negroes? I wish you wouldn't read some of your poems to white folks. How do you find anything interesting in a place like a cabaret? Why do you write about black people? You aren't black. What makes you do so many jazz poems?

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487 Despite the fact that the musical was laden with stereotypes.
But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile. Yet the Philadelphia clubwoman is ashamed to say that her race created it and she does not like me to write about it. The old subconscious "white is best" runs through her mind.488

In this piece Hughes articulated and indicted race uplift discourse even as he participated in praising some of its heroes, such as Paul Robeson, and adopting some of its norms in his own literature and life, such as a level of misogyny, and silencing of the contributions of women, and a shrouding of his own sexuality in accordance with the strong historic bias toward a heterosexual (re)presentation of black males. Hughes’ championing of jazz anticipated, and helped to ensure, its widespread acceptance by the African American middle class by the end of the interwar era.

As the nineteen-twenties progressed jazz flourished and developed becoming more complex in America and better known as a specific style (especially among a select group of diehard French fans) in France. Throughout the era it served as a response to race uplift in two ways: it provided a grounds for men who were not of the “talented tenth” to develop a world consciousness as mentioned in chapter two and those men lived their lives resistant, or uncaring, of the construct of “race men” thus expressing agency. However the wild success of jazz meant that race uplift advocates had to include, acknowledge and incorporate it into their world view in a way that made sense. For that reason many race uplift idealists were more convinced about jazz when it won recognition (and legitimation) as a “true American art form” through the work of

488 Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain."
Duke Ellington, the classicizing efforts of William Grant Still, and Florence Price but also Gershwin, Debussy, and other white composers. At the same time the social constructions and the internalization of appropriate (westernized) models for black men and women persisted. Furthermore, within the dissonant and resistant iteration of black jazz masculinity embraced by Langston Hughes, or Claude McKay and many of the musicians who toured Europe there was still an emphasis on heterosexual men. Women were not seen as equal or equally talented and their behavioral transgressions were more transgressive than those of men.

Self-presentation, social behavior, and the way an individual becomes a synecdoche for the group in racial discourses is thoroughly entwined with power structures. Where the group holding hegemonic power differs in socio-economic status, or racial identification to other population groups in the same society those differences and acts of conflation have discriminatory outcomes in social, political, and labor relations. Race uplift advocates feared the conflation of all black men into a stereotype of a black man who was flashy, dishonest, and lazy, and a sexual predator. In a society where white men controlled most of the governmental institutions particularly the law, access to passports, work permits, and residency status, and where white men also controlled most of the businesses and thus employment opportunities, these perceptions about black men led to raids, arrests, racial profiling, and strictly delimited job opportunities. This is what race uplift advocates were so strongly trying to avert. Their ideology was restrictive and accommodationist. It denied difference and constrained individual expression, sexual and social freedoms. And yet it was an understandable response to the inequity of power relations applied along the lines of race.
The jazz players who took advantage of the freedoms France had to offer took another approach and simply lived the way they wanted more free of racial restrictions than they had been in America. They played a variant of African American music thus pragmatically modeling resistance to the double consciousness of W. E. B. Du Bois. Their experiences in Europe suggested that a black man or woman could reasonably expect to thrive and enjoy freedom of movement and celebrate their cultural heritage free of racial prejudice. At the same time that expectation was far from realistic given the French colonial situation and many of the musicians who took advantage of France’s freedoms reinforced problematic stereotypes. At the same time they laid a firm groundwork for the acceptance of black jazz players in the French métropole. This created a space within which jazz music became firmly entrenched in French culture, and a taste for the more sophisticated, jazz stylings of American artists whose fame is now legendary was established such that after the hiatus of World War II jazz musicians found a persistent welcome in Europe that provided solid financial and artistic ground for the art form (as it was now labeled) to survive and grow.

Within the broader context of race prejudice and the fight against it throughout the Atlantic Langston Hughes – a touchstone for this discussion – identified one of the most significant aspects of all of these debates about how the black man should act and what he should produce when he stated: “The present vogue in things Negro, although it may do as much harm as good for the budding artist, has at least done this: it has brought him forcibly to the attention of his own people among whom for so long, unless the other race had noticed him beforehand, he was a prophet with little honor.” The coexistence and co-flourishing of jazz and race uplift seem dissonant especially when the contrast between France and America, middle class and
working class is considered. Yet each of these developments in the social and musical performance of black masculinity pushed the discourse, generated new questions about what black men were, how they could or should live and confronted racial injustice. In terms of the French black diaspora I would suggest that the “vogue in things Negro” especially in jazz, encouraged the black Francophone impulse to reclaim their own music in the face of its co-option into the general classification of jazz. The following chapter considers the resulting turn to Afro Caribbean music as political and social tool, and a source of black French cultural identification. It also considers how the “power of black music” to borrow Samuel Floyd’s phrase, was invoked by black left-wing political associations who rejected race uplift ideology in favor of protest and political community organizing.
5. Reclaiming the biguine: dance, political action, and the *Bals colonial*

The pan-African race uplift efforts to moderate the public image of black celebrities described in the previous two chapters constituted only one branch of a multi-faceted pan-African program. In the realm of literary production a new black internationalism promoted high quality literary work by black authors and also fostered links between black cultural forms across the Atlantic thus honoring both African American and Afro Caribbean music and literature.\(^{489}\) In France such efforts were spearheaded by educated black Americans and Francophone men and women living in Paris.\(^{490}\) The works published by these authors – whether in Alain Locke’s *New Negro*, or in the *Revue du Monde Noir* were viewed as expressing something racially distinctive in art and literature. Efforts to champion the biguine, a Caribbean dance form that inspired Cole Porter’s famous number *Begin the Biguine* paralleled these efforts in art and literature.\(^{491}\) The biguine referred to a specific dance form but it was also used as an umbrella term for the Antillean musical style in general.


\(^{490}\) Brent Edwards, Gary Wilder, Sharpley Whiting, and Jennifer Boittin have all discussed these literary and political developments. Their work has begun to trace the importance of the early Parisian pan-African networks as instigators of the Négritude movement more usually credited to Aimé Césaire. It complements the studies produced by French scholars of immigration (Pierre Noiriel, Patrick Weil, Philippe DeWitte are most notable here and are discussed in the introduction). Further research needs to be done on what the perceptions/reactions were throughout France. Marseilles, for example, was probably much more culturally North African and Sub-Saharan African as the dock work attracted migrant laborers and the proximity to North Africa made entry into Marseilles very easy. For some details on Marseille’s immigration history see Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic*.

\(^{491}\) Although his piece bears no relation to a biguine.
This discussion considers how the musical practices of pan-African intellectuals in interwar Paris became a grounds for political expression in a process which strengthened during the interwar years. Prince Touvalou Houénou, the colorful socialite and aspiring pan-African political leader known as “Prince Kojo” to some, printed several articles promoting a black expressive culture in his publication Les Continents. Early in the 1920s the paper hosted two evening concerts of what Houénou labeled musique nègre américano-africaine. The program incorporated a Cuban classical pianist, the jazz cabaret vocalists Florence Palmer and Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith, an African American male duo ‘Crutcher and Evans,’ and the jazz drummer Buddy Gilmore. This eclectic black American and African program, however, didn’t represent the Antilles and nor did a concert later that summer featuring Roland Hayes, a black American classical singer, who started with Schubert and Debussy and ended with a set of spirituals.\footnote{Program details are from Les Continents (Paris) 3, June 15 1924, Edwards discusses similar concerts, Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora, 171.}

Most of the styles of music being pressed into the service of pan-African cultural expression here thus drew on African American traditions. As the tumulte noir and the resultant popularity of jazz continued to characterize Parisian cultural life throughout the nineteen-twenties Francophone black subjects – particularly Martinicans – expressed ambivalence toward the American music and such generic perceptions of black culture.\footnote{Jody Blake suggests that there was a retrenchment, culturally, by 1925, and devotes a chapter to this entitled “The Call to Order,” Blake, Le Tumulte Noir. Jackson places this cultural retrenchment later, as do I. Jackson, Making Jazz French. I would add that jazz continued to be popular but from 1928 onward there was also an attempt to get white French representation into the musical style, and guarantee ‘native’ French musicians access to work. There was a corresponding desire to revive the French chanson. But jazz never lost its presence or popularity.} They began to articulate a distinctive and complex identification with Frenchness, but also black racial solidarity, and furthermore the culture of their homeland as distinct from that of France and other black cultures.
Touvalou Houénou’s stance in promoting pan-African concerts and reviewing them in his paper, for example, was much more favorable to jazz than that of the Nardal sisters in the later 1920s and early 1930s. There are several explanatory factors for this shift in tone. One is that these concerts took place very early in the decade when jazz was well-established in France but wasn’t the overwhelmingly dominant force it later became. African American singer Bricktop recalled in her biography that few African-Americans and “real” jazz entertainers were present in Paris by 1924.\textsuperscript{494} The all-pervasive linkage between jazz and black identity that gained in strength throughout the decade was still in its fledgling stages amongst the wider French public.\textsuperscript{495} A second and associated factor is that Josephine Baker had yet to emblazon the image of the black erotic female form so deeply into the Parisian consciousness. The Nardal sisters only began to assert an alternate image of black French femininity once they had been confronted with that of the “exotic puppet” represented by Baker. Their work as pioneers of a “nascent feminism… of upwardly mobile women of African descent in the métropole” really began in the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{496} Their commentaries upon the biguine come out in print in 1928, 1930 and 1931 respectively which suggests they were partially motivated by Josephine Baker’s impact upon perceptions of black womanhood in Europe.

A third factor is also related to timing and historical context. In 1924 the newspaper \textit{Les Continents} and related attempts to forge a pan-African but Francophone network had barely got

\begin{footnotes}
\item 494 Bricktop and Haskins, \textit{Bricktop}, 81. She numbers black entertainers living in Paris at 8-10 although already there were more than she estimated as discussed in Chapter Two.
\item 496 Edwards, \textit{The Practice of Diaspora}, 122.
\end{footnotes}
off the ground. By 1931 several pan-African periodicals had been published, a number of black political associations had been formed, and the Colonial Exposition had generated an enormous amount of interest and controversy among black Francophone groups. The bourgeois black diasporans who attended the Martinican and Guadeloupean concessions at the *Exposition Coloniale* wrote proudly about how their culture was displayed at the exposition. Philippe de Zara identified the Exposition as demonstrating some of the admirable cultural wealth of the “black world.” His article “The Awakening of the Black World” suggested cultivating the *élites noirs* to avoid “de-civilization” and also suggested that the subjects of the French Empire resist being *déraciné* or “uprooted” with the sense of that word being from their cultural traditions as well as physically from their homeland.498

This chapter considers the biguine as a musically distinctive style which reflected important social and historical differences between black expatriate communities in Paris. It examines how and why black French intellectuals insisted upon the difference between jazz and the biguine and shows that when French colonial subjects asserted their cultural and ethnic differences from metropolitan white French citizens it had political implications. The sites in which Afro Caribbean and African music-making took place also became significant elements in a complex and multi-faceted effort to articulate a Caribbean identity that was in and part of, yet not one and the same as, the *Hexagone*. The rise of the international communist party and its anti-imperial offshoot organizations intersected with this movement. Anti-colonial groups based in Paris promoted their political agenda through large dance events featuring black music. The

dances were both fund-raisers and occasions to disseminate the anti-colonial message among black Francophone residents. All those who attended such dances, therefore, engaged in an inherently politicized practice.

The police, acting under instructions from the ministry of the interior, monitored nearly every aspect of social and cultural life in the capital during the interwar period and they paid very serious attention to these dance events. The extent of their concern underlines the point that music-making functioned as an articulation of cultural independence that had political ramifications and threatened to undermine a widely held but mythical view of an egalitarian and culturally unified French republic. These differences between the musical styles, performance practices and urban haunts of jazz musicians, and the styles, practices and spaces used by other groups of Parisians who self-identified as black illustrate the larger point pursued in this dissertation, that African-Americans and Francophone black inhabitants of Paris had very different experiences of how race shaped their opportunities and experiences in the French métropole.

**Jazz versus the Biguine**

By the late nineteen-twenties jazz had worked its way deep into the fabric of French culture and many French consumers understood it as a coherent style rather than a catchall definition for any piece of music that showed some evidence of rhythmic syncopation, and a gimmick or two in the performance. Whether “straight” (played conventionally with few improvisations) or “hot” (performed with a great deal of improvisation) jazz music was more
clearly understood and appreciated than it had been in 1920. It still, however, overshadowed and obscured other black styles of music such as the biguine. The advent of French jazz with the work of Django Reinhardt and players like him created a slightly different style of jazz played by white Europeans, and understood as French (although still played by immigrants and travellers). It did not, however, clarify the distinction between African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean musical styles and this proved frustrating for members of the Francophone black community in France. Afro Caribbean intellectuals, therefore, began to publish articles that sought to differentiate Afro Caribbean music from jazz in order to achieve two distinct aims. The first was to distance themselves from the perilous association between black culture and exotic primitivism as has been described in previous chapters. The second was to demonstrate a distinctive Afro Caribbean set of cultural practices and achieve recognition as a group of colonial subjects who were both French and Caribbean.

The attempt to distinguish between Afro Caribbean, and black American musical styles involved describing the differences between jazz and the biguine. The Caribbean style vied with the Tango and the Charleston – seen as a jazz dance - for a fan base in all the major nightclubs. Francophone Afro Caribbeans tried to point out the differences between these styles in published musical criticism that reflected upon how the biguine differed from jazz while acknowledging that it was linked to the African American form through a common genesis.
The biguine was regarded by some Afro Caribbeans in interwar Paris as “the privileged form of expression of the creole spirit.”\textsuperscript{499} Clearly the cultural product here was doing work as a repository for what might in other circumstances be called national pride – except that in the 1920s the French Antilles were still colonies of France. The association between Afro-Caribbean identity (comprised by a sense of self-understanding as Caribbean and a group affiliation or sense of connectedness with other black Caribbeans), pride and music-making became explicit in the 1960s when revivalists of the gwoka drum styles indigenous to Martinique and Guadeloupe linked their work to the nationalist-ethnic movement retour aux sources inspired by Aimé Césaire’s Négritude.\textsuperscript{500} Yet the process of showing how music revealed a distinctive Francophone Afro-Caribbean identity began well before the revivals of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{501}

The music of the Antilles was distinctive but some of the distinctions between it and jazz were quite subtle. Jazz and the biguine are closely related styles of music that developed from the fusion of European and African music in a colonial setting. One of the closest musical connections between them – the point at which they most obviously show a shared development from a common root - is between the biguine and New Orleans jazz. New Orleans (the “birthplace of jazz”) had been settled by the French. Slaves there, and in the French Antilles, were permitted to use the drums in communal music-making in contrast to restrictions on slaves in other areas of the Americas. The similarity between French Caribbean music and New Orleans

\textsuperscript{501} Niaah, "Mapping Black Atlantic Performance Geographies : From Slave Ship to Ghetto."
jazz may also spring from the fact that New Orleans jazz was itself derived from the French Caribbean music which evolved earlier. The shared musical elements of these two styles illustrate the connection between their origins in African music and the transformation of that African music over the course of time through contact with European musical styles in the context of slave societies. The biguine, like jazz, was a music fused from African and European traditions in a colonial/plantation setting. Slaves adapted the musical form of the quadrilles and waltzes danced by French planters by combining them with rhythms and harmonic content derived from African musical traditions. The biguine was one of the most commercially successful results of this fusion and competed with jazz on the dance floors of interwar Paris.

Gisele Dubouillé made this connection explicit in a review of “New Records of Negro Music,” she wrote in 1931:

Most of the modern dance music – from the tango to the rag-time, passing through the biguine and the blues – proceeds from the sources of African songs. Notwithstanding this evident relationship, African music has been neglected till now by the record firms which have otherwise supplied us with a pretty complete range of jazz. Parlophone should be complimented for having registered lately some purely African songs.

In this assessment Dubouillé acknowledged the links between diasporic African musical styles but she also drew several clear distinctions between them. Her distinctions were founded on an interesting set of assumptions about authenticity, geography and music. She was clearly invested in tracing a variety of contemporary music back to its African source. She commented

favorably on a “purely African” record and suggests that professional musicians and dancers would find “mines of original ideas” in it. Her suggestion here resonated with the approach avant-garde artists took to African art in general, which was to use it as a source of inspiration, and pan-African activists took to black esthetics in general which was to pay homage to their shared heritage and in doing so claim longevity and distinction for black cultural products.

Dubouillé, as one might expect given that she was writing for the pan-African Revue du Monde Noir clearly appreciated the beauty of all black music. But her differing assessment of the biguine and jazz revealed some hierarchical ideas about the two styles. First she stated that black music had passed “through the biguine” to the blues, an American form. In addition to this she sounded almost dismissive of jazz because it had become so commercialized. She implied that it had drifted very far from “purely” African elements which she privileged as authentic. She was also, one suspects, chagrined that jazz had stolen the limelight from other diasporic musical styles. Listeners at the time had access to a “complete range” of “excellent” jazz records but the same was not yet true of Antillean and African musical genres. Dubouillé clearly wished to champion the biguine over jazz here and she felt strongly that the two musical styles could and should be distinguished from one another.

Despite Dubouillé’s insistence upon differences the story of the biguine in interwar Paris paralleled that of jazz in many respects. Like jazz it was made known in the wider world through its importation into Paris in the interwar period. Like jazz it became identified with race and cultural identity. ‘Jazz’ became a generic term enfolding a lot of different variants upon the style of syncopated and harmonically distinctive music developed in America from the fusion of African and European musical traditions. The biguine functioned as an umbrella term for a
variety of Afro Caribbean musical forms and jazz might have signified anything from a Scott Joplin style rag to a Sophie Tucker blues song, in the parlance of the early 1920s in Europe. The biguine, in turn, could be anything that displayed a Caribbean infused musical style such as the mazouk or “West Indian mazurka” as well as the laggia and the majumbe. French audiences didn’t necessarily register the distinctions between the American and the Antillean music.\footnote{See Gisele Dubouillé’s gentle reminder to readers that the two forms are different in her review, “Nouveaux Disques de Musique nègre/ New Records of Negro Music,” "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World," 187. Check Berliner prob has support here too. For the range of ragtime/blues/cakewalk styles that were included under the general rubric of jazz see Jeffrey Jackson (find exact page)}

As a musical form Antillean music, including the biguine, shares several features with jazz such as the use of call and response (antiphonal) patterns and a complex rhythmic structure featuring syncopation. This use of complex polyrhythms and syncopations was one of its defining features. Fans noted that the biguine (like jazz, especially hot jazz) was much more rhythmically adventurous than most conventional Western music in the early 1920s. Even staunch fans acknowledged that the rhythm was a central element of the style and that “without the rhythm, the melody… would be quite monotonous.”\footnote{Andrée Nardal, “Notes on the Creole Biguine/Etude sur la Créole Biguine,” in "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World," 121-123.} The “tibwa” or base musical rhythm is fast and syncopated. Two common patterns are shown in the figure below.\footnote{Julian Gerstin. "Martinique and Guadaloupe." In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ilsprod.lib.neu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/44478 (accessed February 8, 2009).}
The Caribbean musical style thus combines a relatively simple melody line with complex syncopated rhythms and close ensemble playing that features the clarinet, cello, violin, drums and a mix of other instruments. The lead instrument, often a clarinet, worked in conjunction with syncopated rhythms to make the music “jump.” Andrée Nardal wrote a musical analysis of the biguine in 1931 that commented extensively on these features of Antillean music:

> The musical phrase could appear monotonous, without the clarinet which comments upon the music, embroidering it with variations, and punctuating it with its sighs. In a solo, or playing in concert with the other instruments, the clarinet is by turns spry, breathy, teasing and lascivious. The rhythm therefore acquires a surprising elasticity.  

Andrée’s sister Paulette reviewed a performance of the biguine in which she also noted the distinctive effect created by the “heartrending cries of the clarinet which winds its way through the musical storm and ends in a cascade of short tumbling notes.”

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507 Andrée Nardal, « Notes on the Creole Biguine/Ètude sur la Biguine Creole (folk dance). »
rhythm were joined by an even more distinctive sound in the “cha-chas” or shakers. The rhythm and the centrality of the clarinet and the chacha (shakers) to the sound were all characteristic of the biguine as it was played in Martinique. In the dance hall, furthermore, the dancers marked and intensified the rhythmic syncopations with the “noise of their feet.”

Collaborative, interweaving, ensemble sound was also a defining stylistic element of the biguine and it relied heavily upon group improvisation. Good ensemble playing with a lively rhythm won accolades – *Jojo pati* by Andree Léardée and his band was a “highly pimentoed piece of hot stuff” a phrase which denoted really good lively music during that era. The heavy emphasis upon ensemble was one of the distinctions between jazz and the biguine at this stage. Some of the hot jazz that was filtering through from America by 1931 foregrounded improvised solos by such masters as Louis Armstrong, or Coleman Hawkins. Stellio the Antillean band leader may have been a star clarinetist but he wasn’t idolized as a soloist like Armstrong. The point is subtle but the Nardal sisters identified it as a significant difference between the biguine and jazz.

Gisele Dubouillé’s assessment of the biguine, discussed above, both implicitly and explicitly qualified the biguine as more authentic than jazz. She praised the biguine and other non-jazz styles that were close to the “purely African” source. The biguine, she claimed, was the “firstborn child” of African music although she didn’t specify why it was the “firstborn” vis a vis

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509 Paulette Nardal records this at the Bal de la Glacière, and it corresponds to the black musical practice of ‘patting juba’ or incorporating the body into the music-making discussed in Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 53.

510 Dubouillé, “Nouveaux Disques de Musique Nègre/ New Records of Negro Music,”

511 Jeffrey Jackson comments on Armstrong’s popularity, which is also evident in interwar issues of the *Jazz-Hot* and *Revue du Jazz* magazines. Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 157.
Jazz and South American forms. Nevertheless one condition of authenticity is fulfilled – the form is close to the source. As many musicologists and popular cultural theorists have shown identifying authenticity in music is an ideological enterprise. Dubouillé discussed one particular piece, the Peanut Vendor, in considerable detail. Her ambivalent review of that piece engages with the issue of authenticity: “The Cuban Peanut Vendor by De Apuzzu is a biguine in which the only flaw is its classical perfection. A too-consummate skill has presided over the orchestration. The native warmth of the biguine has, perhaps, been somewhat sacrificed to the striking wealth of harmonies and rhythms.” This comment linked the quality of authenticity with “native warmth” and simplicity as compared to ornamentation and elaboration. It defined the validity of the cultural product – and those who produce it – according to its closeness to a “pure” source. This was an interesting modification of the modernizing Western impulse that characterized some race uplift rhetoric and it contrasted with some African American efforts to classicize black American music.

