# A Cultural Reappraisal of Jazz History: Some Preliminary Researches and Analyses on American Vernacular Music

by

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### ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Black is a word that carries strong cultural currency in the United States today. By casting jazz as "black music," early jazz critics and scholars created suspect bases for many key facets of the music and its historical development. Due largely to racial politics, these have gone virtually unquestioned. Through this process of creating a history of jazz, African-American racial classification was conflated with Black ethnic identity. This thesis represents a preliminary approach to a deeper examination of the array of ethnic groups, and the cultures they represent, present in *fin de siècle* New Orleans. Particular attention is paid to Creole culture, a complex, regional construction scarcely recognized by the jazz community. By examining the development of jazz through a cultural lens, that music's place in the broader evolution of American vernacular musics may become more evident.

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### INTRODUCTION

Jazz scholar and pianist David Ake has called jazz "a site where individuals and cultures construct, display, and challenge their identities." If this has been true for jazz musicians in practice, the conflation of race and culture has all but erased this facet of the music from its history. As that history has been created, the cultures and ethnic identities of its participants have been blanched to match the politically-crafted monochromatic racial framework upon which the United States was built: members of the jazz community have been treated simply as "black" or "white." This stripping of cultural identity has taken place throughout the jazz narrative, and it has been enacted on both sides of America's binary racial system. For example, Sicilian or Jewish ethnics have been essentially interpreted as "white," and, perhaps more importantly, the multifaceted Creole ethnicities have simply ignored or, more commonly, folded into Black culture. In Ake's words.

critics... generally characterize jazz in terms of two mutating but self-contained worlds: black and white. On the one hand, black jazz is most typically seen as an expression of a unified community ("the people"). On the other, white jazz is often understood as the creation of a rag-tag group of outsiders, misfit individuals forced together by and alienated from an equally unified but incurably unhip metaculture.<sup>2</sup>

Such cultural and ethnic obfuscation has led to a jazz history built atop what seems like illogical precepts and grossly leaping conclusions — all part of a broad effort to make the music fit neatly into American Black culture. The need of jazz critics and scholars to present the music as exhibiting a fundamental Black identity — a concept that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), x.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid., 11.

requires the necessary, isolating precept that the music mysteriously appeared, practically from naught, among the virtually destitute Blacks of New Orleans in the decade or so immediately prior to the twentieth century — has all but completely divorced jazz not only from its multicultural wellspring, but from its musical lineage as well.

In regard to this musical lineage, it is my belief that jazz is not "America's Great Art Form," at least as it originally emerged. Rather, it is but one vein of American vernacular music, having evolved slowly over time through minstrelsy, the period of the so-called "coon" songs, and ragtime. It is, at its core, commercial music made for dancing, as surely a popular entertainment as its evolutionary antecedents were popular entertainments. Jazz is decidedly not a folk music, as is commonly insinuated (though it has, at various points in its history, undoubtedly absorbed and incorporated characteristic folk elements), and it does not adhere to the model of the largely insular cultural products studied by ethnomusicologists. It is a music shaped not primarily by the artistic aesthetic of a beset people yearning to find their collective voice, but by the fickle market forces of public taste and the need for ever more thrilling entertainments for the youth of a young nation.

The works of early jazz scholars often culminate with a soppy pearl pulled from a common string of lamentations bemoaning the belief that we may never know how the earliest jazz truly sounded, that the question of who blew the first notes of jazz may forever remain a mystery, or that no one had the foresight to record the holy moment of musical conception. I reject every aspect of this type of thinking. I believe that the music's trail of the evolutionary development is still quite available for finding. I also

imagine that serious musicological studies will show this evolutionary trail to be heavily influenced by the lives and work of African Americans.

The first step in reconstructing the lost path of jazz's evolution requires jazz scholars to embrace the idea that African Americans have not been culturally monolithic. As this remains true today, this point should be readily agreeable. Black culture must be reckoned to represent only one possible expression of identity for people whose lineage (whole or in part) can be traced to Africa. The second necessary step involves taking a lesson directly from the research approaches of historical musicologists: Early jazz scholars must become more interdisciplinary in the scope of their awareness. Those engaged in examining the problems in the history of early jazz must acknowledge and make use of the work that cultural anthropologists and social historians have done to increase our knowledge and understanding of the American Gulf South, the Southwest, and even parts of the Midwest. As key geographies in the evolution of American vernacular music, the need to understand the cultural formations of these regions should be self-evident.