Antillean champions of the biguine were expressing a common human impulse when they felt ethnic pride, nostalgic longing, and physical joy at the sound of the jaunty and intertwining musical tapestry of the biguine. Classical composers had invoked precisely this

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512 See, for example, Robert Walser’s discussion of authenticity in his work, Robert Walser, Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music, Music/Culture (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993); Robert Walser, Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

513 The review was published both in French and English but I’ve re-translated her French version here because the Revue’s translation masks some of the strength of feeling evident in the original. For example the translation gives ‘trahisser’ as ‘to neglect’ rather than ‘to betray.’

514 The intersection of nationalism, ethnicity and music is a complex and fraught one – many ‘nationalist’ composers in the Western classical tradition have been accused of ‘tourist nationalism’ in their music – that is donning local elements like a holiday costume for a local festival – over a frame that remained resolutely classical. Richard Taruskin. "Nationalism." In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://0-
set of human reactions when they began to incorporate folksongs and local sounds in classical compositions to create “nationalism in music.” Chopin’s incorporation of elements of Polish folk tunes in his appropriately named Polonaises was imitated and developed by other composers such as Bartok and Kodaly working with Hungarian folk idioms, Sibelius the Finnish composer, and later the ex-patriate Russian, Stravinsky. Educated Afro Caribbeans in Paris clearly experienced their musical folk idioms as representative of a distinctive cultural identity. There doesn’t, however, seem to have been a move to push for its incorporation and development into classical music and offer a distinctive Afro Caribbean contribution to the High Art tradition. The Nardals and Gisele Dubouillé, instead, showed an impulse to praise the music of their homeland in its “pure” and authentic form. Their writing about the biguine music suggests that this was because the music of their homeland gave them a physical sensation of home as well as fuelling their cultural pride. They didn’t want to jeopardize that experience.

In the conclusion to her 1931 review of recently released black records Gisele Dubouillé expressed a wish that a record company would record a biguine with “more strings in the instrumentation.” The implication is that such a biguine would have the power to conjure up the sights and sounds of the Caribbean Islands themselves – for people who belonged. The strings were defined as authentic components of an Antillean sound and listeners who treasured “the memory of Antillean serenades in the stillness of a starry night” would be transported back to that setting. Similarly, when Paulette Nardal reviewed a new Bal nègre, close to the Metro Glacière, she described how dancers, listeners and performers were “carried away” by the music.
She lamented that some of the female dancers and their partners were dressed in European style because they disrupted the authenticity of the setting and the music.\textsuperscript{515} Her pleasure in the setting was linked with her desire for her homeland which was “not France.” When the ball ended she felt abruptly wrenched back – “brutally returned” – to the soil of France.\textsuperscript{516} The trope of abrupt return after a musical transport is used frequently in relation to the biguine.

Andrée Nardal also identified the biguine – in the form of mechanized records – as an imaginative portal that could carry her away to the Antilles. The transporting power was associated explicitly with an authentic biguine as defined by rhythm, strings, and ensemble playing. After an exegesis on rhythm, ensemble playing and the crude dialect of the lyrics she concludes:

> These folksongs used to remain popular only during the carnival time in the Antilles... but thanks to the phonograph, now-a-days certain ones are being revived such as the biguines formerly played during the delirious Carnival of St. Pierre, the city swallowed up by the volcano Mount Pelée. The romance of the guitars and mandolins, the garrulous “shashas”, the tinkling triangles, the simple accordion of the countryside, the wailing clarinet, the blaring trombone, the staccato of the strings, the muffled beats of the bass-drum (battements assourdis du jazz), transform the dreariest winter day into the dazzling tropical sunshine flooding the palms.\textsuperscript{517}

\textsuperscript{515} Her discussion of the “girls of the tropics” at the ball had just a touch of the exoticizing tone for which her sister critiques Paul Morand and other European authors. Yet the sentiment behind Paulette’s description differed from them as she included herself as a ‘girl from the tropics’ and was clearly nostalgic for her homeland.

\textsuperscript{516} She expressed the same sentiment in another story – a fictional narrative depicting an elderly Martinican woman working as a maid in Paris who daydreams about the drums ‘the soul of Old Africa that passes in the Antillean tambam.’ At the end of the story her daydream is “torn” and she is once more back on the streets of Paris. Paulette Nardal, “En Exil,” La Dépêche africaine, December 15 1929. Edwards discusses this story and Sharpley-Whiting included a translation in the appendix to her work on Nègritude women, Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora, 146-147; Sharpley-Whiting, Nègritude Women.

\textsuperscript{517} Andrée Nardal, « Etude sur la Biguine Créole/Notes on the Biguine Créole (folk dance), » “La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World,” 123.
Andrée Nardal clearly felt that the musical style evoked a very specific sense of place. That effect was due to the distinctive musical elements and instrumentation of the authentic biguine – an emphasis on rhythm, the use of the shakers, the role of the clarinet, and the presence of the strings. The biguine was thus musically distinctive from jazz and that musical distinction was claimed as a social and cultural source of distinctiveness by the black Caribbean community in Paris who saw it as more refined, authentic, and characteristic of the Creole spirit than the contrasting popular black musical style, jazz.

To record or not to record: commercializing the homeland?

Andrée Nardal’s positive reaction to mechanization placed her on the cutting edge of a debate that still rages. Recording technology was one aspect of modern civilization that was developing rapidly in the nineteen-twenties and expanding in commercial scope and social impact. The role of mechanization in making a recording available for mass circulation had an explosive effect on the jazz industry. In America the positive impact of this historical development upon an African American sense of cultural identity is well-known. Mass commodification of songs and musical performances was not to everyone’s taste, however.

Theodor Adorno’s critique is probably the best known example of the skeptical assessment that

518 Joelle Neulander discusses the implications of the rise of recorded music for French national identity and examines how music and songs were utilised to characterize the colonies and France’s relationship to Greater France in Joelle Neulander, Programming National Identity: The Culture of Radio in 1930s France (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009). She doesn’t however, examine how radio music dealt with jazz or how the French subjects portrayed in those colonial programs felt about the way their music was portrayed or how radio and commercial recordings might have been used, as the Nardals did, to generate other French identities than that prescribed by the national radio program.

519 Joel Dinerstein’s work address this, and other aspects of the intersection between society, mechanization, and music in interwar America, Joel Dinerstein, Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).
the mass commodification of music diminished both the quality of any given musical product and the agency of the consumer in relation to musical production. Adorno’s cynicism and elitism affected his portrayal of popular recorded music but he did identify the way that commodification affected the production of music and changed the listening experience.

Scholars and fans love the fact that recording technology can preserve music but some lament the fact it commercializes folk music styles while others argue it strips them of their life and their improvisatory ethos and fixes them static in time. The role of mechanization in the distribution of biguine music demonstrates how the play of musical forms and technologies in the social sphere had its own contentious ramifications. Giselle Dubouillé’s discussion of mechanization’s impact upon the musical form was very negative compared to Nardal’s. She singled out the chacha and the triangle as integral elements of the biguine (as Paulette Nardal had earlier) and argued that when they were sacrificed to the technical exigencies of the recording studio much was lost – and nothing was gained:

The ear of the microphone demands the sacrifice of the instinct toward improvisation and orchestral embellishment. Moreover it seems that the drums betray the Antillean rhythms of the biguine in favor of the virtuosic but less flexible rhythms of continental American. Orchestras gain nothing more by this abandonment of the ‘chacha’ and the ‘triangle,’

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520 This is a simplification of Adorno’s quite sophisticated critique. The basic outlines of his thought on popular music, however, were highly cynical although he acknowledged the complexity of jazz, and also its vulnerability to be co-opted into stereotyping racial discourses. For his thought and an an excellent discussion of it see Theodor W. Adorno, Richard D. Leppert, and Susan H. Gillespie, *Essays on Music / Theodor W. Adorno ; Selected, with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Richard Leppert ; New Translations by Susan H. Gillespie* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002).

Gisele Dubouillé appreciated the recorded biguine—her article advised readers to listen to as many as they could. But she lamented the loss of immediacy, and the “native warmth” of the biguine due to the nature of the record player; “a mechanism of pitiless precision.”

In contrast Andrée Nardal celebrated the fact that mechanization preserved the sounds, colors, and festive celebrations of her homeland. “Thanks to the phonograph” the biguine could be enjoyed year round not only during the delirious days of Carnivale.522 The clash in these attitudes is related to an ideal of authenticity that posited authenticity as linked to an unchanging and original musical production that was also (and contradictorily) improvisatory and unconfined by classical music notation in actual performance. This construct of authenticity was complicated by the invention of new recording technologies. Listeners still debate the value of attending a concert in the flesh versus listening to the sanitized studio-recorded version. With regard to the biguine the debate referenced not only the listener’s pleasure but also cultural importance. The biguine lost something in being recorded by a “pitiless” machine and yet at the same time this ensured survival—in some form—and guaranteed that homesick listeners could hear their music as long as they had access to a record player and a recording of the biguine.

The issue of commodification and the mechanization of the biguine was linked to political agency in France. It raised the possibility that record buyers—consumers of any race or class—might exercise a colonizing possession of Antillean music through the mere possession of a record. Brent Edwards argued, for example, that the Nardal sisters created a “rendering of

522 Andrée Nardal, « Etude sur la Biguine, » "La Revue Du Monde Noir = the Review of the Black World." p. 123. Jazz could also be enjoyed on a daily basis, both in clubs live, and in numerous recordings. Hence Giselle Dubouillé’s slightly bitter observation in her review of disks that recording of ‘purely African’ music, and that of the biguine she reviewed was a welcome addition to the many jazz recordings available at the time.
migration, longing, music, and gender identity” through a series of rhetorical moves. He contrasted their rhetoric with a commercial promotion by Odéon records that claimed anyone listening to a record of the biguine would experience the same “transporting” effect. In their 1930 catalogue Odéon printed a description of a recording inspired by the “powerful and sweet blacks left in France by the war.” It proclaimed that these men and women not only retained a nostalgia for their homeland but had communicated it “to us!” The promotional literature promised that the record of Antillean music would help listeners “make that beautiful long voyage in their dreams, [or] in one of the black popular dance halls which have recently been so much in vogue, and which are indeed so curious.” The piece closed with an injunction to “close your eyes and spin the record.”

As Edwards has pointed out there is an interesting appropriation of colonial nostalgia going on here by way of the consumer product – the record. The material product symbolically grants nostalgic affiliation to the metropolitan French subject who may have never, and may never see any part of France d’Outre mer: “it links the listener’s possession of the object to France’s possession of the colonies.” The colonial exposition had shades of a similar attitude – for the price of a ticket the “wonders” of the French colonies “could be yours.” Edwards suggested that the Nardal sisters wrote their assessments of Caribbean music against this appropriation, although they may not have read Odéon’s promotional literature. But it is

523 This discussion engages with Edwards’ analysis extensively. I’ve used his translation of the Odeon catalogue piece. Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora, 144-146.
important to push the analysis further than this and acknowledge other aspects of the cultural exchange between colony and métropole.

The biguine was first recorded in Paris and much of the industrial apparatus needed to record music was more available in Paris than in the Caribbean. The consumer demand for the biguine that led to it being recorded was an outcome of the tumulte noir and the heightened interest in Francophone black music following the “discovery” of the Bal nègre. The Colonial Exposition featured Caribbean culture in multiple concerts and performances and further heightened the popularity of the musical style. The popularity of the biguine in Paris then led to records of it becoming available back in Martinique and Guadeloupe which, in turn, laid the foundation for the resurgence in its popularity in the 1960s. This historical trajectory of one type of cultural production demonstrates that the relationship between métropole and colony was never one in which the cultural movement was from center to periphery. And despite the commodification of the music of the Antilles the process of recording, marketing, and listening was never just one of appropriation. However the question of what happened to the country of origin in memory when envisioning it from a distance remains. When a Martinican living in Paris replayed the vibrant sounds of the recorded biguine for the hundredth time while imagining his or her homeland did this compromise and concretize the actual place into a sentimental cluster of feelings and memories? Or did it serve to foster a tangible link between Francophone Caribbeans and their homeland and reinforce their complicated cultural identification as both French and Antillean.
Two further aspects of this interaction between recorded music, *métropole*, and colonial identification deserve exploration. The first is the intimacy with which the Nardal sisters write about music and place. This grounded their reactions and distinguishes them from casual consumers of a touristic nostalgia. It legitimates their claim to “feel” their homeland in the music in a way that the French of the *Hexagone* could not.\(^{525}\) They displayed a masterful understanding of the musical characteristics that make the biguine Antillean – a subtlety that French born French subjects often missed and confused with elements of jazz. When Marcel Pays, a young and curious reporter, visited the *Bal nègre* he described the music he heard as “music of the blacks,” played by a “jazz band without ambition.”\(^{526}\) At that stage, however, the resident band was led by the Afro Caribbean Rézard des Vouves and played distinctively Caribbean music – beguines, and Martinican/Guadeloupean quadrilles, and mazurkas.\(^{527}\) The distinctively Antillean music and the accompanying dances were major draw cards for the black colonial subjects living in the *métropole* who attended. Marcel Pays was clearly surprised to see the “shasha” or shaker which was not part of the standard jazz instrumentation. Yet he still defined the music as jazz and lumped it into a general category of black music. His act of conflation, representative of many white French general audiences, differentiated him from the Afro Caribbeans and Africans present and identified him as an outsider.\(^{528}\)

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525 This is an example of what Samuel Floyd describes as the ‘cultural memory’ which he used to judge his own analysis of black music. The Nardals didn’t have his term but I think their musical criticism references exactly the same process as Floyd describes in that he developed his analysis and then checked it against what he “felt” was right in what he was saying about the music, given his personal familiarity with folk tales, spirituals and black culture. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 4, 7-8.


528 This conflation, of course, was also something the Nardals and their colleagues were eager to correct.
The second point that requires further discussion is the women’s claim to physically remember. The lived experience of growing up in the physical space of the Caribbean Islands is important here – the music facilitates sensory memory just as the taste of a madeleine might in Proust. This difference in lived experience betrays a rupture, an irrevocable and unbridgeable gap between the France-born French subject’s imaginative identification with the Caribbean and that of a man or woman who had been brought up there. The Nardal sisters and Gisele Dubouillé thus refuted the historical formulation according to which the French state had characterized France d’Outre Mer as an extension of the métropole. Their reactions to music demonstrate that the cultural products flooding into the métropole from the French Caribbean were unique and so reminiscent of a terroire completely and utterly distinct from France that the music transported an inside listener back home. When it stopped these women, and listeners like them, felt “wrenched” back to the soil of France. This argument also applies to the experiences of men and women raised in other French colonies. It therefore has wider implications for the notion of a unitary French identity and exposes the falsity of the claim that overseas French territories were part of the métropole and would become culturally or ethnically indivisible from it through the process of colonization.

Of course the ideological position that the French colonies were merely an extension of the Republic was always already compromised from the inception of the idea of the French nation. The identification of Caribbean-born French as Créoles and the complicated identity of the pieds-noirs of North Africa testify to that. France d’outre-mer always bore a complicated relationship to metropolitan France. French colonists, bureaucrats and leaders frequently debated how to manage the relationships between France and her various colonies (and few questioned
whether it could be done purely from the top down by government decision). The resulting debate over “association versus assimilation” never referenced a purely oppositional pair of stances. The controversial French project of assimilation was and is irrevocably compromised when it attempts to assimilate colonial others to a Western European vision of French identity. In each account of the biguine’s nostalgic pull – whether produced by Odéon to commodify colonial nostalgia, by the Nardals to counter such commodification, or by Marcel Pays who describes the “poignant nostalgia” of black music – the space between the métropole and Martinique requires a bridge. The cultural product thus signifies difference and distance and the inherent failure of assimilation and integration.

The way the Nardal sisters and Gisele Dubouillé wrote about Antillean dance and music shows that they felt a sense of difference between French people born in France and themselves. Educated Martinicans and Guadeloupeans have often been depicted as more invested in the French Republican promise, French citizenship, and the colonial enterprise than other Francophone diasporic groups and they have also been described as more closely assimilated (and assimilable) than other groups. In 1928, however, Paulette Nardal argued that the assimilationist policy and rhetoric had had a stifling effect on Afro Caribbean literature. If this comment is cross-referenced with their attitudes toward the biguine it is clear that the Nardal sisters were actively involved in presenting themselves as complete and civilized French citizens.

530 This has been painfully evident in recent years in bitter debates over the right to wear the veil in public, how immigration from former colonies should be managed, and in ethnic tensions which erupted into rioting in the banlieues.
531 See the brief discussion of these differences in the introduction to Dewitte, Les Mouvements Nègres.
532 Mentioned in Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora, 124.
who were nevertheless inextricably and intimately linked to their Caribbean homeland. The intimacy of their bond with the physical land of their birth is conveyed by the transporting effect of the physical experience of listening to music originating there. This was not assimilation in any way, shape, or form.

Antillean music flourished alongside a diverse range of black Francophone, Black American and white French musical forms during the nineteen-twenties. Elements of some of them were fused into a new and exciting hybrid forms and even modifications of jazz but the authentic or “true” styles flourished as well. The Nardals and Dubouillé resisted musical hybridization when it came to the biguine. They seemed determined that the authentic biguine remain alive and unassimilated into the French cultural melting pot. This is ironic because, as discussed in previous chapters, they simultaneously tried to combat perceptions of exotic colonial women that portrayed them as primitive, unchanging and unchanged vis a vis history and the modern world. Jane Nardal was excited that Josephine Baker, for all the faults of her representation of women of color, brought the “exotic feminine” into the machine age. But she was not so eager for the music of her homeland to be adapted through its migration into the dynamic musical world of the French capital.

Her sisters echoed her appreciation of the “pure” biguine which suggests that these women, like many ethnically diverse inhabitants of Paris engaged in a complex process through which they claimed to be part of France, and yet carved out a special place in relation to French capital.

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533 The trade journals Jazz-Tango, and Ballroom and Band report on various bands and often identify them playing a mix of Tango, French, Jazz, or Biguine/Antillean. See also the discussions on the beguine in Berliner, Ambivalent Desire, 207-210; Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora, 173; Jackson, Making Jazz French.

national identity. Ultimately the import of these discussions and commentaries on nostalgia, place and the biguine show that the post-revolutionary myth of French universalism and racial blindness was never a true reflection of historical conditions in the “imperial-nation state.” The biguine was just one of many socio-ethnic cultural expressions that jostled together in the cosmopolitan cultural capital that was interwar Paris and reflected the diversity that seethed under the mythical umbrella of liberté, égalité, fraternité.

Dance, race and urban spaces in Paris

The biguine was most often performed and danced at the bals coloniales or black dance halls, in Paris which were originally created to serve the black French community in the métropole. The idea that dance halls function as a terrain upon which cultural battles are waged identifies them as performance geographies. A dancehall’s layout and the interactions that occur in it “reveal spatial categories, philosophies, and systems.” They are therefore performance geographies because they reveal “how people living in particular locations give those locations identity through performances.” Analyzing a performance geography requires “a mapping of the locations used, the types and systems of use, the politics of their location in relation to other sites and other practices, the character of events/rituals in particular locations, and the manner in which different performances/performers relate to each other within and across different cultures.”

they were more than just places of leisure and relaxation. They were political and culturally significant and the biguine was an important component of that significance.\textsuperscript{537}

The \textit{Bal nègre} in the Rue Blomet is a critical site for understanding how black French colonial subjects articulated cultural and ethnic distinctions through dance and music practices. It was host to a set of “types and systems of use” that were linked to ethnic identifications among black French living in Paris. It was an accessible urban location that “linked dance and dancers to other sites and other practices” and that facilitated group connectedness and political involvement. The character of events and rituals in the black dancehalls were distinctive. They were a microcosm of how men and women of a variety of different ethnic origins and socio-economic groups related to each other “within and across different cultures.”\textsuperscript{538} The relationships that ensued between black Francophone colonial subjects coming together to dance and a growing trickle of white French Parisians who came out of curiosity meant that cultural practices became politicized upon that site.

This dance hall had evolved out of a series of political meetings that the Martinican Jean Rèzard de Vouves held to promote his candidacy for the Chamber of Deputies.\textsuperscript{539} The campaign events turned into impromptu dances and by 1924 the situation was formalized and the clientele expanded to include all \textit{sujets noirs} living in or visiting Paris. The dance hall subsequently became a great success. As the decade wore on, however, the “snobs” or intellectual and artistic

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\textsuperscript{537} This is still true. I lived in Montmartre between 2006 and 2007. At the corner of rue Lepic and the Boulevard de Clichy was a dance club that was clearly a black dance space, and very popular. Conversely the Moulin Rouge always had a huge queue of white tourists outside.
\textsuperscript{538} Niaah, ”Mapping Black Atlantic Performance Geographies : From Slave Ship to Ghetto,” 194.
\textsuperscript{539} Brett Berliner has a good account of this in Berliner, \textit{Ambivalent Desire}, 206.
avant-garde and their high society following discovered it and it became a lure to wealthy white Parisians and tourists (just as happened in Harlem a little earlier).\textsuperscript{540} The reporter Marcel Pays discovered it after receiving a tip-off from a Scandinavian painter and a Russian artist sitting next to him at a café table in Montparnasse.\textsuperscript{541} Pays’ conflation of jazz and Antillean music has been mentioned above, as has his adoption of the Parisian habit of likening every diasporic black female in Paris to Josephine Baker. His foray into the world of the \textit{Bal colonial} was typical of many white nightlife adventurers at the time. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, attended and described the scene at the \textit{bal}. Her piece is a literate, articulate and yet ultimately objectifying comment on black Francophone colonial subjects in which she drew clear distinctions between the “animalism” of black people and the “rigidity” of white French women.

On Sunday evening, we relinquished the bitter elegance of skepticism, and thrilled to the splendid animalism of the \textit{Noirs} of the rue Blomet... In this era [late nineteen-thirties], very few white French women mixed amongst the black crowd; fewer still ventured onto the dance floor: confronted with supple Africans, with rippling Antillais, their rigidity was pathetic; if they attempted to abandon it, they made themselves look like hysterics in a trance... the noise, the smoke, the fumes of alcohol, the violent rhythms of the orchestra numbed me; through the haze I saw beautiful happy faces passing.\textsuperscript{542}

Hysteria, black people, frenzy, animal associations, the vital role of music, the presence of alcohol – all the usual signifiers for jazz operating in the journalistic and literary discourses of interwar Paris are at work here.

\textsuperscript{541} Marcel Pays, “Un Bal Negre,” \textit{Information}, 23 July 1928.
Most analyses of interwar France have examined accounts like these in order to discuss the place the *Bal nègre* occupied in the white French imagination. Brett Berliner, for example, explained the fascinated ambivalence Europeans felt for the “exotic other” as represented by the *noirs* dancing there. It is worth turning the story around and commenting upon the ambivalence the black diasporans felt as they saw a white crowd entering their cultural space. *Crapouillot*, a popular satirical magazine commented on its too-great popularity in 1931, noting that trendsetters such as Jean Cocteau, and the “jaded of the Foubourg Saint Germain” had discovered this spot, “where blacks of all classes gathered to dance amongst themselves to the sound of jazz and the shakers.”

The satiric article then suggested that the *Bal nègre* had lost its novelty factor and now pleasure seekers might have to turn to the dives of Saint-Denis and get their thrills from watching North Africans compete for the attentions of “beauties of the night.” The implication that North Africans were a level further down from Africans and Afro Carribbeans in terms of “slumming it for excitement” suggests that even on this popular level the French were anything but color-blind and their perceptions of racial and ethnic difference were both prejudiced and nuanced.

The report in *Crapouillot* indicates the extent to which, by the late 1920s, the *Bal nègre* had become an open secret and risked being reduced to a sightseeing stop on a literary “must-do in Paris” itinerary. De Beauvoir was one of numerous white curiosity seekers who eventually caused many of the “rippling Antillais,” and “supple Africans” to flee the *Bal nègre*. The men

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and women who had created and developed the space were less than happy when they saw it filling up with white (and black) men and women who were there in part to “enjoy the show” rather than participate as insiders. Black French colonial subjects, however, created new performance geographies in response to this development.

By 1928 Afro-Caribbeans had become disaffected with the commercialization and acculturation of the dance hall in the Rue Blomet as the number of curious white patrons visiting it increased. The new Bal colonial in the rue Auguste-Blanqui, close to the metro Glacière, in the 15th arrondissement was one response to their discontent. Patrons attending this ball reportedly had to show their blue cards – cards issued by the foyer colonial to gain entry.\footnote{Léardée, Meunier, and Léardée, La Biguine De L'oncle Ben's : Ernest Léardée Raconte, 146.} Paulette Nardal reviewed it for the Dépêche Africaine. From the outset her impressions were positive. The venue was “huge and congenial” and she warmed to the sound of “a black orchestra… playing a biguine to wake the dead.”\footnote{Paulette Nardal, “le Nouveau Bal Nègre de la Glacière,”} Even the bare wooden walls and massive unclad girders didn’t dampen Nardal’s enthusiasm – they simply added to the authenticity of the space by recalling the constructions Antillais of her homeland. Nardal declared that, in this setting, les noirs se sentent bien chez eux, – black people could feel at home. The performance geography thus functioned as a space for the expression of a Francophone yet pan-African identity.

Nardal’s piece is full of comparisons between a black way of doing things and a European and/or jazz orientation.\footnote{The quotations in the following paragraph are all from Paulette Nardal, “le Nouveau Bal Nègre de la Glacière.”} After stating that “blacks feel at home,” at this new bal for example, she explained this was partly because “there is no shocking contrast, as there is in other
dancings, between their kind and a violently European setting.” Nothing in this room reminded her of France, except for “some rare Parisians, lost in a crowd of coloured people.” She claimed to share these sentiments with the diverse mix of Antillais, Guyannais, Africans, even Ethiopians of all classes who mingled at the ball in a common desire to experience some of the atmosphere of their respective countries. But their homelands were not one and the same nor did the Nardals identify wholly as pan-African. Francophone colonial subjects traced their differences as well as their similarities in slow and languorous patterns on the dance floor.

The physical location of the dance hall reflected the raced nature of Parisian urban space – both the dancehalls discussed above were located in somewhat marginal locations within the interwar Parisian urban environment. The bal at the rue Blomet was in the fifteenth arrondissement well away from the more fashionable haunts of Montparnasse and the Champs Elysée, or even Montmartre which was strongly associated with les noirs d’Amérique. The Bal glacière was in the thirteenth arrondissement and far enough from the popular haunts of Montparnasse to require patrons to actively seek it out. It wasn’t on the habitual nightclub route nor was it in a fashionable living area. This aspect of their physical location reflected further some of the differences among patrons at the bals and it also reflected some of the political aspects of black Francophone music-making as the interwar era progressed.

Paris was then, and still is today, arranged in a snail-like set of concentric circles of arrondissements or city areas. These are numbered from one to twenty and each arrondissement is divided into four quartiers. The first arrondissement contains the Louvre and is the historic

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548 More work needs to be done on French African responses to the bal.
heart of Paris – the *Île de la Cité*. The *arrondissements* spinning out from it and numbered consecutively on the inner concentric circle are among the most prestigious in Paris (along with some outer arrondissements to the West.) The fifth is a slight exception in that it hosts many students of the Sorbonne, and the third and fourth *arrondissements* have pockets of eclecticism still left but by and large the closer to the centre or the further West one lives the better standing one has in terms of class, social status and usually wealth. Conversely the *arrondissements* further from the center and toward the East have a more mixed character and population. The South East *arrondissements* (the twelfth and the thirteenth) are the most industrialized, concrete and grey parts of the city. The bureaucratic urban divisions are overlaid upon and reflect a socio-economic and ethnic series of divisions.

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549 That is *arrondissements* one through eight and sixteen and seventeen. These are largely inhabited by higher income and higher status individuals, exclusive and expensive hotels and wealthy families.
In the interwar period the socio-ethnic makeup of the city was under increasing scrutiny by the police and thus the performance geographies of the *bals* discussed above were situated within a wider set of spatial realities that related to perceptions of race. The surveillance files kept on foreign workers tracked where they lived, and where they were most numerous. They record that the *arrondissements* with the largest population of “foreign workers” or *étangers* in 1925 were the fourth, the tenth, the eleventh, and the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth – that is the North East segments of the Parisian snailshell. Of these the eighteenth and nineteenth *arrondissements* had the highest number of immigrants receiving aid from the French state. The

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551 « La main d’oeuvre étrangère dans la region Parisienne », 1925, dossier 331-500c, Série B/a 2247, APP, Paris, France.
state intervened in this urban situation by carrying out “hygiene sweeps” which, according to police reports, resulted in the infection and disease levels in these areas becoming “a little closer to those of arrondissements less inhabited by étrangers.” These less prestigious – thus more affordable – arrondissements tended to be crowded but that was a function of economics rather than the ethnic origin of the inhabitants. And yet the clear association here between immigrants and poor hygiene practices resulted in ethnic stereotyping.

Concerns operating at the intersection of place and race had surfaced before but in the aftermath of World War One they became more clearly articulated and more acute. A diligent Préfet de police suggested to the Ministère de travail that if it were necessary to retain a large number of foreign workers in France after the war it was vital that they were kept under strict observation and discipline because otherwise such “foreign workers and colonial subjects” would quickly lapse into irregular work and an indolent existence which would threaten public order and safety. The Préfet de la police treated colonial workers as a broad group in this advisory to the Minister of Labor although stereotyping was applied more to North Africans and

552 « peu près semblables à ceux des arondissements moins peuplés en étrangers, » « La main d’œuvre étrangère dans la région Parisienne », 1925, dossier 331-500c, Série B/a 2247, APP, Paris, France.
553 These were, of course, intertwined as a result of labor restrictions and poor wages experienced by immigrants.
555 « j’estime, en effet, que, s’il est nécessaire de conserver en France une main d’œuvre nombreuse, il convient de ne jamais perdre de vue le souci d’une discipline assez rigoureuse: les travailleurs étrangers et coloniaux seraient vite enclins à ne travailler que très irrégulièrement et à vivre dans une sorte de demi-oisiveté – dangereuse évidemment pour le bon ordre dans le département de la Seine. » « Le Préfet de police à ministère de travail. » 7 juin 1918, dossier 331-500, B/a 2247, APP, Paris, France.
Russians, Poles and other Eastern Europeans than the Sub-Saharan, West Africans, or the Antilleans because they were more numerous in Paris at the time.

Ironically the Governor of Algeria was concerned that the urban vices of Paris were corrupting North Africans rather than vice versa. He expressed his concern that Algerians living and working in Paris were being corrupted by *étalissements louches de la capitale*, or “seedy establishments in the Capital” where instead of getting a meal they were being tempted into gambling. The governor notes this phenomenon was particularly frequent in the thirteenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth arrondissements – again areas closer to the boundaries of Paris proper where wealthy Parisians and American tourists were unlikely to spend much time. His concern, copied in triplicate and placed in the relevant police files, underlined the intersection between racial perceptions, immigration and daily life in the métropole. Black Francophone performance geographies were mapped onto this socio-ethnic urban grid.

The intersections between race and space are even more apparent when one considers various political hotspots for the colonial communities in Paris. Black, North African, and anti-colonial groups conducted their activities largely within the “problem” arrondissements defined by the police in the reports discussed above – the fourth, tenth, eleventh, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth – and to a lesser extent the “shady establishments” of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth. African and Antillean subjects liaised with North Africans but the blacks and the North Africans formed different organizations although they ran events in the same key areas. The *Etoile Nord-Africain* (the major political group run by and for North Africans) had an office in

the fourteenth. The *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre* had offices in the eighteenth, and then a splinter group moved to an office in the eleventh.

On the 27 January, 1931, a tactical meeting held to try and agree upon the best methods to attract “blacks in the Paris region” took place in the fourteenth *arrondissement* at 33 rue Denfert-Rochereau.\footnote{Police Report, “Le 28 Janvier 1931.” Discusses a meeting held at 33 rue Denfert-Rochereau, 27 Jan 1931, dossier Ass. 802, APP, Paris, France.} This position was well chosen as it perched on the border of *arrondissements* five and six which held many of the student members who had travelled into the *métropole* to study. It was close to the foyer for *ex-tirailleurs* (in the thirteenth arrondissement close to the *périphérique* or city border) which housed up to five hundred *tirailleurs* on leave per year.\footnote{Dewitte, *Les Mouvements Nègres*, 28.} The *Bal glacière* was in the same area, close to the *foyer*, and no doubt capitalized upon the proximity of these colonial soldiers on leave. Most of the events organized by the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre*, and the black francophone movements that succeeded it took place in these immigrant and working class *arrondissements*. This was particularly true of the events organized by the black workers’ unions and the socialist groups who tended to have a heavier representation of Sub-Saharan and West Africans, and took on the responsibility for representing disaffected *tirailleurs* after the war.

The *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre* was one of about sixty associations inspired by or associated with the *Ligue Contre Impérialisme et l’Oppression Coloniale* including the *Etoile Nord-Africaine*, the *Union des Travailleurs Nègre*, and l’*Association d’entr’Aide et de Culture*
The black Francophone groups in the capital were therefore linked with the Malgache, Indonesian and North African population through the LCIOC which also counted Upton Sinclair, Diego Rivera, Ho Ch Minh (then known as Nguyễn Ái Quôc), and Jawaharlal Nehru, in its leadership. The group’s influence was widespread and was instrumental in protests against the Colonial Exposition of 1931. As an umbrella organization it determined some of the performance geographies at work in the capital because it supplied money and publicity to the groups and to support their events. Their meetings regularly attracted several hundred attendees.

Here it is useful to turn again to Niaah’s analysis which argues that African music became subject to surveillance and restriction in its translation and transformation across the Atlantic. She focuses on the African American blues, South African Kwaito, and Jamaican Dancehall to illustrate her argument and described how the music-making of enslaved performers on Sunday afternoons in New Orleans was subject to supervision by the local authorities. She demonstrates that the same practices of supervision, segregation, police raids and shut-downs were imposed upon spaces in which the blues were performed. She then discusses the adaptations made by blues performers and consumers arguing that “the constant movement of bodies, music and performers within these multiple, informal, organic spaces (juke joints, streets, cities) was an imperative produced by the condition of oppression. Even as the spaces

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559 Also the Comité de Défence des Libertés Syndicales et de Presse en Syrie, the Comité de l’Aide pour les Victimes de la Misère et de la Répression en Tunisie, and others. See the lengthy report on the Ligue contre l’Impérialisme et l’Oppression Coloniale, compiled April 1933, dossier 5250, Série B/a 1912, APP. It describes the Berlin conference and lists affiliated Parisian members, associations, and leaders of those associations. See also Paris, « Note pour monsieur le directeur des renseignements généraux, » 11 janvier 1936, in the same dossier. That letter, dated Paris 18 Mai, 1936, details the local ‘arabe, chinois, indo-chinoise and japonais’ sections. Also mentions l’Union des Travailleurs Nègres as well as the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre.
were policed, performers defied the legal restrictions and continually produced new ways of maintain black cultural integrity.\textsuperscript{560}

Niaah argues that a similar set of influences and impulses characterized \textit{Kwaito}, the blues, and the Jamaican music and dance practice known as dancehall. She argues that each of these musical styles emerged at a time of political volatility and expressed the intent of a generation to distinguish themselves from the musical traditions and political dominance of traditional colonial powers (although Kwaito simultaneously defined itself as apolitical in some ways). Both Kwaito and dancehall took place in marginalized spaces that were subject to police surveillance and shutdown. Both of these, like the blues and the Antillean music played in interwar Paris, trace their musical origins back to Africa. Furthermore the “shebeens” that became the site of Kwaito performance and dance in South Africa, like the Jamaican Dancehalls, served as “social institutions that build a sense of community and group identity- they formed a cultural geography cutting across class but shaped by blacks.”\textsuperscript{561}

The \textit{bals nègres} functioned in exactly the same way in interwar Paris. The \textit{bals} were also subject to police and state surveillance that was predicated upon fears generated by perceived racial difference within the colonial relationship. The occasional political fundraisers and balls that became a persistent feature of black political social and community life in the French \textit{métropole} were particularly prone to surveillance. Although Sonjah Niaah doesn’t consider Paris in her analysis it is evident from this discussion that the transatlantic process she describes in

\textsuperscript{560} Niaah goes into detail here on fake “dance classes” which disguised mixed race dance establishments, but also police raids on “jook joints,” urban blues venues and other performance spaces. Niaah, "Mapping Black Atlantic Performance Geographies: From Slave Ship to Ghetto," 199-201.

\textsuperscript{561} Niaah, "Mapping Black Atlantic Performance Geographies: From Slave Ship to Ghetto," 207.
regard to American, Jamaican and South African performance geographies also characterized black dance practices in interwar Paris.

The differing levels of threat ascribed to different music-making practices, venues, and events in interwar Paris revealed the contrast in black American and black Francophone experiences in the French métropole. Police roamed and raided Montmartre in search of gang activities, theft, and violence but they were not there to spy on black American entertainers and their audiences nor to try and vet the jazz venues for political insurgency. In fact they often stepped in to try and prevent white American violence toward black jazz players. The “blackness” of Montmartre was, to a certain extent, an African American contribution to the urban landscape although African-Americans were not the only members of the diaspora who lived there. The nightclubs clustered along the boulevard de Clichy and squeezed, like Bricktop’s, in between the ninth and the eighteenth arrondissement were, however, associated with decadent nightlife and the jazz world. Yet if one continued to walk along the Boulevard de Clichy to the East into the top of the eighteenth arrondissement one would enter an area known

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562 One could be more nuanced here – some jazz clubs were investigated in association with the surveillance of noted communists and surrealists, such as Pierre Unick, or Louis Aragon (They appear frequently in the police files on the *Ligue Contre Imperialisme*, dossier 52502, Série B/a 1912). But jazz itself and even the biguine was not controlled in a systematic fashion as in post-1933 Nazi Germany or Communist Russia where the music itself signified political subversion Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980*, 1st Limelight ed. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1985).

563 They got involved on behalf of fighter pilot and nightclub owner Eugene Bullard, for example, as discussed in Chapter Four, and on behalf of ‘Prince’ Koko Touvalou Houenou in an incident at the Jockey Bar. Bricktop and Haskins, *Bricktop*, 118-119. Bullard’s case also appears in the police arrest records for 1927. Série C/b 33 32 (Arrests Saint-Georges precinct), August 1927, Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Paris, France. See also Lloyd, *Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris*, 80-85.
as Barbes-Rochechouart which had been a low-income housing area for decades. Today it is one of the centers of the black population living within the péripherique and in the interwar period the police had already identified it as a problematic area in part because of the high immigrant population. It is not surprising that the site of the permanent office of the first incarnation of the black activist group the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre was located here.

The proximity to the red light district and its jazz players highlights the contradictions between the experiences of black Americans in Paris and Francophone black inhabitants. There is no record of any of the black entertainers having been involved in the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre or having visited its center of organization. Various performers such as Bricktop and Noble Sissle performed in pan-African cultural settings. Police reports on the black communist dance-fundraisers make the occasional mention of jazz bands (which could actually mean Caribbean bands) featured as part of the entertainment provided. But the connections here are tenuous. It seems that the socio-ethnic political reality on the ground was that the jazz performers of Montmartre and the earnest political activists hosting their meetings on the other side of the arrondissement were distinct not just culturally but politically and spatially.

564 Several of Zola’s novels in the ‘Rougon-Macquart’ series feature characters who reside in this area as it was in the late nineteenth century. In l’Assommoir the unfortunate Gervaise Macquart’s tragic and inevitable slide into poverty and death plays out on the streets of Barbes-Rochechouart. Today walking through the area is vibrant but run down in places and boasts a diverse residential population.

565 See, for example, ‘An Antillean band and some black artists will take the stage/Un orchestra antillais et des artistes noir prêteront leur concours,’ “Fête organise par la Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre,” le Directeur des Renseignements Généraux et des Jeux à M. le Préfet de Police, 3 Avril, 1936, Ass. 802, or the report of a more conventional concert, given to honor the Antilles, in the presence of Gratien Candace, and Blaise Diagne, reported in the Dépêche Africaine, 26 Jan 1929, and also reported upon by the police, at which “les Créoles Jazz band,” performed, see dossier on the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre, Ass. 802, APP, Paris, France.
This further underlines the biggest contrast between these two broad groups. Most African-Americans did not feel drawn to protest French racial practices because they, themselves, did not feel restricted in their movements while they lived in France. If they did they certainly considered the restrictions far less onerous than those operating in America. It is true that in Paris jazz performances and performers were less subject to police surveillance than blues performers were in America. Instead French colonial subjects bore the brunt of the police surveillance of social music-making. Many black Americans only became conscious of the more complicated and darker shadings of French racial thinking in the aftermath of World War Two when anti-colonial campaigns – and the state restriction of them - became much more visible to the general public.  

Maya Angelou, for example, describes her realization of the distinction the French made between her and “Africans from Africa” as a shock and a rupture in her vision of France. The spatial relationships between the two groups described above underscore some differences between them that became increasingly evident over time once these groups had reached a certain numeric presence and social visibility in Paris. The distinctions were part of an overlapping set of cultural practices that collectively worked to mark out perceived socio-ethnic differences among black diasporans in the métropole even as they simultaneously recognized limited connections between the groups.

566 See Stovall’s article on black responses to the Algerian Independence Struggle which analyzes the resulting ruptures and shift in the black American perception of ‘color-blind’ France Stovall, “The Fire This Time: Black American Expatriates and the Algerian War.” Claude McKay had noted the rampant racism in Marseilles in his novel Banjo but his critique had not punctured the black American desire to see France as a promised land of racial equality McKay, Banjo; a Story without a Plot.

Dancing up a political storm: marketing the anti-colonial message at bals de nuit

Jazz venues offered entertainment to international audiences, many of whom were white, whereas the *bals nègres* initially had a much less racially mixed clientele. The fundraising balls by the black anti-colonial groups in particular were events for the colonial community and not subject to outside interference by white bohemians. Occasionally like-minded white surrealist activists such as Pierre Unick did attend, as did white lovers and spouses, and police spies – but wealthy white tourists in search of novelty were unlikely to intrude. A few white anti-colonialists joined members of the black bourgeoisie, black militants and unionists at the large dance events planned by or involving the communist party, the *CGTU*, and the *Ligue contre Imperialisme*. These events, therefore, drew together dissidents of every class, race and ethnic group and also drew attention from the police. They were the most overtly politicized sites of music-making in the French *métropole*.

The police charged with keeping track of subversive black political activities paid particular attention to the large balls and concerts put together by the black, North African, and communist political organizations. The records of their surveillance of these musical events and dance spaces shows that they were the cultural manifestation of political intentions and that they mirrored the socio-ethnic geography of the city. When the *Ligue Contre Impérialisme et l’Oppression Coloniale* planned a *soirée dansante*, for example, the police seriously considered refusing permission because planners sent out 700 invitations and expected 250 people to attend.

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568 For Unick, and Mme. Leo Wanner, amongst others see the reports on the *Ligue contre Imperialisme*, Série B/a 1912, APP, Paris, France.
accept.\textsuperscript{569} This was a very real possibility. Just one year later a crowd of 700 turned up to a combined meeting of the \textit{Ligue contre Imperialisme} and the \textit{Etoile Nord-Africaine}. The police noted that most of the attendees at this event were North African. This reflects the actual proportions of colonial subjects in Paris at the time – there were far more North Africans than any other single group of regionally/racially identified colonial subjects. Whether small or large in number, however, each anti-colonial group won recognition at these balls and dances. These events built community both within their self-selected racial and regional community and beyond. These events also helped spread the anti-colonial word among their target populations.

On the fourth of April, 1936, for example the \textit{Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre} organized a concert to promote their political program. It began at nine in the evening and featured musical items followed by a \textit{Bal de nuit}. An \textit{orchestre Antillais} and a group of unspecified \textit{artistes noir} contributed to the evening.\textsuperscript{570} The \textit{bal} took place at the \textit{hotel des chambres syndicales} (Rue de Lancry) in the tenth arrondissement and the police spy reported that the ball was to support the association’s goal of ‘complete emancipation for the \textit{Race nègre}.’\textsuperscript{571} Here we see race, space, and politics all entwined in a musical event. The orchestra was Antillean and all of the performers were black. The ball was held in a working class area of Paris associated with the immigrant and hygiene concerns outlined above. And the event was hosted by a group who used it to build community but also to promote a political message that bore directly upon the relationship between France and her colonial subjects.

\textsuperscript{569} “\textit{FêteFranco-Arabe, organisée le 1 Décembre a la Salle I.J},” 3 Décembre 1934, Série B/a 1912, APP.
\textsuperscript{570} Report of 25 Mars 1935 describes the plans for this event. It describes the event as being a fundraiser to enable the group to produce more ‘propaganda,’ dossier 79-501-754, Ass. 802, APP.
\textsuperscript{571} « le directeur des renseignements généraux et de jeux à Monsieur le préfet de la Police, » 3 Avril 1935, dossier 79-501-754, Ass. 802, APP.
A year later another fundraising *Bal de nuit* attracted police attention because all of the leaders of the major black and North African organizations attended. It was not a political evening of great import according to the police spy because *aucune discours ‘n’était prononcé* (no speeches were made). Yet it marked the tenth anniversary of the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre* and thus signified an important moment in the life of the black community served by the organization. It showed how different anti-colonial groups in Paris formed a loose but wide ranging alliance within which a variety of different ethnic and socio-economically distinct political groups were included. Emile Fauré, président of the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre* was joined at the ball by Trémoko Kouyaté – also an active member of that *Ligue* but who was there as *fondateur of the Rassemblement Colonial Français*. The police spy present noted that M. Cénac-Thaly, president of the *Comité d’Etudes et d’Action Coloniale* and M. Hanna-Charley, president of the *Comité Victor-Schoelcher* attended. Later in the evening an even bigger fish turned up; “Messali Hadj, political director of *El Ouma*, ex-president of the banned association the *Etoile Nord Africaine* arrived about 11 p.m. saying that he had come from Courbevoie where he attended a meeting of the Algerian militants from that region.”

The presence of Messali Hadj is particularly revealing of the web of alliances between these politically active groups because he headed one of the most organized, effective, well-subscribed and powerful of the anti-colonial groups active in the interwar period. The French government perceived it as such a prominent event that it brought the police into the scene.

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572 This paragraph draws on two different reports of the event one prior to it and the other after it happened. « Correspondance, » 12 Avril, 1937, and « Advisory » 8 Avril, 1937, dossier 79-501-754, Association 802.
threat that its license to meet was revoked and every attempt to re-form the group legally met with considerable police opposition.\textsuperscript{574}

The success of this ball also shows that although the number of active and vocal members of the \textit{Ligue de Défense}, or the \textit{Union des Travailleurs Nègre} was small they were representative of a much larger community. The organizations were well known enough and well-respected within that community to attract hundreds of people to a dance. The fact that the organization had been around for ten years and people were still supportive of it suggests that it had not just an ongoing presence but ongoing relevance. The “widely distributed” advertisements for the dance support this interpretation as they proudly proclaimed the longevity and ongoing activity of the LDRN.\textsuperscript{575} The invitation stressed that the “festive celebration” was in honor of “the only association that has been able to remain fully active for ten consecutive years, always at the forefront of the struggle.”\textsuperscript{576} When people attended the dance they honored the struggle for black rights, black citizenship and against colonial oppression. And this illustrates the fact that cultural practices had a direct bearing on relations of power and political affiliation in the French \textit{métropole}.

The surveillance and restrictions on such events underscores their importance as points of contact and networking among the colonial communities resident in Paris.\textsuperscript{577} Police reports

\textsuperscript{574} See Série B/a 2172, APP. The \textit{Etoile Nord-Africaine} is also discussed by Martin Thomas, and Clifford Rosenberg, Rosenberg, \textit{Policing Paris}; Thomas, \textit{The French Empire between the Wars : Imperialism, Politics and Society}.

\textsuperscript{575} The police dutifully recorded that leaflets promoting the dance had ‘been distributed widely among the blacks of the Paris region.’

\textsuperscript{576} « P.M.A. » 8 Avril 1937, dossier 79-501-754, Ass. 802, APP. The quotation marks are in the original report and indicate the police were quoting directly from publicity material here.

\textsuperscript{577} These dances can be considered as ‘building social capital’ according to Bourdieu’s formulation.
openly refer to the danger of dances becoming a site of anti-colonial agitation and outreach. They described the concert and Bal de nuit organized by the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre in April 1936 as an effort to raise money to produce anti-colonial “propaganda” for distribution.\textsuperscript{578} The préfet de la police had previously alerted the Ministry of the Interior that the group intended to “create a hostile feeling” toward France among the black population of West and Sub-Saharan Africa.\textsuperscript{579} Furthermore the report commented upon the group’s intention to distribute anti-colonial tracts and pamphlets published by the Internationale Syndicale Rouge. Given that the State considered the black political organizations a threat to security it is no wonder police were concerned when these activists had big dance events that drew far higher numbers than a regular meeting and also a wider range of attendees. Regular attendance at meetings of the Union des Travailleurs Nègre, or the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre ranged between ten and fifty members with very exceptional meetings attracting up to one hundred and twenty. Balls, concerts and Soirées artistiques, however, had far higher attendance.\textsuperscript{580} Police noted that at least one hundred and fifty attendees were expected at one of the concerts mentioned above.\textsuperscript{581} The

\textsuperscript{578}Report of 25 Mars, Ass. 802, dossier 79-501-754, Archives de la Préfecture de la Police
\textsuperscript{579} The report added that the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre intended to represent France as a ‘nation spoilatrice de leur terre/ nation despoothing their land’ and recommended that their license to assemble not be renewed. J. Chiappe, « le Préfet de Police à Monsieur le Président du Conseil, Ministre de l’Intérieur (Direction du contrôle et de la Comptabilité – 1er bureau – Associations) » [copie], 25 Août 1930, no dossier noted, Ass. 802, APP.
\textsuperscript{580} These figures drawn from a selection of reports. See, for example, “Correspondance,” le 16 Mars 1927, dossier 79-501-615, Ass. 672, which documents a meeting of the Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre, the precursor and later moderate alternative to the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre, where une trentaine/about thirty people turned up. A very contentious meeting drew 120 adherents of the Ligue ‘of which a dozen were women,’ see “Report,” 9 Mai 1927, which describes the Assemblée Générale of 16 Janvier 1927. See also the untitled report, “Original classé au dossier Lamine Senghor,” 9 November 1927, dossier 79-501-754, Ass. 672, APP for details of a meeting at which only 11 members were present. These are examples of low, high, and moderate attendance figures noted in the police reports.
\textsuperscript{581} My idiomatic paraphrase. The literal French gives ‘d’attirer à une réunion publique déguisée un certain nombre de curieux et d’individus qui n’ont pas été touchées par la propagande anti française des agitateurs panislamistes.’ This is one of several reasons cited by M. le Directeur adjoint, Chef du Services des affaires indigenes Nord
associated fear that the *concert suivi d’un bal* might be a political meeting “in disguise” reinforces the point that the police were scared of the political power of these musical events.

Furthermore the influence of the dance meetings was intensified by the fact that they attracted a far higher ratio of women than regular political meetings. There were some women involved in the *Union des Travailleurs Nègre*. Women were welcome and a few were active in the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre*. Mme. Leo Wanner was a prominent and formidable figure in the *LCIOC* and several associated groups targeting the North African population.

However the pattern of migration into the *métropole* in the interwar period shows a concentration of male immigrants from the colonies and this gender ratio was borne out in the attendance figures for political meetings.\(^{582}\) At the *bals*, however, women were both welcomed and in demand. They were given incentives to go, such as ticket prices which “followed sex” and were lower for women than men.\(^{583}\) Unfortunately the police files for the large political balls do not record the gender ratios. Eyewitness reports of the *bals* in the Rue Blomet and Glacière cited above indicate that the number of women was equal to men on any given evening. Marcel Pays notes that about fifty couples (heterosexual) were dancing at the *bal* in the Rue Blomet the night

\(^{582}\) See *Série B/a 1912*, and Ass. 802, APP. The most well-attended meeting of the *LDRN*, as noted above, was attended by 120 people, of whom ‘about twelve’ were women. The meeting with fewest attendees included eleven black men and ‘*une femme blanche*’ – Mme Koddo-Kossoul, the wife of one of the leaders. See note 583 above for the reports of these meetings.

\(^{583}\) ‘*Le prix des cartes, prises à l’avance, est fixé à 8 francs et six francs suivant le sexe.*’ This rose to ten francs and eight francs at the door. « *P.M.A.,* » 8 Avril 1937, dossier 79-501-754, Ass. 802, APP. The price differential might reflect prevailing gender norms regarding women’s employment – women’s tickets were priced as student/senior tickets might be today, to reflect lower incomes.
he attended and Paulette Nardal’s review of the Bal glacière mentions the large numbers – and the variety – of women present.\textsuperscript{584} Photographs of the ball published in photographer Brassai’s exposé of the little known “dark” nightlife of Paris indicates that women did attend the balls in significant numbers.\textsuperscript{585} It is therefore likely that the proportion of women at the political fundraising dances was far higher than the ten percent who made it to the regular meetings. Dance events thus served as a form of political outreach to women and engaged a wider set of social networks than political and unionist circles could usually reach.

The point is reinforced by a more detailed look at the gender dynamics of these organizations in which women were very under-represented at the leadership level.\textsuperscript{586} The Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre published advertisements that appealed for female and male members. The language of the advertisements however betrayed some gendered assumptions in the call to “Blacks of the world! To women! To men of thought! Of action and labor!”\textsuperscript{587} The constitution of both this group and the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre (which succeeded it) stated that they welcomed women members. Yet one of the few women to hold office in either group was the wife of one of the male leaders, Mme. Kouyaté, and she was subject to strong


\textsuperscript{585} Brassai, \textit{The Secret Paris of the 30’s}.


criticism. The balls, in contrast to the formal meetings, were a safe space in which women could demonstrate political solidarity with the anti-colonial viewpoint without exposing themselves to the type of critique that Mme Kouyaté experienced. A ball served as a nebulous space between the perceived separation of public and private spheres. It thus becomes a space rich with possibility for female involvement in the political actions that at this time, in the anti-colonial groups, were usually initiated by men.

Although mechanisms of gender exclusion seem to have been operating in the formal leadership structures of these organizations the informal events such as balls and concerts did serve both male and female populations. It is possible that these social events also served as a gateway for women into a more active role in the movements. Paulette Nardal one of the few women for whom we have extensive documentation both in print sources and in the occasional police report. Her career showed a chronological development from an early involvement in the literary and cultural activities of the black Francophone Caribbean population living in Paris to more active campaigning – first on behalf of Ethiopia following Mussolini’s invasion – and then in the post-war Antillean pride and Négritude movements of the 1950s. Nardal’s trajectory supports the contention outlined above that the balls may have drawn women into greater involvement with the anti-colonial cause than the purely political meetings.

588 Untitled report, « Original classé au dossier Lamine Senghor » 9 November 1927, dossier 79-501-754, Ass. 802, APP. This report mentions that Mme. Koddo-Kossoul gave a ‘compte rendu moral et financier de la Ligue’ at the meeting.
589 Jennifer Boittin’s pioneering work on Paulette Nardal builds upon that of Sharpley-Whiting and Brent Hayes Edwards and their contributions to understanding the impact of the Nardal sisters on the Nègritude movement has been expanded by Emily Musil’s recent dissertation. Boittin, "In Black and White: Gender, Race Relations, and the Nardal Sisters in Interwar Paris."; Jennifer Anne Boittin, Colonial Metropolis : The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris, France Overseas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Edwards, The Practice of Diaspora; Musil, “La Marianne Noir”; Sharpley-Whiting, Nègritude Women.
Concluding Case Study: The Ethiopia Protests

The connections outlined above between cultural events, ethnic and racial identification, and anti-colonial activism were intensified and encapsulated in response to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (then Abyssinia).\(^{590}\) It serves as a case study of how political protest, popular music, and pan-African anti-colonialism became intertwined in the interwar era. As early as 1930 the Italians had built a military fort encroaching upon Ethiopian territory at Walwal and a skirmish erupted there in December 1934 between Italian and Ethiopian troops.\(^{591}\) Several attempts at arbitration between the two nations subsequently failed with Ethiopia declaring (correctly) that Italy was making aggressive moves toward invasion. These events were watched with great interest in Paris. In July 1935 the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre* had an extraordinary meeting to discuss the situation. This was nearly three months prior to the official invasion by Italy and the resultant declaration of war by Emperor Haile Selassie but several members of the *Ligue* signed up ready to volunteer on behalf of the Ethiopians. These eager volunteers predicted that the French state would intervene with their intentions and it seems they were right - the police spy dutifully recorded the name of each volunteer and his address.\(^{592}\) However political

\(^{590}\) This development gave added impetus to the loose anti-colonial coalition that was an example of a ‘transnational issue network’ as defined by Cooper and Brubaker: ‘Such networks necessarily cross cultural as well as state boundaries and link particular places and particularistic claims to wider concerns. To take one instance, the anti-apartheid movement brought together South African political organizations that were themselves far from united - some sharing "universalist" ideologies, some calling themselves" Africanist," some asserting a quite local, culturally defined "identity" - with international church groups, labor unions, pan-African movements for racial solidarity, human rights groups, and so on. Particular groups moved in and out of cooperative arrangements within an overall network.’ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 62.


\(^{592}\) “Correspondance,” 10 Juillet 1935, dossier 79-501-754, Ass. 802, APP.
action and outrage about the Ethiopian situation grew from that point forward despite the risk of state surveillance involved in political protests against Italy’s actions.

The crisis represented a call to overcome partisan ethnic, racial and political differences among French subjects even as it highlighted such differences. Two months after the July meeting about seven hundred North Africans and Sub-Saharan Africans turned up to a combined meeting of their associations. The militant black unionists Rosso and Kouyaté, leaders of the Union des Travailleurs Nègres, were joined on the podium by Mathurin who represented the more moderate members of the Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre. Imache Amar and Messali Hadj – both leaders of the large and relatively powerful Etoile Nord-Africaine spoke, and each of the speakers emphasized the need for unity between their constituencies. Newspapers also exhibited this trend. From La Dépêche africaine which positioned itself as a moderate publication to the Cri des Nègres which was outspokenly anti-colonial and communist in its politics the black Francophone diaspora decried the Italian act of aggression. These groups articulated the sense that they came from different perspectives but in the current crisis they were ready to act together.

The unity expressed in political meetings was carried through into the various types of social events, dances and fundraisers described above. Several balls and concerts were arranged.

593 « Rapport Envoyé : Présidence du Conseil, Secrétariat Général, Intérieur : Sûreté Nationale, Intérieur : Affaires Algériennes, Affaires Étrangères : S/Don Afrique » 4 Septembre 1935, dossier 79-501-615, Ass. 672, APP. Note this meeting took place at the Rue de Lancy, one of the popular meeting spots for these groups. It is also worth noting the political acuity of the leaders present. They condemned the League of Nations for lacking the strength or volition to act. Messali Hadj pointed out that Mussolini was claiming to champion muslim groups in Egypt but this was part of his larger imperialist project. He reminded North Africans not to be taken in by Mussolini’s rhetoric.

594 « Rapport Envoyé » 4 Sept, 1935, APP. He spoke in place of its president Emile Fauré who was unable to make it.
to draw attention to the Ethiopian situation, to aid the refugees, and to express solidarity with Ethiopians. As with so many of the events described above these drew large crowds and attracted diverse individuals who may not have turned up to a political meeting. Paulette Nardal and her sisters, for example, were middle-class, educated women who were more often found at the folk and classical music concerts publicized by the moderate publication La Dépêche africaine than the communist and worker-oriented meetings of associations such as the UTN. Yet Paulette had by now become so involved in pan-African anti-colonial discussions that she joined a committee dedicated to aiding the Ethiopian struggle. By June of 1935 she had become secretary of the Comité Mondial contre la Guerre et le Fascisme, and in that role sent a telegram protesting the Italian actions. It was published on the front page of the working class black newspaper Le Cri des Nègres.595 This action and Nardal’s work addressing envelopes for the radical working class Union des Travailleurs Nègres involved her breaching class and gender barriers. Her experiences offers one example of how the Italian invasion of Italy provided a unifying moment that brought together men and women, African, Antillean and North African.

The power of such crisis moments to bring disparate groups together was also evident in the organization of large-scale cultural events which demonstrates how they were integral to socio-cultural identity, political awareness and anti-colonial campaigning in the interwar period. On the 30 March 1939, for example, an advisory warned the Préfet de la Police that the LDRN had, in conjunction with other groups, organized a soirée artistique suivi d’un bal de nuit.596 The

596 « Information: Relative à l’organisation d’une soirée artistique au profit des réfugiées éthiopiennes, » 30 Mars 1939, dossier 79.501-754, Ass. 802, APP.
advisory noted that the ball was in support of the Ethiopian cause and Ethiopian refugees from the Italian invasion and added that the former Ethiopian Minister of Commerce would be a patron for the ball. The choice of venue was the Mairie of the tenth arrondissement which accorded with the spatial and racial geographies of interwar Paris. On the twelfth of April the police confirmed that the ball was going ahead that Saturday evening, commencing at nine p.m. and it included the information that a tract-invitation had been distributed among various milieux indigènes.\textsuperscript{597} It is probable that Paulette Nardal was involved in organizing this event. The organization of this ball shows that networks of communication and anti-colonial co-operation among various urban African, Antillean and North African groups were well-established by this stage. They were ready to flourish into the more visible, martial and active anti-colonial movements of the post World War Two era which is more classically labeled ‘decolonization’ in twentieth century history narratives. Furthermore the balls were a vital part of an informal communications network that included North African Tea-rooms, French cafés, private homes which hosted salons, or faithful wives who staffed the hours of permanence for anti-colonial groups. Although not on record as a focus of police surveillance it is probable that the more established colonial dance halls played their part in this effective but informal communications network.

According to police records large political balls were more numerous after 1935 than before. This suggests that the police became more concerned with such large scale events after the Ethiopian crisis and the attention it drew to colonialism in the capital (although the anti-

\textsuperscript{597} « Avis/prévisions, » 12 Avril, 1939, dossier 79.501-754, Ass. 802, APP.
colonial exposition played its part, as did a change of government and a lurch to the political right). These balls became part of a populist mode of political protest and served to broaden the visibility and the appeal of the anti-colonial message. The employment of black Francophone musicians and musical styles at political balls reinforced a parallel movement through which Antillean and African French colonial subjects asserted a cultural identity that was both French and distinctively African or Antillean. This was a new development and one that laid seeds for the flourishing of the strong cultural and political independence and decolonization movements that emerged after World War Two. This assertion of cultural difference which threatened the fictive unity of the French Imperial nation-state, the anti-colonial activities and organizing of black French groups in the métropole, and the unification of various anti-colonial and racially identified groups in response to the Ethiopian situation in 1935 explains why the French and the French State were adulated African American musicians but imposed restrictions and surveillance on African and Antillean colonial subjects in the métropole. African and Antillean French colonial subjects made citizenship claims on the French state which threatened to alter the fabric of French cultural and political identity whereas black Americans could be embraced as a transitory and politically neutral group. The difference in the way these groups were treated in France exposes the existence of a nuanced awareness of racial difference within France that resulted in different social and political treatment based on both skin color and citizenship status. African Americans were admired, exoticized, embraced and humored whereas black African and Antillean colonial subjects were closely watched, sometimes arrested or repatriated. Black Francophone attempts at cultural expression generated political action and thus police attention rather than fascinated pleasure which was linked to American jazz.
6. Performing racial difference at the Colonial Exposition of 1931

The various and interweaving strands of the story of popular music, racial perception, and colonial politics discussed thus far were wound together more intricately than ever before in the massive cultural and imperial consumer enterprise of 1931 – the Colonial Exposition. One of the greatest exhibits on show was the values-system that underpinned the French colonial exercise. Here the role of music-making, dance, and cultural production in French racial thinking reached its interwar apogee. The previous chapter considered how specific groups of French colonial subjects used the music of their homeland in order to express their cultural and racial identification as fully French and yet Antillean. The music on display at the Colonial Exposition was similarly politicized. It was performed by colonial subjects in order to glorify the colonial enterprise in the heart of the métropole and contested by colonial subjects and their surrealist and communist allies.

The impact of the jazz migration was seen here too, as the controversial election of Josephine Baker as “Queen of the Colonies” raised protests on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus the colonial exposition demonstrates once again how music-making and the tumulte noir were critical components in the unfolding of what have traditionally, in historical research, been considered larger or more significant questions of politics, race and nation in twentieth century France. People define themselves as much by musical taste and heritage as by language, literature and place of origin. And when the vast and varied cultures of France d’Outre-Mer were arrayed at the Exposition Coloniale of 1931 the intersections between empire, colony, musical performance, class, political expression and perceptions of race were part of the show.
This chapter shows how performance was a central, and highly effective, component of the educational and political enterprise undertaken in the Colonial Exposition. It demonstrates how musical and dance performances became a vehicle for justifying colonization. In part this was because performances were interpreted as displaying differing degrees of civilization.

Colonial groups who presented more “primitive” styles of music and dance (such as the West Africans) were seen as requiring France’s civilizing influence while those who presented more “civilized” spectacles (such as the Martinicans) were described by the official guide as illustrating the benefits of the French *mission civilizatrice*. The analysis also shows how gender was entwined in these perceptions and how women were presented and marketed as part of the colonial glories on display. However these official intentions were contested and selectively adapted or exploited by colonial subjects performing in the Exposition and by anti-colonial activists and moderate colonial subjects living in the métropole. The following discussion considers the differing reactions of various pan-African and anti-colonial groups to the Exposition, before presenting a short case study examining the issues raised by Josephine Baker’s involvement in portraying colonial women during that year.\(^598\)

\(^{598}\) The following discussion makes considerable use of official accounts of the Exposition, principally the ‘Official General Report’ written under the guidance of General Olivier, one of the principal organizers of the exposition. This report, and the supporting information drawn from the *Guide Officiel* to the Exposition, and the rich collection of primary documents collected by Catherine Pierre and Michel Hodeir are positive and celebratory account of the events written to impress readers and to justify the money and effort spent on the massive undertaking. However these sources, when read critically, give some perspective on how the relations between propaganda, power, profit and performance worked from the ‘subaltern’ perspective. André Demaison, *Guide Officiel : Exposition Coloniale Internationale De Paris* (Paris: Kapp, 1931); Demaison and b. . Conf Author: Exposition coloniale internationale de, *Guide Officiel*; Catherine Pierre Michel Hodeir, 1931, *L'exposition Coloniale*, La Mémoire Du Siècle (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1991); Fernand pseud Fernand de Rouvray Olivier Marcel Rouget and others, *Ministère Des Colonies. Exposition Internationale De 1931. Rapport Général Présenté Par Le Gouverneur Général Olivier,... T. V. 2e Partie : Les Sections Coloniales Françaises... [Écrit Avec La Collaboration De Mm. Roger Homo, Fernand Rouget, Joseph Trillat.]* (Paris: Impr. nationale, 1933). For secondary accounts see Blanchard et le Maire and
This chapter looks both at explicitly staged performances in which racial characteristics were attributed to music and dance styles and also at the “living displays” featured in various sections of the exposition. Both types of performance enacted perceived racial differences and hierarchies of civilization. In this manner the performers at the Exposition were implicated in a similar set of practices to the African American jazz performers. They accepted contracts which brought them to Paris to perform and their performances reinforced pre-existing perceptions of racial difference. In the case of the Black Americans this was jazz whereas in the case of the *indigènes* employed for the exposition it was “crafting” or “native music and dance.” The many differences between the two types of race-based performance included pay scales and freedom of movement. Another major difference was the colonial and civilizing narrative that was part of the rationale of the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* of 1931. The following analysis concentrates on how that narrative was enacted and contested.

**Advance publicity: Inciting and Debunking Pride in the Colonies**

The story begins with the decision of the French state to host an exposition. The *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* of 1931 had been planned for years, and there was great excitement about it. It had been delayed several times and by the time it opened there was a great deal of pressure on the chief organizers – Maréchal Lyautey and General Olivier – to produce a successful Exposition. Numerous discussions of the exposition agreed that its central aims were...
promotion of a colonial awareness and approval and justify colonization. The exposition also had
the potential to be a major morale booster to the French who were decimated by war and the
economic depression. However its vaunted aim was to educate the French of the Hexagone
about Greater France of which they were a part.

This was an aim shared by some colonial subjects themselves who demonstrated a variety
of responses to the planning and execution of the Exposition. The network of men and women
involved in producing the somewhat conservative Dépêche Africaine published previews of the
Exposition and encouraged colonial producers of food and goods to advertise their products at
it.599 They had high hopes that the exposition would bring attention to their countries and give
their export economies a boost. They also hoped to show off their respective cultures to other
French subjects. This attitude aligned with the growing black Francophone effort to promote
Antillean intellectual and musical culture throughout the Atlantic and especially in the
métropole.

The Exposition was therefore hailed with excitement, expectation and approval by groups
of colonial subjects both in Paris and in the colonies at the time of its planning and execution.
This point is occasionally lost in contemporary critiques of the exposition which rightly draw
attention to the exploitative, reductive stereotyping and voyeuristic dimensions of the event. And
yet the Exposition was never a purely “orientalizing” process in that colonial subjects actively
participated, protested, reflected upon it, held expectations of it, and published the results of how
their expectations were met or disappointed. From the moment the exposition was announced

599 “Exposition Colonial de Vincennes,” Dépêche Africaine 15 Janvier 1930, 3. See also a more factual preview of
the exposition. Dépêche Africaine, August-Sept 1930, 2.
black colonial networks active in the métropole saw the Exposition as a chance for educating their constituents about the benefits and the perils of colonialism. The musical performances on display were interpreted differently by various factions within these networks as evidence of their attitude toward the French colonial influence on their homelands.

The fevered promotional journalism in the popular white French press almost unilaterally emphasized the positive educational value of the Exposition. Comoedia, the popular chatty and newsy, often satirical and theatre-oriented French publication began a regular column “Courrier de L’exposition colonial” several weeks before the exposition even opened. One of the commentaries in this column stressed the necessity and desirability for Parisian school students to learn from the exposition. It reported that M. Albert Besson the conseiller générale de la Seine had negotiated free entry for groups of school students accompanied by their teachers. The article editorialized favorably about this:

We cannot help but rejoice at this happy decision which sanctions the best method of propaganda in favor of the colonial enterprise. It must be noted that until this moment the colonial sentiment hasn’t existed among the popular classes in France. It is necessary that, when the exposition is over, the feeling of the importance and the grandeur of our global empire remains in all the young French brains of tomorrow.

The Minister of Colonies, Paul Reynaud, made this explicitly commented on the exposition’s educational aims in his radio address for its inauguration: “The central aim of the

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600 With the exception of l’Humanité and le Paria.
exposition is to give to the French an awareness of their empire… it is essential for each one among us to feel themselves a citizen of la plus Grande France.\textsuperscript{602}

The need for a fitting sense of colonial pride among the French was widely acknowledged in Europe. Across the channel, in Britain, journalists recognized and teased the French about the absence of popular colonial sentiment:

A Frenchman (according to a popular English idea) is a man who eats vast quantities of bread, wears national decorations in his lapel, and is so fond of his own country that he knows little about the geography of the rest of the world. He hadn’t realized, for example, that when he sent an expedition to drive pirates off the Algerian coast, that colonies bigger than all Europe would a hundred years later be speaking some version of his beloved language and singing the Marseillaise as lustily as himself. He stands now in the midst of his own colonial exhibition, open-mouthed with pride and wonder at his own chicks come home to roost. He has discovered, in his own family circle, strength and beauty he never dreamed of… Within fifteen minutes of the Paris Opera, you are suddenly transplanted to far colonial lands – to jungles of Africa, to palaces of Angkor, into whole villages of Congo huts, to Chinese temples – all looking as old as their original version… The different sections have in many cases nothing to do with each other, and the only feature they have in common is their exoticism.\textsuperscript{603}

The assumption that those in the colonies would all be eager to “lustily sing” the Marseillaise was a bit of a stretch, even at this early stage in the development of anti-colonial movements, but the article represents the common perception that the French government was long overdue on educating its public about the glories and possibilities of empire. Other British papers also commented on the fact that although France’s colonial possessions nearly matched

\textsuperscript{602} “Le but essentiel de l’exposition est de donner aux Francais conscience de leur empire…Il faut que chacun d’entre nous se sente citoyen de la Plus grande France.” Blanchard, Culture Impériale, 5.

\textsuperscript{603} “The French Colonial Exhibition and its many Wonders,” Vogue, July 8 1931, 41.
Britain’s France had taken a while to “catch on” to the idea of empire. The French attitude toward Greater France in many circles was that it represented “an addition of manpower more than anything else, or at most a series of protected markets where French industries may find a safe outlet for their products.” The same author expressed the hope that through the exposition “even the most materialistic of politicians” would “see that the proper expansion of a mission civilisatrice is the best for all concerned.” In pronouncements like this the British patronized the French as colonizers but also advised them to explore the possibilities and duties Britain had found to be inherent in the colonial relationship. The French, it seemed, needed to be instilled with a due sense of imperial pride and responsibility and observers agreed that the Colonial Exposition was the ideal medium for getting them to do that.

These aims meant Exposition organizers wanted to attract the world’s attention, draw a huge number of visitors, and convey the value of the France empire to each of those visitors. One of the methods the commissariat adopted was to win the hearts, as well as the minds, of visitors to the exposition by dazzling them with an array of performances chief among which were authentic dance and musical spectacles. This is not to detract from the immense works of construction effected for the exposition, from model villages, whole town streets, and religious shrines, up to a faithful recreation of the temple of Angkor Wat, complete with bas-relief ornamentation and artwork. Architecture, artifacts and actual performances were all pressed into service to inform and astound visitors. The pavilion for French Equatorial Africa, however,
emphasized that music and ritual added a more intimate understanding of the cultures on display to the architectural displays. At the entry of the section there was a gallery of “indigenous art” which also contained “weapons, fétiches, tribal masks, and instruments of music.” The organizers believed that having all of these artifacts would give “a precise idea of Congolese folklore to the general public who were practically unaware of it.”  

Another comment claimed that the musical instruments allowed visitors to go beyond intellectual appreciation and actually evoke the cultural practices of the ‘other’ through viewing these artifacts: “it permits one to evoke the strange ceremonies conducted deep in remote forests and in the middle of savannahs of wild grasses… dances of initiation, of war, of rejoicing and of death.”  

If the mere sight of musical instruments could have such a powerful effect it is no wonder that the exposition took the power of music to the next stage. The promotional material makes it abundantly clear that performances of music and labor were envisaged to be major attractions of the Exposition. The General Report noted that at the outset planning an architectural style that reflected all the different territories but was also suitably grand seemed insurmountable. In discussing how to make mud huts, for example, reflect the glory of the empire, the planning process showed that such huts were considered necessary because laborers imported for the exposition would use them and dances would be performed in and around them. The commissariat wanted the representation of empire to be as “sincere” as possible and to create

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607 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 366.
608 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 366.
spaces where the *indigènes* brought to Paris for the exposition could go about their occupations.\(^{609}\)

J.A. Rogers, an African American commentator living in Paris and watching the preparations for the exposition with great interest noted that the full “variety of human life and activity” would be on display and that when the buildings were ready “natives will pursue their daily activities and give native dances and render their songs.”\(^{610}\) His vivid interest in all of this, as an African American, is a reminder that African American residents in interwar Europe didn’t necessarily identify with colonial subjects despite the supposed linkages in skin color and oppression. The pan-African ideal might link Rogers with literate black French Caribbeans, or Senegalese performers resident in the Capital, as indicated in chapter two. Yet Rogers was as excited about viewing the colonial subjects “on display” in the exposition as any Frenchman and collaborated with the colonial gaze in this instance. His fascination with the dances of the “other” was shared by many.

Clearly the organizers had very specific aims for the performances and expected them to serve the edifying educations goal of the exposition as a whole. The choice, arrangement, frequency and viability of the dance spectacles was all carefully considered by a commissariat for performances that worked with the general commissariat organizing the exposition. And their planning paid off. Spectators were allured to visit time and time again because of the “skilfully orchestrated spectacles” that “plunged them into recreations of the court of Bahanzin, to the heart

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\(^{609}\) *un aménagement, aussi sincère que possible, d’un quartier de Djenné où les habitants pourraient vaquer à leurs occupations.* Rouget and others, *Rapport Général*, 280.

\(^{610}\) Tuskegee Clippings File, 762.
of the ritual processions of Annam, or into the splendors of colonial evenings.”611 Who could resist such an experience, especially when encountered in the seeming strangeness and excitement but actual safety of the highly controlled area of the Bois de Vincennes used for the exposition.

A broad coalition of surrealists, anti-colonial intellectuals, ex-soldiers, workers and activists based in Paris, however, worked under the guidance the Ligue contre oppression et l’impérialisme to try and scupper the educational aims of the Exposition and expose the violence of the colonizing rationale behind it. They determined to produce an anti-exposition. The French branch of the Ligue had begun to ask for financial support from the international secretariat two years before the opening of the exposition. They also solicited information and photographic material from the secretariat to include in displays at the Exposition anti-impérialiste.612 The Ligue contre Imperialisme also roused its Parisian adherents and asked asiatique, nègre and arabe commissions to gather anti-exposition material on behalf of their constituencies.613

Despite the semblance of organization the groups struggled to work together and to find the funds and materials necessary for their anti-exposition. It was not until March, 1931, that they managed to organize the documents they wished to display and located a site for the anti-

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611 Blanchard, Culture Impériale, 6.
612 The police intercepted the letter, of course, and copied it. Untitled letter, 26 Janvier 1929, Série B/a 1912, APP, Paris.
613 See report describing an anti-exposition planning meeting, ‘à laquelle assistaient une cinquantaine de personnes, parmi lesquelles des nombreuses annamites, et quelques nègres.’ ‘Rapport Confidentiel, » le Préfet de Police, à M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur, 28 Jan 1929. » See also « Correspondance, » 31 March 1931, dossier 5250, série B/a 1912, APP.
exposition at the *Secours Rouge Internationale* headquarters 12 Rue Mathurin Moreau. It opened on June 15th, two months later than the official exposition, was infinitely more modest in size, not as well-publicized by the mainstream press, and was nowhere near the exposition site, so potential visitors faced a couple of hurdles in getting to it. Needless to say the total number of visitors was very small compared to the throngs that visited Vincennes. Despite its limitations the anti-exposition posed a serious critique to the *Exposition Internationale Coloniale* and this critique exposed the inauthenticity of the events at Vincennes and the way the exposition made invisible the French colonial record of brutality. The anti exposition unpacked the linkages made at the exposition between “native” performances and authenticity; between the *mission civilisatrice* and profiteering concessions that exploited the natural resources of the colonies; between the claims to protection enfolded within colonialist rhetoric and the abject failure of those promises on the ground.

In the lead-up to the Grand Opening of the Exposition the anti-colonial activists and and their publications made just as powerful a claim against the Exposition’s “verity” as the promoters of the exposition made for it. A month before the official opening of the exposition the *Ligue anti-impérialiste* stepped up its campaign to encourage indigenous groups, particularly *les nègres*, to protest against the “imperialist parade at Vincennes.” Sure enough in that same month readers of the *Race Nègre*, the newspaper of the *Union des travailleurs nègres* were reminded that the exposition at Vincennes gave them yet another “opportunity to appreciate the

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614 « Correspondance, » 30 May 1931, Dossier 5250, Série B/a 1912, APP, Paris. June 15th was the projected opening date.
615 « Correspondance, » 13 April 1931, dossier 5250, Série B/a 1912, APP.
great work of the capitalist oppressor.”⁶¹⁶ The rhetoric was fiery but the article continued with an acute analysis of why the exposition would prove so alluring. It deconstructed the falsification and rose-tinted quality of the “true glimpses of life in the colonies” the Exposition purported to present and thus exposed the contested nature of the authenticity on display at the exposition even amidst the hype of expectation:

Here we are on the eve of the opening of the grand international colonial display. It proposes to offer to the public, always avid for novelty, true glimpses of life in the colonies, and to magnates of finance and industry, it will present a complete inventory of the resources of Asia, Africa, and Oceania. For naïve folk the spectacle doesn’t lack for gaiety; as far as businessmen, there was never a better occasion to conduct their affairs. Is there any field of endeavour so marvelous as that of the colonial domain?⁶¹⁷

The article accused even skeptics of having been seduced by the alluring sights promised by the exposition and it depicted financiers descending like a flock of vultures or a plague of locusts, made more ravenous by the financial exigencies of the Great Depression.⁶¹⁸ Unlike the pro-colonial lobby among the black community the author of this article railed against the hollow promises of Western investment in the colonies and argued that they had brought nothing but misery to the colonies. It is representative of much of the work that anti-colonial surrealist authors and activists did in the anti-exposition, and beyond, to expose the corruption and oppression involved in building the Congo-Ocean railroad which took a terrible toll in lives and utilized the forced labor of thousands of men, women and even children.⁶¹⁹ The article ends by

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⁶¹⁸ These similes are translated direct from the text.
⁶¹⁹ Hodeir, 1931, L’exposition Coloniale, 120. Excerpts an article in Le Petit Parisien that noted seventeen thousand black workers were killed in the course of laying a mere two hundred kilometers of railway track on this line.
querying the much vaunted “protections” of colonization and asking when the happy day of accounting would come for nègres and the lands of their ancestors. Through this critique it pursued its own educational aim, and tried to debunk the grandiose claims that organizers of the actual Exposition made for colonization, and for the Exposition’s value in representing the “glories” of Greater France in architecture, music and dance.

Performing Racial Difference

African, Madagascan and Antillean dance troupes were highly praised for their work during the exposition. The official commentary on the Madagascan dancers – the M’pilalao’ – shows how marketing and moral guidance were linked in the choice of spectacles. Officials were thrilled with the M’Pilalao whose “charm” and “lively spirit,” in combination with the “éclat of their costumes” and the “originality of the performance they gave” made “Madagascar loved in France.” Organizers felt they contributed a great deal to the larger goals of the exposition: “They not only added to the life of the Section, but they collaborated very effectively with the work of ‘rapprochement’ that has been the great consideration of the Exposition of Vincennes.”

Reviewers acknowledged that music and dance were an integral part of the national-imperial discourse on display at the exposition:

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620 All quotations are from Rouget and others, *Rapport Général*, 208-220.
A splendid program of entertainment, in keeping with the spirit of the exhibition, will be exotic and authentically colonial – Javanese dances, primitive music, water fetes, native pageants… fetes arranged for May are; Arrival by plane of native African chiefs, concert by foreign legion, a day in North Africa.

This quotation from the Bystander yoked the two phrases that are critical to understanding the discursive and conceptual work done by performances. The widespread acknowledgement of the exposition as both “exotic” and “authentically colonial” was at the heart of its stunning impact upon the French imagination and it furthered the organizer’s aims of promoting empire, restoring national pride, and educating French youth into an “appropriately imperial” sensibility. And these terms – authentic and exotic – also characterized the French portrayal and reception of jazz music. It was a powerful formula for popular cultural success in the interwar period. And the seductive power of the combination – to enjoy something both authentic and exotic guaranteed the exposition’s popularity and drew over 8 million visitors.

Press reviews indicate that visitors to the official exhibition were convinced. Newspapers, journals and commercials all perpetuated a chain of associations between live performers and an air of authenticity. A representative review of the exposition, published in Vogue, described the use of live performers as the “greatest marvel” of the exposition because it meant that “each bit of a strange world seems alive – black faces, white burnous, yellow faces, silent and stealthy footsteps.” A more literary French commentaries made the same chain of associations between the conviction of reality and the live exhibits and managed to throw in a reference to high art too, in an interesting claim that the exposition “proved” that Gaugain’s famous Tahitian maidens

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621 Advertisement in Bystander, 27 May 1931, 461.
622 8 million visitors is given by Blanchard, Culture Impériale.
623 Vogue, 8 July 1931, 76.
actually existed. “I have seen them at the Pavilion of New Caledonia” proclaims the witness who then uses somewhat circular logic to describe them “women with bare breasts, simple features, identical to those painted by Gaugain.”

The organizers put a lot of effort into arranging the dances, the drum music, and musical elements in the exposition as part of building its allure and selling its message. Organisers used performances at the exposition as an exegesis on racial hierarchies and the value of the mission civilisatrice. Commentaries on the Madagascan Dancers for example, showed how their dance style was one component in a set of variables according to which the French judged Madagascan civilization. The author explicitly compares the Madagascans with the African dance styles (shown above), in favor of the Madagascans:

The dances begin; the men first; their steps, slow and majestic at first, became faster and faster until they reached a climax (paroxysme). The hands were agitated with a restless trembling, that went well with the fluttering of their flexible headdresses. Clapping their hands the women sketched out with the head, the shoulders and the feet, a light dance movement that lacked neither grace nor noblesse. These were not African frenzies, nor the hieratic undulations of India and yet it had elements of each. The entertainment retained a village-like aspect with long-distant traditions that had been ennobled and stylized little by little. The bare feet and the embroidered frock-coats with detachable collars show the contradictions in this singular art form. The well-developed musical instinct of the Malgaches blossoms in a curious fashion in these M’pilalao dancers.

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626 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 522. Note the long-held association of ‘slowness’ and ‘stateliness’ in the dance with civilization and ‘speed’ and ‘frenzy’ with savagery. The Nardals made the same comparison between jazz and the biguine.
The use of the term “developed” reveals much about French racial thinking as does the comparison between Madagascan “noblesse” and “African Frenzies.” Africans and African-Americans were frequently described by French critics as having innate and instinctive musical ability but very few were described as having developed those abilities. In the illusory ethnic hierarchy based upon degrees of civilization that were laid out in architecture, in performance and in the informational displays at the exposition the word “developed” elevated the Madagascans above several other colonial groups. The musical style and complexity of any given ethnic group, therefore, was understood to be revelatory of racial characteristics.

Two examples serve to show just how manufactured the authenticity on display in the performances was and how the authentic performances were linked to marketing, and to the moral agenda of the organizers. The first example is the enhanced authenticity of five grandes receptions hosted by the Governor General of French West Africa that took place in June and July. The second is the case of the cannibals of New Caledonia who turned out to be not quite what they seemed. In each instance the French State, by way of its representatives organizing the Exposition, presented a performance that succeeded in marketing the racial hierarchy on display at the exposition by drawing large numbers of spectators. In each case the point of the exercise was to underscore to extent of the empire.

The series of grandes receptions betrayed a manipulation of authenticity for the purpose of popular appeal that was almost farcical. The Governor of French West Africa was ostensibly hosting these receptions to show off his region. The “élite of Paris” were invited to these grand

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627 See introduction and chapter one.
receptions, which were held in the interior court of the Palace, which was “transformed into a salle des spectacles for the occasion.”628 Upward of four thousand guests were received (although the report may be exaggerating here) and were, apparently given an “unforgettable memory of African art.” This unforgettable memory was created in part by the “different tam-tams both acrobatic and artistic” from the Ivory Coast, Senegal and the Sudan. These drum and dance groups had been “obtaining great success each evening” at the exposition. However, the report adds, the special receptions were value-added in that Tahitian dancers, Martinican dancers, and some Parisian theatre stars, were brought in, and each reception ended with a procession accompanied by Venetian lanterns “all of which evoked with an impressive verity one of those night-time-festivals given in large Sudanese towns.”629 One suspects, however, that most Sudanese festivals were lacking in Tahitian dancers and Venetian lanterns.

The manipulation of authenticity in such spectacles to exaggerate the glory and influence of French possessions and benevolent powers was extensive. The case of the cannibals illustrates this further. The “Cannibals of New Caledonia” had been touted as an attraction far and wide in advertisements for the exposition. A satiric reviewer in fact commented that spectators at the exposition would be thoroughly entertained as long as “the three thousand orchids of the Philippine Islands do not fade, the jazz band of American Red Indians do not get out of practice, the French colonial natives do not freeze, and that the imported cannibals do not become hungry.”630 Red Indian jazz band aside, the “imported cannibals” were one of the biggest

628 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 305.
629 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 305.
630 Bystander, May 13 1931, 354. Such jokes were pretty common, Paul Emile-Cadilhac, for example, ends his description of the culinary delights to be sampled at the ‘negro restaurant’ at the exhibition by expressing the hope
attractions at the exposition although they were exhibited at the *Jardin d’Acclimation* on the other side of Paris to Vincennes, in the bois de Boulogne. They formed part of a before and after morality tale on how the French had improved some peoples and were in the process of educating and improving others such as these “human-eating savages.” The exposition organizers let it be known that the cannibal village was a performance and the performers were the grandchildren of “genuine cannibals” but many of the spectators either didn’t want to know, or willingly suspended their disbelief in the before of the two halves of the morality tale.

This use of the cannibal was exposed as cliché, degrading and a piece of theatricality worthy of Barnum himself even at the time. Both right wing white journalist Alan Laubreaux, and the more liberal and surrealist Roger Blin, writing for the *Depeche Africaine* wrote articles decrying the falsity of the cannibal set-up. The piece by Laubreaux first described his impressions of the cannibal “enclosure” which are both amusing and somewhat shocking (both then and to a twenty-first century reader albeit for different reasons). He described the “black men with their skin exposed to the air” who are roaming around their “wooden cage” muttering gutturally to each other, and eyeing the spectators with ferocious glances “which, no doubt, were itemizing the best filet and steak cuts, hidden by our European clothes.”

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632 Ezra has a useful account of the display in which she explains the ‘before and after’ paradigm set-up. Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious* 13.
634 Roger Blin offers an almost exact echo detailing the ‘danses guerrières, des gesticulations et des cris impressionants,’ « le scandale du village canaque,” *La Dépêche africaine*, 1 Jul 1931, 1 and 5.
Laubreaux noted that the official brochure describing the enclosure was presented in the elegant style of a top Paris theatre program. Not so ironic, it turns out, because as the article continues Laubreaux realizes that one of the cannibals seems awfully familiar. It is, in fact, a man he used to work with at the printing press in New Caledonia who had very serious duties in his work there. Laubreaux exclaimed in surprise and went back to the cannibals temporary housing to chat to his acquaintance Prosper who explained that the New Caledonians – even those like him with good jobs – competed for the colonial exposition gig because they were promised decent wages and the journey to Paris. It seemed like an adventure. Once out of the public eye Prosper and his friends throw on woolly jerseys and gather around a pot of decidedly non-human chicken stew, before limbering up, doffing their regular clothes, and heading back into the fake cannibal enclosure to give their next bloodcurdling cannibal dance.

Roger Blin, writing for the Dépêche Africaine, recorded a similar sequence of events and he expresses similar sentiments about them. He pointed out that the New Caledonians, although engaged to represent their country at Vincennes had been “cooped up” at the Jardin d’Acclimation. He interviewed Charles, a “cannibal” who had done military service on a French warship. After getting over the initial awkwardness with the offer of a cigarette Blin was introduced to the group and recorded a set of pithy observations on the whole spectacle made by one of the cannibals:

This is probably the surrealist author and theatre producer, born 1907, famed for producing the first production of Beckett’s Waiting for Godot. He was well known for writing parodic right wing articles under pseudonyms.
A handsome chap in a pullover bursts out laughing: ‘these are stupidities (c...ries) they make us do, mere theatre. Its sometimes amusing to frighten the young girls who visit. But at home we would never do this, never daub our faces with red and white and we wouldn’t mess about with these shell necklaces on our neck, or wooden shinbones in our hands. Moreover we rarely dance, we only do so on ceremonial occasions. There are even some guys amongst us who didn’t know how to dance and only in France have they learned the dance of savages!’ Having said so he sketched out a few steps of the Charleston and re-entered the ‘loge.’\footnote{I’ve left the French word here to retain the pun on ‘lodge’ and ‘dressing room.’ Roger Blin, « le scandale du village canaque, » \textit{La Dépêche africaine}, 1 Jul 1931, 1 and 5.}

The ambiguities and ironies of the last sentence are manifold for \textit{loge} can mean ‘dressing room’ or simply lodging. Moreover the final sentence – in both English and French – implies that the truly savage dance on offer in Paris in 1931 was the Charleston. This suggests either that the Charleston – as danced by white Europeans – was a savage sight indeed or that the New Caledonians, like the Antilleans discussed in a previous chapter, were pitting their dance against that of the African-Americans. Or the author could simply be playing with the possibilities and ambiguities inherent in all these readings but in doing so challenging readers to query their own interpretation of savagery and civilization when confronted with the bastardization of New Caledonian culture created to serve the French colonial morality tale that was one of the less defensible aspects of the Colonial Exposition.

In both accounts, however, the interactions between the author, the \textit{canaques} and the audiences they describe remind us that the colonial exposition, as with all colonial interactions, never simply worked from the \textit{métropole} outward. The performers – in these reports – clearly enjoyed agency and were able to comment on and react to the exploitation they experienced
while performing the approved version of their culture. They ridiculed the audiences and took them for fools just as vigorously as the audience drew moral judgements about traditional New Caledonian culture from the before and after renditions of the cannibal villages at Vincennes.

Both journalists finished their pieces with a damning critique of the French officials who spearheaded the exposition. Laubreaux commented that he found the situation amusing until it dawned upon him that the “Barnum behind this circus” was L'Administration Française. Although the Canaques might be conscious of their deceit he argued that the true shame of perpetuating such a farce belonged with the Minister of the Colonies who authorized the display at the “highest level” all the while “mouthing platitudes about progress, social emancipation, and human dignity.”637 The right wing political views of the author may have fuelled his critique and the evident exploitation on display in this incident was an ideal anecdote with which to discredit the government. Yet his critique was piercing and matched by Roger Blin’s disgust at the official patronage of the scandale de la village canaque.638 Had Lyautey and Olivier truly wanted to offer an authentic and respectful portrayal of the unique cultures gathered under the French imperial umbrella they could have avoided such derogatory representations.

In going forward with the display the organizers pandered to the desire of the spectators at the exposition to see authentic cannibals “pour de vrai” (for real/in the flesh) before they had disappeared from the French empire. This was undoubtedly to attract visitors and make money as

637 Laubreaux in Hodeir, 1931, L'exposition Coloniale, 100. Laubreaux’s outrage is interpreted by editors Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre as somewhat exaggerated as several similar displays had been included at other expositions and world fairs, not to mention in the Jardin d'acclimation. Hodeir and Pierre suggest that Lyautey didn’t have much power to prevent such a popular display being included in the exposition even if he may have disapproved.
638 Blin, « le scandale du village canaque. »
much as it was to educate them. The cannibal section served to illustrate how deeply the more civilized, patriotic, and early-established colonies such as Martinique had been improved by their longstanding contact with France. The before and after implication was not subtle. The “savage” men and women of New Caledonia were shown in two distinct displays, the second of which featured a schoolhouse, a church and no cannibals. The Antillean pavilion was further advanced than these and it underlined the message that colonies benefited from France’s ongoing presence and intervention in their culture. The case of the cannibals shows how clever marketing and the manufacturing of performances capitalized on contemporary discourses of authenticity and race to advance the visibility and popularity of the French colonial enterprise while portraying it as a moral and benevolent endeavour.

Martinique and Guadeloupe were distinctly on the flip side to the cannibal group in the before and after narrative that was part of the show at the Colonial Exposition. The French government and the officials organizing the exposition championed Martinique as the ideal product of French colonization. Many Antilleans themselves had an ambivalent relationship with France that mingled elements of appreciation and belonging with a consciousness of the limitations operating upon them as sujets d’outre mer. This complex attitude was discussed in chapter three and the actions and responses of Antillean men and women to the Exposition offer further examples of the nuances in that particular colonial relationship.

Martinicans and Guadeloupeans based in Paris were slow to become involved in militant anti-colonial movements although many of them supported literary and intellectual pan-African

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639 Ezra, The Colonial Unconscious 13..
networks ad ideals that had an underlying disapproval of imperialism as an abstract process and the exclusion of colonial subjects from full French citizenship as a concrete outcome. Yet much of their criticism stemmed from the fact that they wished to participate fully as equal citizens in the French republic rather than break away from it. Their lack of immediate and active involvement in the communist and black activist circles being formed in the years prior to the Exposition is one manifestation of a fairly stable relationship with the métropole in the early 1920s.

It is therefore understandable that Martinique and Guadeloupe should receive rave reviews as model regions in the Rapport Generale of the Exposition. As shown in the brief quotation that follows, however, the exposition highly romanticized the relationship between France and her colonies:

Martinique, the ‘pearl of the Antilles’ rich with so many memories, had an influential place in this dazzling display of the French oeuvre civilisatrice, that was the exposition of 1931. Everything pointed to her presence there: her broad involvement in the colonial saga that unfolded in the Caribbean sea, her love for progress, and the concern and good deeds France has shown her. Also the local administration hastened to comply with the Conseil Général and with the country’s wishes in permitting Martinique, on this occasion, to open the pages of its history and bring to the métropole this testimony of her fidelity and gratitude.  

The evident approval the organizers – and by extension the pro-colonial lobby active in France in the interwar period – felt for Martinique and Guadeloupe was extended to the way in which their music and dance were put on display. The chatty arts and theatre publication Comoedia confidently pronounced that the Bal créole would be one of the chief attractions of the

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640 La Martinique « Perle des Antilles, » Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 973.
Guadeloupian pavilion and visitors would enjoy the opportunity to dance to the lively sound of a Guadeloupian orchestra both afternoon and evening.\textsuperscript{641} There are no qualms about “natives” mingling with tourists here. While the Algerian dances were deemed “unsuitable” and the African dances were highly staged and controlled, the Martinican and Guadeloupean pavilion jointly shared a dance floor and the visitors to the exhibition were welcomed to it.

In addition to the dance floor visitors to the Exposition were advised to take advantage of the bar and restaurant, all serving authentic Guadeloupian products. The official guide goes into more detail, promising that the “sweetly spoken creoles filles, dressed in Antillean style with the distinctively knotted Madras headscarves will smile and serve coffee, chocolate, or rum.”\textsuperscript{642} The description of the Guadeloupian comptoir occasioned an imperial-nationalist dig at America too, as the author claimed the bananas there were to the American bananas as Bordeaux was to Californian wines. The culture, food, and drink are presented as a feature of pride for France in a much more intimate and avuncular fashion than the potential and resources of the African territories were in the official literature publicizing the Exposition.\textsuperscript{643} Advertisements were printed in \textit{La Dépêche africaine} encouraging business people who read the paper to place their products at the pavilion and utilize the opportunity presented by the exposition.

The performances here are also promoted as authentic (although less primitive than those of Africa) and they are manufactured just as much as the other displays were. Here also,

\textsuperscript{641} “A Travers l’Exposition” \textit{Comoedia}, May 7 1931, 5.
\textsuperscript{642} Demaison, \textit{Guide Officiel}, 52.
\textsuperscript{643} Advertisements were printed in \textit{La Dépêche africaine} encouraging business people who read the paper to place their products at the pavilion and utilize the opportunity presented by the exposition which also suggests a collaborative approach. “Advertisement,” \textit{LDA} Dec 1929, 1.
performances were intertwined with financial and political motivations. Each of the Sections hosted receptions and dinners honoring visiting nobles from the relevant country and sold goods from that country. In the case of Guadeloupe the events were hosted to honor Antilleans actually living in the city. First a dinner was hosted as marketing event for the congresistes de la Journée du Rhum and this was clearly part of an extended effort to promote and reward Antillean national products and production. The dinner took place in the restaurant that featured an attached dance floor, authentic creole dishes and service by “strictly creole Guadeloupéennes in their local costume.”

The dinner was hosted by Gratien Candace, first Antillean to be elected to the National Assembly. The largest event mentioned in the report, however, shows just how differently Guadeloupeans were treated from other indigènes employed in the performative production of racial perception enacted at the exposition.

The fête créole designed to show off the Antilles that took place on the 12 November made extensive use of Paris-based Antilleans to perform and participate in the event. Whereas the sense one got of the performers brought in to supplement the African dancers in the French West African fete did carry a connotation of the performance needing a little extra excitement the tone used about the performers in the fête créole is totally different. Many of the conditions are the same – Maréchal Lyautey and General Olivier are present along with various Paris notables. A film on Guadeloupe was shown and then an address was delivered. But instead of featuring “imported indigenes” the event boasted the best Guadeloupian artists in Paris, who came to Vincennes to perform (prétèrent leur concours). Rama Tahe, the “celebrated

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644 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 973-983.
Guadeloupian vedette,” the dancer Da-Lal, the poet Gilbert de Chambertrand, Mademoiselles Duhalde and Gene (their talent isn’t specified) and the Antillean conductor Stellio’s band with the resident star Mme. A. Ride rounded out the program.645

The performers are referred to as “artists” not indigènes and the respect implied by this is further evident in the selection of a poet to contribute to the evening’s program. Stellio and his band were renowned for playing Antillean music in Paris and they lived and worked there full time. There was much more flow and permeability between the Martinican pavilion and Paris than any other section, as is evidenced by the fact that, apparently, black dancers one “might see at the Bal nègre in the rue Blomet” could be found dancing there.646 These performers were clearly free to come and go as they pleased, and the tone in which they are discussed is much more respectful and even collaborative than the tone used for other laborers and performers used in the exposition.

This tone and these conditions make it clear that the Antillean citizens of Greater France were considered an entirely different group to the indigènes of New Caledonia, Africa or even Madagascar.647 The Guide Officiel mentions the “local industries” and the “ongoing prosperity” of the islands garnered from sugar and rum. The author is particularly enthusiastic about the schools and the social life of the Antilles and he links all of these charms to the allure of the

645 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 973-983.
647 Most Antilleans enjoyed more extensive citizenship rights regarding voting, representation, and welfare entitlements than French Africans.
“nostalgic dances” such as the biguine.\textsuperscript{648} The biguine was derived from the African slave adaptation of courtly European dances they were exposed to while enslaved upon the plantations in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and pre-independent Haiti. The implicit approval for Antillean dance and music emerges clearly in the way it was presented as an activity in which visitors could participate.\textsuperscript{649}

The link between musical style and racial profiling characterized jazz music, interwar artwork and European perceptions of many types of drumming. At the colonial exposition this impulse to see authenticity and racial difference in live performance reached new heights. The organizers claimed to have noble aims and desired to avoid “vulgar” stereotypical racial displays that might appeal to the base-minded. However they promoted performances as deliberate and artificial as the most elaborate stage sets at the Casino de Paris or the rococo stylings of a Paris Opera production. The French perceived authenticity in seeing drum music performed by Africans, or highly rhythmic music being performed by members of the African diaspora because of a longstanding association between the drums and African music. African music and social relations traditionally did rely on heavy use of the drums as a means of communication and has always featured more complex rhythms (in the musicological sense of complex) than Western music.\textsuperscript{650} But in interwar Europe these historical trends became linked to racial characteristics such that audiences expected to see Africans and drums in the West African section of the exposition, and expected all black Americans to play jazz.

\textsuperscript{648} Demaison, \textit{Guide Officiel}, 52.
\textsuperscript{650} This is discussed in the introduction.
Diasporic Africans performing at the Exposition, therefore, shared with the jazz performances and the biguine dancers in Paris an intimate and awkward relationship to perceived racial difference as expressed through music. The following comment is illustrative of the general set of assumptions regarding music and racial perception as they played out for non-African French visitors to the exposition.

Dance is, for the primitive, the most marvelous escape. Like the musician in a symphony, like the poet in an ode, like Marcel Proust in *Le Temps retrouvé*, the black, fleeing from a hostile universe, seeks refuge in that hostile universe, seeks refuge in rhythm. Seated in an armchair on the red terrace, the European gazes and dreams, ah, monotony of the drums which soothes the restless spirit… the youth of the world.

The authors do acknowledge the creative and poetic spirit that animates the “primitive” while also engaging in the characteristic yoking of racial distinctions (“black”) with rhythm, and with an eternal unchanging childlike state since time began (“youth of the world”). They themselves are striving for a poetic tone using repetition, and quite erudite references that firmly locate them in the world of high culture.

Their reasoning is still very close to Arthur de Gobineau who, much earlier, had declared that for “the Negro the dance is, with music, of the most irresistible passion” and identified sensuality as “almost everything” in diasporic African musical expression. The musicologist Albert Friedenthal summarized such ideas in 1913 when he described black dance as “an

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651 This has been discussed earlier in relation to jazz. Jody Blake does an excellent job of summarizing such notions, as do Bernard Gendron, Elizabeth Ezra and Brett Berliner. But in the context of the exposition the associations between race, primitivism and music were raised by contemporary commentators without the admixture of American technology and modernity that was attached to jazz music in interwar Paris.
652 Maurois and illus, "Sur Le Vif", 15.
653 This paragraph relies heavily on Blake’s description of racial attitudes, Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir* 25.
utterance of life” full of “natural movements” manifesting themselves in “vibrations dictated by an inner rhythmic sense.” Degorce and Maurois’s analysis of music at the exposition, then, differs little from the writings of musicologists of the late eighteen-hundreds and early nineteen-hundreds, who, impressed by the “primitivism” of black dance and music identified them as expressions of “animal pleasure” and “pagan superstitions.” The “creativity of blacks” was therefore defined as unutterably “other” to the sophisticated and intellectual stylings of a symphony or a passage of Proustian prose. And that value judgement was made manifest to many of the viewers at the Exposition through performances and the interpretive guides that categorized musical styles according to perceived levels of civilization. Despite the changes that jazz had wrought in the perception of black music as modern they had only scratched the surface of deeply engrained French perceptions about racial difference, primitivism, and inferiority, a belief-system that was shored up by the need to justify and glorify the French civilizing mission.

The organizers revealed a certain tension in trying to hold a perceived line between authenticity, edifying displays, and pure entertainment. After reassuring the visitor that he or she would be amazed and delighted at the sights, André Demaison, the author of the Guide Officiel then advises the eager visitor what not to expect. “You won’t find here” he began, “an exploitation of the crude tastes of a vulgar public – the very name of the man who organized it is a guarantee of the exposition’s grandeur.” Furthermore, he added, the organizers consider visitors to be “men of good taste” and he argued that the exposition would not be marred by the “belly dances, bamboulas, and bazaar displays” that had discredited other colonial

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654 See also Gendron, Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club; Jackson, Making Jazz French.
655 Demaison, Guide Officiel, 17.
commemorations. Instead, the guide promises all the excitement and attractions one could dream of, including shows by day and night but – and this is an important caveat – all of these quality entertainments will be “true reconstructions of the tropical life” and thus encourage the visitor to reflect with fitting seriousness upon the colonial endeavor. Artists will be inspired, industrialists impressed with the possibilities presented by the colonial relationship, and all will appreciate the improvement France has brought to her colonies. This section of the guide concludes with the assurance that “after visiting you’ll be a better person by having linked to the greater human family.” A key element here is the assertion that what is on display is real and a true reconstruction. Thus the exposition’s political message – as well as its entertaining displays – must be taken seriously.

In order to maintain what they considered a fitting tone, a due seriousness, the organizers actually selected the dance troupes, musicians, and styles of music, dance and theatre they admitted to the exposition very carefully. A brief reference in the Rapport Général mentions that the inclusion of Algerian dances had been discussed, the Commission had, in the end, put forward an opinion that certain Algerian attractions were less than desirable for display – and this included “indigenous dances.” There is no specific reason given for why the Algerian dances were deemed so unsuitable but in conjunction with the guide officiel’s dismissive mention of “belly dancing” as a vulgar spectacle it is safe to infer that North Africa was

656 “Bamboulas” is virtually untranslatable, according to various French colleagues. Some sense of “wild primitive festive rites/revels” but with insulting aspects to it. French colleague suggested it likened it had a similar tone to ‘Niggers’ in colloquial French.
658 « La commission émit, toutefois, un avis de principe défavorable à certaines attractions telles que les danses indigène. » Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 23.
associated with less than desirable dances that might be seen as vulgarized and commercial. These very different rulings with respect to how “indigenous” dance was promoted and circumscribed at the Exposition Coloniale emphasizes the way dance and music were important components in its elaborate construction of cultural differentiation, claims to authenticity and the validation of colonial intervention.

The response of many black Francophone Caribbeans living in Paris to the products and performances on display at the Guadeloupéan pavilion was very positive in tone. They appreciated the presentation of their cultural heritage and the good of their country at the exposition. La Dépêche africaine, praised the Guadeloupean section for the charming presentation of Antillean culture in the same issue as it printed the damning condemnation of the New Caledonian Cannibal display. The editors clearly showed their recognition that the French State was treating these two ethnic cultures differently and adopted an editorial policy that differentiated between the displays rather than following one overarching pro-colonial party line. The account of the Guadeloupean concession was effusive in its praise. It mentioned the sweet créole chitchat, the free samples of produits du cru (genuine local products), and the gracious Guadeloupean serving women in local dress and with distinctive headscarves in typical madras style. When it moved to music the review waxed lyrical on how it accurately represented the spirit of the Antilles:
But how could one long resist the lively strains of the Guadeloupian Orchestra that, at the back of the pavilion, sounded the assembly call for the children of the Antilles and quickly recreated for them, through the songs of their country, the atmosphere of the petite patrie (little fatherland) and soon inspired the development of the nostalgic creole danses, of such penetrating charm, that evoked the far-off islands. It was the haunt of gourmets, it was the haunt of artists: we will return to Guadeloupe.\textsuperscript{659}

The claim to a sense of Antillean belonging through appreciation of music echoes the wider trend in interwar Paris discussed in the last chapter. The tone here was that of an insider, and one who approved of the presentation of Guadeloupe. It differed significantly from the reactions on record for the participants in the “cannibal village” and stands out from the absence of “insider” commentary on the African dance and drum performances.

Most of the surrealist, and communist or socialist activists who protested the exposition were far less moderate in their views than these contributors to the Dépêche Africaine. Anti-exposition organizers were opposed to all of the displays at the Exposition without distinction. They realized very clearly the seductive power of the image and the beguiling nature of the spectacles and displays that Maréchal Lyautey and his team had put together. They knew their counter-exposition intended to counteract the displays at Vincennes was at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the spectacular displays there. They planned to offset this disadvantage by distributing brochures, posters, and informational tracts throughout the duration of the exposition. In addition to asking for financial contributions and artifacts to display they sent out a call for talented writers and artists to contribute work to the anti-exposition publicity.\textsuperscript{660} They also planned to

\textsuperscript{659} ‘A l’exposition Coloniale; Le Pavillon de la Guadeloupe,’ La Dépêche africaine 1 Jul 1931, 1.
\textsuperscript{660} « Correspondance, » 31 March 1931, dossier 5.250, Série B/a 1912, APP.
combat the allure of the grand official fêtes by staging protests onsite during them. Finally they tried to spread the anti-imperialist word at meetings and in intensified newspaper and journal campaigns as the exposition continued to enjoy great success in June. These campaigns pointed out the exploitative and degrading aspect of performances such as the biguine dances at the Guadeloupean pavilion. Police spies recorded that at one meeting the participants rose, one after another, and proclaimed that the Exposition at Vincennes was no more than an opportunity for the organizers to “ridicule the blacks by the display of the customs and mores of the race noire, by the exhibition of black women on stage, and by the biguine dances.”

These anti-colonial analyses of the Exposition at Vincennes not only accused the performances of being degrading and misleading but also decried the exposition for failing to include examples of good quality artworks produced by black artists. They had put their finger on a key point here. The highly constructed representation of the culture of French colonies at Vincennes served very clear political and pro-colonial purposes. The writers, surrealists, intellectuals and workers who participated in the meetings and protests against the exposition understood that it presented music and art as signifiers of a set of racial and cultural hierarchies. The public were being sold a set of hierarchical pro-colonial values by way of the captivating sights, sounds, and performances on display at the Exposition.

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661 Police report of 22 June 1931, mentions that press campaign against the exposition was about to intensify and that instructions had been sent to sympathetic journalists to publish material critiquing the exposition, ‘sera intensifiée encore.’ dossier 5.250, Série B/a 1912, APP.
663 André Gide spoke out on many occasions against both colonialism and the exposition.
The moderate black publication the *Dépêche Africaine* striving, as always, to represent a diverse range of views within the diasporic black population in Paris printed an evocative analysis of this process two months after the exposition opened. The piece is more militant and anti-colonial than much of the work published in the newspaper and it offers compelling evidence that even black Francophones of a fairly conservative bent were able to pick and choose the meanings they drew from the exposition. The author, Roger Blin, noted that “we had expected the exposition would bring with it all sorts of ridiculous exhibitions, bric a brac as though from a bad carnival, and all the usual jokes made about *les noirs.*” Moreover he argues that those in the know find it annoying to correct the “forged picturesque, the vile drawings, the crazy ideas with which commercial enterprises tried, cost what it may, to latch on to the vogue for the exotic in their publicity.” 664 The author concludes that the French colonial administration and the organizers have engaged in falsifying practices such as the fake cannibal village. He thus tries to expose the manipulative and falsifying power of the racialized representations on display at Vincennes.

The anti-colonial activists were not utter skeptics. They didn’t believe the public were irredeemable gulls who would swallow the colonial message whole. They hoped that through critical journalism, publicity drives, and their counter-exposition they could offer an oppositional viewpoint to that enshrined in the official exposition. Unfortunately for their protest they lacked the funds and the ability to organize and co-ordinate the large forces necessary to offer any real

664 Blin, « le scandale du village canaque. »
competition to the Exposition’s tantalizing array of wonders. They failed to reach the huge numbers of Metropolitan white French and Europeans that were drawn to marvel at the wonders of the exposition.

**Labor and Discipline**

The organizers decision to sanction certain forms of music and dance performance at Vincennes and not others resonates with the exposition of policing and performance geographies laid out in chapter five in relation to the biguine. Every performance, every musical choice, every dance act and resultant cultural exchange at the exposition was subject to attempted control by the organizers and the colonial troops they deployed to regulate proceedings. Elizabeth Ezra writes that in the context of the colonial exposition “the hearts and minds being won over may have been French, but the bodies being disciplined were those of the colonized.” This contention risks underemphasizing the agency of the performers which is evident in how they negotiated their contracts, chose to become involved, and then interacted with the spectators. Yet it is important to tease out how performers’ bodies were in fact, subject to the discipline that Ezra identifies in her claim and fails to fully substantiate. The voices of most of the *indigènes* brought to France for the exposition unfortunately never became part of the official record of the exposition accounts. Records of them are rare in the popular press too but even at the time many anti-colonial activists considered the involvement of *indigènes* in the exposition to be a shameful

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665 The police reports don’t contain their amusement at the occasional disorganization of the *Ligue*. One on occasion, when the *Ligue* moved its headquarters from one place to another and were burning non-essential but potentially incriminating documents the girlfriend of the secretary (a coiffeuse) burned several files of essential documents by mistake.

microcosm of exploitative French imperial economic and labor relations. Before the exposition began the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme prevented the use of pousse-pousse (rickshaws pulled by indigènes) to transport visitors around the exposition, stating that it was abusive of workers.  

The heavy restrictions and surveillance operating on colonial subjects employed to perform at the Exposition is apparent in reports that outline how organizers will “protect the indigènes” from rough and over-excited crowds. “No indigène was able to be absent from their village during the day” without the authorization of a fonctionnaire de service and moreover no such authorization would be given at night. It was “strictly forbidden” (formellement interdit) to leave the confines (enceinte) of the exposition. The organizers claimed this was to “avoid the curiosity of the public” and thus protect the performers. They built special “compounds” strictly barricaded for the performers from each section to live in with the stated intention of protection from the prying eyes of visitors. They also, however, mentioned the need to guarantee the performers and performing artisans “moral protection” to the “largest extent possible.” The concern to control performers’ freedom of movement and access to Paris that accompanied the concern for their welfare is evident in other discussions that focused upon

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repatriation and upon the necessity of preventing the indigènes from being corrupted or beguiled by the charms and opportunities of the métropole. 672

An exception to the general rule sequestering the laborer-performers at the exposition show how unusual it was for most performers to get leave to explore the city. In discussing the housing and medical arrangements for the non-military indigènes working in the French West African Section of the exposition the Rapport Générale recorded that the Commissariat “tried very hard” (s’efforcè) to arrange some outside entertainment for performers, including “guided bus rides into Paris.” 673 The performers were allowed to see Paris but clearly under very circumscribed conditions determined by the commissariat and in the eminently controlled environment of a bus tour. This may have suited the performers and it may, as the Rapport claims, have protected them from the goggling and gaping of curious Parisians. One wonders, also, if the canny Commissariat didn’t want to “spoil the show” by allowing the indigenes to roam through Paris and be seen by anyone and everyone, even those who hadn’t paid to see the exposition and were not viewing the colonial subjects in the appropriate educational setting.

The performers brought in for the exposition were subject to an array of mechanisms of control and surveillance reflective of the discursive process identified by Foucault. The means used to discipline (if not punish) performers during their stay at the exposition featured both self-regulation on the part of the indigenous performers and also state regulation by way of visa limitation and surveillance by the military units deployed to work (and themselves perform) at the exposition. Yet, as Foucault so effectively points out in relation to prisons and many other

672 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 522.
673 Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 302.
human mechanisms of control, the regulation was also one of knowledge, power and access.\textsuperscript{674} Getting into Paris required knowledge – of the administrative processes required for a pass, and also of the city layout, which areas were safe, and how to get where one wanted to go.

Most of the performers spoke French, but some didn’t and so language was a potential barrier to freedom of movement. Here the involvement of the state is interwoven with the origin of the individual subject because the French education systems were very well-established in some colonies and not in others. So possessing the knowledge and linguistic ability required to exit the exposition and enter the \textit{métropole} proper was itself a product of French colonial discourse in that the French state had poured educations resources into some colonies (the Antilles for example) and not others (many West African regions) – as protestors to the exposition were quick to note in their anti-exposition. All of these mechanisms of surveillance and restriction meant that the discourse of civilization was shown forth in the power – or lack thereof – of colonial subjects contracted to perform in the exposition to go forth into Paris. The more civilized one was, in terms of language, ability to fill out forms and negotiate with authority, and present oneself suitably, the better a chance of negotiating the hurdles that lay between the exposition \textit{enceinte} and Paris.

The exposition offers many concrete examples of these mechanisms of power operated and how they were linked to performance and how they operated in real time and space notably the use of restricted visas and supervised repatriation schemes and also the use of colonial troops to regulate events. The restricted visa system was one aspect of the extensive efforts made to

\textsuperscript{674} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}; Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison}. 
control spiraling immigration and the (much needed) influx of foreign labor (main-d’oeuvre étrangère) that characterized French society after the First World War.\textsuperscript{675} When it came to artists such as Josephine Baker, Bricktop Smith, or Sidney Bechet the visa requirements were similar to that of skilled laborers – each performer had to prove he or she had a contract and renew his or her visa periodically with renewal being dependent on the individual performer’s ability to prove they had gainful employment.\textsuperscript{676} Of course performers could, and did, disguise slack periods of employment and like other immigrants some of the lower-profile performers were able to outstay their visas and keep working intermittently until they found a longer contract or an employer willing to sponsor them.

Every performer who lived and worked in Paris was subject to more stringent requirements attempts to place quotas on foreign labor once the Great Depression hit France. All of these restrictions, however, were far more liberal than the rules that the Minister of the Interior devised for colonial subjects engaged for the purposes of an exposition. In 1925 the Minister of the Interior took the opportunity to explicitly state the rules relating to such performers to both the Préfet de la Police and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Minister of the Interior “made known” in a formal letter that he “was not opposed” to allowing foreign musicians who were invited to France to give concerts into the country.\textsuperscript{677} The letter then clarifies this permission adding “however these foreigners whose visas are of a limited duration may not receive from


\textsuperscript{676} See, for example, “Josephine Baker,” and “Sidney Bechet,” in Série G/a Etrangers, APP.

\textsuperscript{677} Both references in this paragraph are drawn from a directive : ‘Ministère de l’Intérieur - Direction de la Sûreté Générale à la Service Central des Cartes d’Identité des Etrangers - No. E.2/7/ » Paris, le 11 Fev 1925, Série B/a 2249, APP.
your services (following the décret of 25 October 1924) anything but cartes d’identité valid only for the duration of the exposition.” The designation of étrangers shifted somewhat over the course of the interwar period and colonial subjects were not always classified as such but the visa restrictions operating in regards to the Exposition Coloniale of 1931 followed the guidelines set forth in this 1925 directive.

The second surveillance measure utilized to control the performers and performer-artisans who served in the exposition was (intentionally) much more visible to the public. The use of ‘indigenous troops’ for crowd control was a deliberate move upon the part of the organizers to add to the authenticity and colonial atmosphere on display. Maréchal Lyautey claimed that the use of these troops was to add to their appreciation of Greater France but also to encourage the general public to recognize the contribution made by colonial troops to the French effort in World War One. The 1200 infantrymen and 200 Spahis (light mounted cavalry of North Africa) were used for a number of different ceremonies and parades in addition to their policing duties. Some claimed the best display they made, in terms of educating and impressing the French youth with their qualities and their service to France was through their athletic and horseback exercises. The troops, however, were used for more than just athletic and cavalry displays. In addition to serving in various parades and events featuring other indigenous groups the soldiers put on their own military parade and the Spahis also appeared at the Hippodrome showing off their equestrian skills. The tirailleurs, for their part, performed songs and dances in the halles de spectacles du Musée des Colonies, or the auditorium in the Museum of Colonies.

These figures come from Hodeir et Pierre, but are supported by the Rapport Général, and in the Guide Officiel. Hodeir, 1931, L'exposition Coloniale, 92.
Through these activities the colonial troops inserted themselves in the décor of the exposition. It is important to register, however, that their involvement was supposed to conduce to the authenticity of the whole and as such was performative in more ways than their simple involvement in actual performances.  

Furthermore, whether providing guards of honor for visiting notables, or being assigned to surveillance and guard duties throughout the exposition the soldiers were enforcing the mechanisms of restriction and control that operated upon both spectators and performers at the exposition. Their role in many of the events held at the Commissariat général was to maintain order. The point is implicit in the congratulatory report given by the Commandant général d’armes de la place de Vincennes, in October when the colonial soldiers had finished their tenure at the exposition:

At this moment when the indigenous colonial troops who have come to Vincennes for the Exposition Coloniale are going to leave the garrison, the General Commander of Arms is happy to testify to his complete satisfaction with their military spirit, discipline, good camaraderie, and the excellent control (manners?) that they have shown. It is his pleasure to note that not one act of ill-discipline or infraction of self-presentation had to be taken down during the six months that these remarkable troops stayed at Vincennes.

The use of the troops as both a performative element in the Exposition and a mechanism of control was just one element of the complex labor relations that lay behind the excitement and

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679 The examples and quotations in this paragraph are from an article from L’Illustration cited in Hodeir, 1931, L’Exposition Coloniale, 91.
entertainment on offer at the exposition. The labor of entertainment at the Colonial exhibition involved a patronage relationship and an economic exchange. Performers were supposedly paid for their labor although their wage was moderated to account for the fact that lodging and food were included. The artisans had the cost of materials take out of their wages although they were allowed to keep some of the profits from any craft items they sold. However the wages were minimal, the quarters cramped and desperately cold for men and women used to much warmer climates, and the opportunities for glory, honor, and improved access to French citizenship were heavily mediated by the French state.

The wages ranged between 150 and 650 francs a month and performers were also provided with bed and board. The lowest end of this range of wages were not very generous. The contrast in wages between performer-laborers at the Exposition and entertainers freely contracting out their own performative labor in the city proper around the same time is striking. Opal Cooper, for example, a fairly talented African-American singer was hired on at the Cabaret Montmartre at 350 francs per day (10,500 per month) although he had to pay for a pianist and provide his own food and lodging for this sum. He therefore earned as much in one day as some performers at the exposition did in a whole month. Several performers in the New Caledonian cannibal troupe complained to journalists that their contracts were exploitative and

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682 The General Report lists many details of the wages and working conditions at the Exposition. For example the section on “Afrique Equatoriale Française; delegation indigène” lists time pay and contract details for 22 men, 13 women, 2 children. Their contract included travel, 150 francs per month, l’entretien or food and board, and half the profit of any products they made and sold. The conditions for the Guadeloupean girls are listed not only in other sources and acknowledged to be among the best at the Exposition. Demaison, Guide Officiel, 52; Hodeir, 1931, L’exposition Coloniale, 90; Rouget and others, Rapport Général, 392, 973. See also “A l’exposition Coloniale; Le Pavillon de la Guadeloupe,” Dépêche Africaine, 1 Jul 1931, 1.

683 “La Société Montmartre et M. Opal Cooper, Paris le 16 Octobre 1933,” ‘Opal Cooper papers,’ Helen Armstead-Jones collection, Schomburg Center for Black Culture, NYPL.
that they hadn’t been paid fairly nor given all that they were promised when they signed on for
the engagement." The differential value placed upon the performance and cultural presentation
of the Antilles, described above, affected labor relations as the “two charming Gaudeloupean
girls” sent to represent their country were paid 500 and 650 francs per month (plus tips),
respectively (the higher paid woman cleaned the coffee machine). In contrast the adult members
of an artisan delegation from Afrique Equatoriale Française were paid 150 francs per month and
half of the profits of any goods they made and sold – but the profits were minimal after the
exposition accountants subtracted the cost of materials. Despite these harsh labor conditions
many performers and laborers seem to have been eager to sign up for the exposition. Two
Guadeloupean girls hired to make coffee and dance were chosen through a heavily subscribed
competition held in Guadeloupe, and Prosper and Charles actors in the New Caledonian cannibal
enclosure (discussed below) gave up a stable job at a printing press for the opportunity to be a
part of the exposition. It is clear that colonial artisans and performers were motivated to
participate in the exposition by a variety of impulses among which was economic gain greater
than that they may have achieved in their own country.

Women

The anti-colonial critique of Vincennes also contended with colonial rhetoric on the issue
of women’s rights. Both pro-colonial and anti-colonial factions justified their political agenda on
the basis of protectionism toward women and children. Both groups condemned dances that

684 Roger Blin, « Le scandale du Village Canaque, »
685 See note 683.
“degraded” women and claimed to protect those women from exploitation. The organizers of the Exposition claimed they had deliberately excluded North African *danses du ventre* from Vincennes in order to avoid vulgarizing displays of female colonial subjects (and, one suspects, avoid corrupting vulnerable young school children – or appearing to corrupt them). Anti-colonial activists countered that the Antillean biguine was a *danse du ventre* and thus a vulgarizing display. This latter stance is an interesting contrast to the Nardals’ vehement defense of the grace and propriety of the biguine discussed in chapters three and five. The difference in interpretation exposes the variety of approaches to contesting colonialism within the colonial population.

This clash over the issue of the feminine dances performed at the exposition represented the broader skirmishes in a battle over colonialism that were waged (mostly by men) on the terrain of women’s rights. André Dèmaison claimed, in the *Guide Officiel*, that one of the elevating lessons to be learned from the exposition was how the French had improved the lives of women in the colonies. He presented the feminine plight prior to colonization as a justification of European intervention claiming that “before us, in Africa, the strongest exercised mastery over the weakest, women were nothing more than cattle, and children practically nothing.”\(^{686}\) However the anti-exposition used the same women as an example of how horrifically exploitative French colonial practices were and how women had been pressed into forced labor at the expense of their children. André Gide wrote an exposé in conjunction with the exposition that detailed the plight of women and children pressed into forced labor. He described a “group of women in the process of working on repairs to the road.” He used the same rhetoric as

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Demaison likening the women to poor cattle, “steaming in the rain” who labored “without appropriate tools” to dig enough earth to bank up the road from huge holes, “deeper than thirty metres.” Gide claimed that more than once the holes had collapsed burying the women and children working in them. He pointed out that all this labor was to service a road used no more than once a month by a colonial administrator and the representative of the forestry company working the area. The whole narrative serves as a counterpoint to the extravagant claims made about the labor and the bodies of colonial women at the exposition of which performance was one part.

The women who served at the Guadeloupean concessions offer a different perspective on labor relations. They served at the Antillean concession stand and occasionally danced on the dance floor which was “one of the most frequented attractions” at the exposition. Antillean dance numbers were played throughout the day and commentaries on the filles créoles who waited at the restaurant and occasionally danced contained more than a hint of the suggestion that male patrons might like to dance or converse with the Guadeloupian women serving them. Not only were these women “charming” and “sweetly spoken” but they could “smile and serve you coffee, chocolate and rum of the Islands,” and according to one journalist they were liable to break into a captivating dance mid-transaction which just added to the charm of the pavilion. The women here were portrayed as malleable and attractive but approachable and conceivable as flirtatious perhaps even sexual partners – all of which was in contrast with the way the African women involved in the various sections were portrayed.

687 André Gide, cited in Hodeir, 1931, L'exposition Coloniale, 122.
African women are mentioned in accounts of the exposition but the “young girl dancers of Siguiri” for example are not individualized or portrayed as conversable beings in the same way as the Martinicans. Other African women involved in the artisanal displays at the exposition are mentioned solely in connection with their work and their children and portrayed as objects of interest to view from afar. Paul-Emile Cadilhac, journalist and author, described a black woman with her child “clinging to her back, showing his teeth like those of a young dog,” and two other women making leather from a sheep’s bloody shoulder. He concludes “We are far, far from Paris.” These are not women who seem approachable or as though they could transition into life in Paris like a character in a Josephine Baker film. And as such they illustrate that the construction of a racial hierarchy at the exposition was produced by and upon the bodies of the women performing in it, just as Josephine Baker’s body became a tabula rasa for the projection of colonial female stereotypes in her show.

This brief comparison of the way the women of different ethnic origins were described suggests that the “grace” of women of the colonies became a representation of the civilization of the society from which they came. Yet the Martinican women retained enough of the exotic to prove a powerful draw card to the exposition perhaps because they combined the approachability with exoticism. Journalist Georges Devaise was captivated by this combination. His description of the Guadeloupian pavilion shows the characteristic tone of approval and indulgent acceptance of the pro-colonial Frenchman to the Antilles:

688 Cadilhac, excerpted in Hodeir, 1931, L’exposition Coloniale, 89.
Music. Banjos and saxophones attack a biguine. Three tall girls who were seated in the edge of a wooden platform rise without haste. Two of them are black. The third, who has the most beautiful eyes in the world, is a creole. Their hands pressed to their stomachs they move in little steps (coupés?), with a movement of their hips, slow but relentless, which makes one think of the oscillations of a ship on its moorings on calm water. Soon all the waitresses began to dance on the spot. Next, as if in Coppelia’s doll shop where the puppets came to life one after another, the contagion conquers the older women, chocolate colored, assigned to wash the glasses. Finally, Titine, who hadn’t even finished giving her customer change, threw her tray on the nearest empty table and climbed onto the platform. The same movement, voluptuous but solemn, that rocks (cradles? Berce?) the three dancers seizes her. A song, very, very sweet, pours from her lips. She veils her eyes. Titine is very far from us.

In this anecdote the author is clearly sentimentalizing his experience and at the same time creating a very consciously crafted written narrative. There is a fantasizing element in his narrative, and the female actors in it are likened to puppets at one point, and graceful ships at another. The author objectifies the women here and yet feels involved in the action and in the music which seduces the participants in the scene into a dance.

The final sentence makes a claim to understand – even empathize – with Titine in her nostalgia for her homeland. This is a humanizing stance in that it acknowledges the existence of Titine’s inner life and emotions and in fact suggests there may be some sympathetic linkage between the reader, the author, and Titine, which draws us all together in a common web of humanity. Titine is accessible to the author (and to us) which means she is not ascribed quite the same degree of “otherness” as are the African women. The very same trope of distance – being “far” from something is used in both instances but when referencing the Martinican display the sense is less that Devaise feels far from Paris by virtue of being among these strange creatures.

but that Titine is far from him due to nostalgia. She is thus a feeling subject with a past. This narrative encapsulates the prevailing attitude toward Martinicans and Guadeloupeans in the exposition and one that seemed common in interwar Paris.

The author’s literary shaping of this encounter offers interesting contrasts and similarities with the way Josephine Baker portrayed colonial femininity during the year of the Exposition when she was called upon to be a colonial-feminine cipher, in the show *Paris qui Remue*. In the anecdote at the Exposition the figure of Titine is used as the symbolic representation of all the Antillean women – her decision to join in is the culmination of their collective movement into dance. This suggests that the narrative is both constructed and metonymic where the part (Titine) may well stand for the whole (Guadeloupe/Antilles colonies). Characteristics demonstrated by this particular woman are ascribed to the entire country and society she represents. Titine was Antillean (as far as we know and certainly as far as we learn from the author’s anecdote). Josephine Baker, on the contrary had a set of colonial and racial characteristics mapped onto her in the popular revue *Paris Qui Remue* but was not, herself, a colonial French subject.

Josephine Baker proved to be the ideal performer to represent colonial womanhood, and in part because she was not one and therefore could not, or chose not, to contest the stereotypical images she portrayed on stage. The anti-colonial activists who claimed to speak for African womanhood, and the pro-colonial defenders of the protecting and uplifting influence of colonization upon colonial womanhood actually engaged in a similar process to the audiences who came to view Josephine Baker in her various guises of colonial maidenhood at the Casino.
de Paris. None of them asked colonial women exactly what they thought about the *mise-en-valeur* that was supposed to have such a positive or negative impact upon their lives. The following case study shows how Baker’s involvement in the Exposition illustrated how cultural products, colonial imperatives, the performance of racial and imperial relations, and the working of gender ideals all intersected at this particular moment in the French *métropole*.

**Josephine Baker: Queen of the Colonies?**

On March 11 of 1931 the *New York Times* noted that “Josephine Baker of St Louis and points South, American Negro Dancer, tonight was elected to be Queen of the Colonies in the forthcoming *Exposition coloniale* in Paris.”

The choice of Baker is at first glance both surprising and ironic. Why was this black American, of “St Louis and points South” as the *Times* puts it, chosen to represent the colonies when she had never set foot in a single one of them, at this stage in her career. Elizabeth Ezra identified the irony of this moment and contextualized it in the light of colonial ambivalence which, she states “was echoed in a telling moment of cultural confusion when Baker was named Queen of the Colonies at the 1931 *Exposition colonial,* despite the protests of spoilsports who pointed out that the United States could not technically be considered a French colony.”

The fact that the French could envision Baker as an appropriate representative of the millions of *sujets de la plus grande France* that encompassed women and men from the current Vietnam, to Senegal, from the French Antilles to Algeria illustrates the constructed and performative nature of the exposition as a whole.

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690 “Baker elected Queen of Colonies,” *New York Times*, March 11 1931, 8
In 1931 Josephine Baker was 25 and had reached the heights of professional stardom in France, due not only to her physical genius, but also to her malleability and swift adaptation to the French market. Her original debut in the *Revue Nègre* capitalized on the vogue for all things African and African-American in the immediate aftermath of World War 1. At that stage Baker embodied a French fascination with the black feminine other, the erotic exotic, that referenced a vaguely African or black American imaginary without really making specific reference to either place or time. Her enormous success highlights the European social context of wartime disillusionment, the turn away from Western art, and the emergence of jazz as a major transatlantic cultural force that both capitalized upon existing western constructions of racial difference ideas of race and yet simultaneously provided a new Atlantic trajectory for success for black American artists.

But the *tumulte noir* occurred in a Paris at a time when many in the French métropole, particularly among the average working French man or woman, had very little knowledge, or significant awareness of the colonies. American jazz combined with the use of colonial soldiers in the war, and thus their increased presence in France, to radically intensify metropolitan French awareness of race and of the colonies. One of the means through which the French “came to Africa” was by way of African-American music, and its “primitive rhythms,” that at once shocked and invigorated just as Baker’s early dancing did.

Yet the social and political climate changed in the next few years. Entertainment taxes rose, the *tumulte noir* began to subside and an attempt to return to French values in music was

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692 Blanchard, *Culture Impériale*; Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious*
made. Furthermore working French musicians began to combat the race-based preferential hiring of black musicians in the métropole, and to promote the employment of French musicians. An ugly swell of fascist anti-immigrant nationalist feeling surged and was held in tension with the left-wing socialist and radical tendencies still evident in France. One result of these historical developments was that by 1931 a black American columnist reported:

The bottom has fallen out of Montmartre’s night life. Five years ago colored Americans in this city could be numbered in hundreds, today they number perhaps less than forty… With the exception of Josephine Baker, whose popularity declined for a time but who is stronger now than ever, few colored Americans are seen on the stage. While the numbers of colored Americans have fallen off, those of the colored French West Indians and the Africans have increased.693

The last sentence suggests that the vogue for American blackness was shifting. In addition to being beautiful and talented Baker strategically moved with the popular taste.

The Colonial Exposition underlined the (in retrospect last-ditch) effort the French state was making to promote itself as an Imperial Nation-State, incite colonial pride, and aggressively advocate a policy of mise-en-valeur for the French colonies. Cultural work that created a “colonial unconsciousness” that emerged in film, advertising, and literature worked alongside state efforts to promote a greater awareness and pride in the colonies.694 This context helps explain Baker’s election as Queen of the colonies and explains her ongoing success in the métropole at a time when French musicians were closing ranks and, as Rogers points out, fewer

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694 Ezra, The Colonial Unconscious
American performers were being hired in the *métropole* (although he vastly underestimates the number).

By 1931, the year of the exposition and her election as “Queen of the Colonies,” Baker was actively choosing a Francophile identity. Her discography featured numerous songs in French by 1931. In terms of her personal image many credit her husband and manager Pepito with motivating her and guiding her to adopt a more French persona. At this stage in her career she had slimmed down into an appropriation of French chic, her hair was slicked back, with the aid of that eponymous hair product *Bakerfix* and she was doing her best to learn the language. In her life and her public image, therefore, she symbolized a *mission civilatrice* here wrought upon the naïf erotic black American girl with the help of her white European lover, to transform her into a *bona fide* French star. Baker’s personal transformation offered a celebrity narrative which correlated with the cruder lessons offered by the contrast between the cannibal village, and the civilized Guadeloupean pavilion, or the endless informational plaques at the *Cité international des Informations* where France’s achievements of civilization among her colonies were the central theme.

Baker, however, was no naïve colonial subject brought to France by a benevolent master. She actively embraced the lucrative opportunity to find a new self-presentation that resonated with the public. Baker had returned from a European tour in 1930 to take up a role in the revue 

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696 In this she raises some of the same admiration and frustration as Madonna who enacted some very problematic self-representations and yet smiled through all the resultant criticism, reshaped herself according to the market, and ended up richer than any of her critics. Of course Baker suffered from financial difficulties but she was as adept at trimming her sail to the about-to-be-prevailing wind.
Paris Qui Remue, showing at the Casino de Paris in which Baker played a series of “colonialist fantasy skits.” Her performance was clearly not authentic and yet audiences were gripped by it and the show sold out, night after night. And that show is breathtakingly obvious in its performance of a colonialist fantasy skit, projecting numerous variations on a theme of race and colonization. In the number entitled La Petite Tonkinoise Josephine Baker is the Vietnamese mistress of a French Colonist and she “loves him more than all the rest” of the girls who make eyes at him. In another she descends the majestic Casino staircase as an exotic butterfly, complete with huge wings, only to be pursued, and eventually caught by savage hunters who rip off her wings. In Voulez-vous de la canne à sucre she becomes a Martinican woman offering the audience sugar cane, and, finally, in a number that came to be her signature tune, she is a woman torn between two loves – her country, and Paris. But the country of the song, in the version that was staged in the revue, was not America. It was Africa, and the chanteuse is an African beauty torn between tribal loyalty, and her love for a (white) French colonist. It is a lilting melody that is charming, slightly populist, by no means jazz music but is definitely more syncopated than traditional French chanson or Music Hall ballad. The lyrics operate on a number of levels:

697 ‘Colonialist sexual fantasy skits’ is a direct quotation from Stovall, Paris Noir, 90. Some of these were quite absurd as Stovall, and Rose point out.
In the song, as it was composed, Paris stands for the figure of the white French colonizer, and the character of the singer, the African girl, ultimately longs to be “carried away” quite literally, in the last line. Although she might express ambivalence the song leads to the ultimate conclusion that her strongest desire, and the one that will prevail, is her desire for Paris, the lover, and also explicitly here the imperial métropole.

*J'ai Deux Amours* was written for *Paris qui Remue*, and specifically for Baker. It is no accident that the Casino de Paris went for this particular show, and chose Baker to star in 1931. As I have pointed out, the *Exposition colonial internationale* had been planned for years, and there was great excitement about it. *Paris qui Remue* capitalized on that zeitgeist. Blanchard and Lemaire point out that the intention and the extended moment it created in French imperial consciousness was grandiose, and the exposition as a whole sought to reiterate French glory in
the wake of war and depression, and a savagely decimated male population. What better way than displaying an empire of feminized or primitivised subjects, eager to love France, and be improved by her. And at least eight million visitors to the exhibition consumed this message wholesale. Baker (very knowingly) performed colonial stereotypes for the French public to consume and her suitability as “Queen of the Colonies” was therefore evident to the white French public. All too often historians overlook the importance of music as a critical social text and a site of active cultural consumption through which raced and gendered ideals are disseminated. In this instance Baker’s songs, and her performance can be interpreted as a correlative to the musical and performative transactions of the exposition, in which music from the empire was sucked into the capital, and exploited for authenticity just like black performers. The spectacles and shows discussed throughout this chapter played a vital part of promoting the colonial message. When Josephine Baker released a recording of J’d Deux Amours she offered an even more mobile item of consumption that promoted France’s irresistible attraction to her colonial subjects and the desirability of the mission civilizatrice. Although Baker never got to reign as “Queen of the Colonies” at the exposition her recording of La Tonkinoise and J’ai deux Amours was played nonstop in the evenings:

Music gives savor to the waffles, the sauerkraut is seasoned by the charming little air La Tonkinoise: and Josephine Baker, on a million discs, says what the whole world is thinking (and all the better) that she has two loves – her country and Paris.

698 In some cases this consumption was quite literal – several advertisements for Vietnamese rice in the 1930s give the message Consommez imperial, vous consommez Francais or ‘to eat imperial is to eat French.’ That quotation and material in the paragraph as a whole is drawn from Blanchard, Culture Impériale.

The acceptability of Baker as queen of the Exposition may have been greater because she didn’t raise the uncomfortable questions of black *citoyenneté* and political rights that a genuine colonial subject may have. And of course Josephine Baker was NOT bona fide French colonial subject. Her two *amours* are often taken to mean America and France. And so again we are returned to the impossible irony of her selection as “Queen of the Colonies.” There were immediate protests to the election. Perhaps one of the most vehement is from a Belgian journalist:

“Josephine Baker queen of the Colonies! That smacks of mental derangement! When I think of all the ghosts of those poor guys who went and got shot full of holes in the marshes of French Indochina, for example. I dream of Morocco, of the proud profile of Maréchal Lyautey, of the sacrifices of mothers and women, of the great native leaders. To symbolize all of that you’ve chosen Josephine Baker, a music-hall dancer? It is too much.”

There were some similar reactions in America were no less scandalized. “Queen where is yo kink” read the leading headline, in the *New York World-Telegram*, March 4 1931. The article was entitled “Harlem’s No French Colony.” And it pointed out that Baker’s image was so Europeanized by this point even her “hair had no kink.”

The conflict and turmoil around Baker’s contested appointment mirror wider trends in the imperial *métropole*. Musical performance, jazz performers, and ethnic distinctions stimulated interest and conflict in interwar Paris because they were so intricately interwoven with the performance of race and nation and with the perceived value of the colonial relationship. The anti-exposition protests targeted music, recognizing its signifying power:

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First, this exposition, defined as colonial, doesn’t bear any resemblance to it apart from the name. It has been, and as remained, in essence, a completely commercial display. The tams-tams nègres and the exotic dances, that is all that was found to show to visitors, as if the whole life of the colonies was summed up in these choreographic displays. 701

This was a damning and very astute assessment of the role of performance in the exposition. It negates the value of the performers’ art however and neglects to acknowledge the pride many performers and colonial subjects resident in the métropole, found in the representation of their culture at the exposition. However, it does deconstruct the authenticity of the performances and expose some of the political, exploitative, and commercial underpinnings of the exposition. Although it may deny agency to the performers at the exposition itself it emphasizes that the reductive images of black men and women that circulated widely in the French métropole between the wars, in part as a response to the sudden popularity of jazz, generated a productive set of responses that engaged with, and began to shift, or rupture, the reductive social construction of racial difference that had had such discursive power and dominance in France and that had been masked by Republican promises and myths of equality. The moment of Baker’s selection as “Queen of the Colonies” both confused and exposed the constructed nature of these proliferating racial and colonial stereotypes.

701“Alors que l’Exposition se ferme” le Cri des Nègres, Oct 1931, 1. This article is one of several on the exposition including a photograph showing the severed heads of rebellious colonial subjects captured by pro-French tribes and beheaded.
Conclusion

In the nineteen-twenties jazz spread its beguiling tentacles into the heart of Europe. The movement of about a thousand black American musicians to Europe resulted in a broad set of transatlantic exchanges with implications for black cultural production, the nature of citizenship in France and America, and the desirability of Western models of civilization and modernity. An analysis of this phenomenon showed that the interwar period was a moment that initiated a major discursive shift in French understandings of racial difference and that publicly complicated and disrupted the myth of color blindness. In France one response to jazz was to point out the difference between the black American presence and the French presence in Paris, and to strengthen the visibility of the Francophone black colonial presence through politics and cultural expression. It was a transnational moment in which black men and women of a variety of origins and classes from different nations expressed their pride in black culture and especially black music. The movement of jazz performers and jazz music back and forth across the Atlantic instigated an informal campaign against racial prejudice and a surge of advocacy for a cosmopolitan, racially equal society on both sides of the Atlantic.

Many groups within this loose transatlantic coalition utilized black music to serve political goals but the musical styles and performance spaces they used varied due to deep political, national and socio-economic differences. Groups in France, for example, were inspired to promote black French cultural expression in opposition to jazz and in doing so they initiated a new articulation of black French citoyenneté. Thus the examination of black music in transatlantic context, in the interwar era, revealed a host of developments in the expression of
black cultural pride and demands for racial justice. These broad trends in the black Atlantic, however, were subject to distinctive local variations.

The sudden visibility of racial difference in France after World War One due to the use of colonial soldiers coincided with the impact and popularity of jazz which was widely acknowledged to be black music. The way the French embraced jazz and jazz musicians was seen as evidence of the absence of racial prejudice in France but the ambivalence evident in some reviews of jazz hinted at a more complex reality as did the differential treatment extended to black Americans and black colonial subjects in France. The Republican model had promised full recognition to citizens of color but the legal basis for such citizenship varied wildly from colony to colony. In the Antilles inhabitants enjoyed many of the advantages of citizenship whereas in French West Africa colonial subjects had to fulfill a set of requirements including education tests and legal declarations of their intent to become a French citizen. French republican ideology thus masked a complicated set of unequal relationships between men and women of color from the colonies and white French men who were assumed to be the normative citizen. The influx of black jazz musicians into Paris at a time when France was also host to numerous colonial subjects forced the French to confront the existence of racial difference. This presented a significant problem to the French national and cultural imagination of France as a ‘color-blind’ nation founded on the Republican promises of Liberté, égalité, and fraternité.

When hundreds of thousands of sub-Saharan soldiers flooded into France during the war and then shortly afterward the black American jazz presence became a distinctive, visible, and culturally influential part of the metropolitan population (particularly in Paris, and Marseilles)
the assumption of a normative model of white French male citizenship was put to the test. Chapter One details how these developments resulted in a heightened popular anxiety about French cultural production, national identity, and about the maintenance of a racially unified French citizenry. It shows how these anxieties were revealed both explicitly and implicitly in responses to jazz and points out that black colonial subjects were active participants in the discussions about race, music, and French national identity that resulted.

Many black American jazz performers in France were not interested in these overtly political discussions but they were nevertheless politicized by their experience in France. Jazz music became their passport to an experience of respect and racial equality that America had denied them and a source of pride for their community back home. Jazz performers transmitted positive descriptions of France back home to the black community in America by way of popular newspapers, and also postcards, letters and messages to friends. As they did so they disseminated the promise and possibility of a racially equal society and a hospitable black Atlantic to a broad cross-section of African American society.

Times got harder for black entertainers in Europe in the late nineteen-twenties and as a result American musicians were drawn into closer connection with black French colonial subjects who worked as entertainers in Paris. These groups formed a sense of pan-African solidarity that paralleled contemporary developments in transatlantic intellectual circles. Chapter Two illuminates this process and reveals how the experiences of these black American jazz performers forged a pragmatic black cosmopolitanism. By sharing their positive travel experiences with an imagined black American national community through the black newspapers
the thousand or so jazz entertainers that toured Europe in the interwar period expanded the horizons of a much greater constituency of African Americans than the middle class intellectual world inhabited by the literary giants of the Harlem renaissance, or the intellectual network epitomized by W. E. B. Du Bois. Chapter Two thus shows how these jazz entertainers expanded the Black Atlantic and made it relevant to the working class without engaging directly in moderate intellectual politics or radical working class left-wing networks.

Class differences affected how the various groups in America and France that were aligned in the broad cause of racial solidarity viewed the best strategy for achieving it. And these socio-economic distinctions shaped how each group viewed appropriate gender behaviors. This was directly related to the impact of jazz upon Europe as the high profile of jazz performers meant that their behavior was very visible and could serve either as a source of pride or shame for “the race,” as African Americans designated the black diaspora throughout the world, or noirs in the French usage. In practice, as chapters three and four show, this meant that middle class advocates of race uplift hoped that through demonstrating their moral and intellectual probity and adherence to bourgeois middle class values they would prove themselves worthy of full racial equality and all the rights and privileges of citizenship. Within this world view black entertainers were viewed as potential “race leaders” and those that fulfilled bourgeois gender ideals, such as Florence Mills, or Noble Sissle were embraced by black audiences throughout the Atlantic. Stars such as Josephine Baker or Sidney Bechet who transgressed middle class mores had a more complicated reception among middle class pan-African circles.
Chapters three and four tease out the way these gender expectations differed for men and for women. Both French and American middle class advocates of race uplift were more concerned than working class entertainers to try and regulate the sexual and social behavior of fellow noirs or members of “the race.” Middle class commentaries expressed concern about black men who dressed flashily and fought and drank too much and they worried about the public impression created by black women who could be perceived as promiscuous or vulgar in their personal style and social manner. Black entertainers, however, saw the freedom to cross the color line, and consume fashion and alcohol lavishly as a symbol of the freedom from race prejudice they experienced in Europe. Further variations could be seen in the fact that the black French bourgeoisie seemed to fear being portrayed as loincloth clad jungle savages while the black American race uplift advocates focused more intensely upon sexual relationships that created scandal, such as those that crossed the color line. In both of these chapters the potential for black performers to serve as role models but also to be seen as representative of all men and women who shared their skin color intensified the expectations placed upon their behavior and the weight assigned to their performance of appropriate gender roles.

The differences between black Americans and black French African colonial subjects and French Antillean of color became evident in the differing musical practices of the groups. The analysis of black performance geographies, in interwar Paris presented in Chapter five reveals how Antillean and African subjects began to forge a vibrant sense of black French citoyenneté in the interwar era. They did this through engaging in printed musical critiques which compared the Antillean musical style loosely known as the biguine favorably to black American jazz styles. They also established and frequented a dancehall known as the Bal nègre which featured
Antillean music and dances. When that dancehall became extremely popular with the white French avant-garde and their followers black colonial subjects established a new *Bal colonial* further off the tourist track. Chapter five contends that this expansion of black French cultural expression and enjoyment in the heart of metropolitan France staked a larger claim to the inclusion of racial diversity in the French vision of *citoyenneté*. The political ramifications of black music-making were even more apparent in the use of Antillean bands and jazz music to draw crowds along to anti-colonial dances and fundraising concerts. Musical dances and soirées became a vehicle for the black anti-colonial message and strengthened its appeal. The trajectory from asserting the distinctiveness of Antillean black cultural expressions to employing that cultural pride and musical practice in the service of explicitly political rhetoric and action heralded the appearance of the self-consciously politicized Négritude movement and marked a significant new departure in the relationship between France and the colonies. The role of popular music in that development was significant.

The *Exposition Coloniale* of 1931 presented the French public with a rich variety of performances and stagings intended to educate the French about the colonies. In the process it presented different groups of colonial subjects according to a racial hierarchy based upon their perceived level of civilization. That hierarchy then further legitimated the colonial enterprise as the groups presented as more civilized were unsurprisingly those that had been colonized earliest and incorporated French religious and educational systems into their society. Chief among these model colonies was the Antilles. Thus the performance of racial difference at the Colonial Exposition generated debate and discussion and was contested and promoted by the colonial subjects it claimed to represent. Those subjects saw clearly how the Exposition manipulated
musical and dance performances to sell the colonial message and associated ideas about racial difference. And they responded as they had to jazz by contesting, adapting, accepting and selectively promoting the performances of race and civilization on display.

While colonial subjects living in the métropole responded to the portrayal of their homelands in a variety of ways the performers at the Exposition occupied a similar role to jazz performers in this process. They remained somewhat removed from these political debates and disputes and showed no hesitation at performing in ways which reinforced racial stereotypes. Many performers were eager to promote the colonial message and in doing so enjoy a trip to Paris and a guaranteed wage along with the new experiences. Others were genuinely proud of their cultural heritage and eager to impress spectators with their performance. However, unlike the jazz performers their movements were strictly regulated, their visas were attached to the Exposition and rigidly enforced. The French state thus demonstrated once again a very clear set of racial distinctions that combined both racial difference and citizenship status. These colonial performers could make a claim on the French state and were on display as French subjects so they required regulation whereas the jazz performers, who collectively had no claim to French citizenship, enjoyed far more freedom in Paris than the performers hired for the Exposition.

In December of 1934, as Hitler’s presence loomed ever larger over Europe, the trade journal Ballroom and Band published an article in which the contributor warned readers about events in Germany and the growing anti-Semitism in both England and France. The article appealed to musicians directly to respect the common humanity that linked them, and to stand

702 “Colour and Creed,” Ballroom and Band, December 1934, 2.
firm in the face of anti-Semitic and anti-black sentiments being expressed throughout Europe.

The author reminded readers to contest and critique the looming specter of Nazism and remember the ties that bound musicians together rather than focusing on the spurious distinctions Hitler was using to drive people apart. As I have argued, and as this columnist pointed out, musical performance, practice, and appreciation transcended some distinctions of race and class in interwar Europe but simultaneously forced a consideration of other distinctions such as the nature of French citizenship and the citizenship value of an Antillean heritage as opposed to a French or Senegalese one.

Despite the efforts of the Ballroom and Band’s astute columnist the shadow of Hitler did fall across the continent. And in the wake of the Second World War the surge in black cultural pride and Nègritude ideals sparked by the jazz craze reached maturity. At the same time the resilience of the myth of French color-blindness and the very real distinctions made in the French métropole on the basis of race persisted. That myth was paradoxically strengthened by black American musicians due to their favorable impressions of France even as the disparity in the French treatment of black Americans and black colonial subjects intensified anti-colonial feeling among black French subjects. Their reaction to the jazz craze indicates that they registered the difference in treatment between them and black Americans and were moved to campaign strongly for full and racially blind French citizenship for colonial subjects.

The developments described are not simply a narrative that illumines the complicated treatment of racial difference in the French past. They also foreshadowed future tensions. In recent years the failure of the republican promise in France has become vividly apparent, as riots
have broken out in the *banlieues* that demonstrate a passionate sense of anger, and exclusion operating among French citizens of African, and North African descent. Similarly riots in Martinique have shown that the inequities persisting along colonial and racial fault lines continue to fracture “Greater” French society. Finally, recent controversies over the issue of religious difference and the wearing of the veil have raised the larger concept of how one can express difference – religious, ethnic, or gendered – as a member of the French republic and yet fully belong in the historically developed understanding of French *citoyenneté*.

The cultural and political developments that paralleled and intersected with the jazz craze in France in the nineteen-twenties raised these questions very publicly and urged black men and women throughout the Atlantic to consider issues of citizenship and race. One impact of the massive popularity of black music in the French *métropole* was that it played a significant role in motivating the Nardal sisters to open their salon and to champion the biguine, the “highest expression of the Creole spirit.” The musical fundraisers that attracted hundreds of French colonial subjects and raised money for anti-colonial organizations established the organizational basis and the public profile for powerful decolonization campaigns after the Second World War.

The Négritude movement that reached its maturity after 1945 is often attributed to its “fathers” Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Edouard Glissant. Yet the analysis laid out in this dissertation suggests that it can also be traced to the singing of American spirituals at the salon of the Nardal sisters, the dancing of the biguine at the *Bal colonial*, or the way that the alluring sights and sounds of jazz raised the visibility of racial difference in France and the selective racial discrimination of the French state. Further work remains to be done on these connections between the political legacy of the *tumulte noir* and later decolonization movements.
The historiographical neglect of the role of popular music in these developments and until recently of the role of the Nardal sisters in the foundation of Négritude suggests that much of this work remains to be done in the field of gender and popular culture.
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