It is my general hypothesis that, as vernacular, commercial musics, ragtime and jazz were critically shaped by Spanish and Creole cultural currents extending northward from Latin America and the Caribbean, so much so that one could question whether these musics can be adequately or accurately described as products of the United States at all. Of course, an exploration of this magnitude is much too large to be contained in this thesis. Rather than provide an exposition that merely brushes the surface of a complete theory, I have chosen to provide a few smaller studies that test the proverbial waters of the broader principles involved. Chapter one will expose some of the specific problems

in jazz history that have been arisen from, or been exacerbated by, the conflation of race and culture. Chapter two is a brief historiographical survey of the interpretation of Creole culture in jazz scholarship. In chapter three, I examine the possibilities of discovering historical evidence of Creole culture in our oral sources through the use current oral history methodology. Finally, chapter four represents a first attempt to expose the evolutionary chain leading to early jazz through analysis of the music itself — obviously a necessity if historical social theories about a music are to be adequately supported.

Before proceeding, a word must be said about the controversy such a study can engender. In pieces that can be interpreted as attempts to rob Black culture of its achievements, it has become customary for authors to offer reassurances, lengthy rationalizations, or quasi-apologies for their work. It is my marked intention not to perpetuate this trend. This document represents an earnest attempt at scholarly work. If any reader believes that it falls short of this goal, I welcome refutation in a similarly serious, scholarly format. I stand more than happy to participate in any such dialogue. History is, after all, an ongoing process. It is a product of the same human condition that gives rise to the extremes of love and war: our inability to ever truly know what another human perceives or has perceived. In spite of this condition, we remain driven by our inexplicable and inextinguishable need to attain such understanding. It is from this foundation, and this perspective, that this thesis has ultimately been written, my work having been guided not by political concerns, but by a purpose of history succinctly expressed by Mary Lynn Rampolla:

The historian's goal is to acquire insight into the ideas and realities that shaped the lives of men and women of earlier societies... The

effort we put into grappling with the assumptions and world views of earlier societies teaches us to see the world through different eyes. The ability to perceive and recognize the meaning of events from a perspective other than our own and to appreciate the diversity of human beliefs and cultures is of inestimable value in our increasingly complex and multicultural society.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), 1.

### CHAPTER 1

## Race and Culture in a Problematic History

It was Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535 – c. 475 BCE) who left behind the famous statement, "Nothing endures but change." In keeping precisely with this sentiment, his words have evolved through variant translations and repetitions into the more clichéd, "The only constant is change." Accordingly, it seems that, in one way or another, all endeavors in historical study can be finally reduced to the deciphering of large- or small-scale evolutionary processes. Even the smallest, most seemingly insignificant of these are vastly complex, and for the employment opportunities thus afforded, historians should be eternally grateful. Yet, as humans, we routinely and actively seek out and take comfort in erroneous knowledge found in the simplest interpretations of such complex historical sequences. This seems particularly true in the United States. As Peter Gomes — a gay African-American Republican Baptist who was on faculty at Harvard University, Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard's Divinity School, and Pusey Minister at Harvard's Memorial Church — put it:

One of the many things one can say about this country is that we dislike complexity, so we will make simple solutions to everything that we possibly can. Even when the complex answer is obviously the correct answer or the more intriguing answer, we want a simple yes or no, or a flat out "this," or an absolutely certain "that."

This has certainly held true through the construction of the history of jazz.

In their seminal works on the subject, Frederic Ramsey, Jr., Charles Edward Smith, Rudi Blesh, Winthrop Sargeant, and other writers in their circle sought, perhaps above all, to achieve lasting political change for the people that Frenchman André

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Peter J. Gomes, interviewed by Stephen Fry, Stephen Fry in America, BBC One, 12 October 2008.

Hodeir, among others, referred to *en masse* as "the American Negro." <sup>5, 6</sup> This earliest recognized generation of critics, writers, and would-be scholars to focus their generally amateurish attention on jazz used the relative simplicity of the binary, black/white racial system long woven into the fabric of the United States to their advantage, eschewing the very real, often obvious complexities extant in the historical evolution of the music in service to their political agendas. While not the first writers to identify jazz as Black music, they were the first to proclaim the idea as *bona fide*, scientific, historical fact, crafting their narratives in books rather than the magazine or newspaper column domain of the critic and thereby lending increased credibility to the concept of an "authentic," indigenous, Black art form.

Through their reduction of the enormously complex, multicultural evolution of American vernacular music into an art form wholly created within Black culture and "owned" accordingly, they had no small measure of success in achieving their laudable aims of bettering the societal lot of African Americans. Indeed, this school of jazz writers was so successful at capitalizing on America's embrace of historical simplicity that their works paved the way for a future that would support their constructed past — one in which jazz assumed the trappings of the European art music tradition and became an element of the Black ethnic construct. Gunther Schuller cemented the position of the early "scholars" tales in his 1968 book, *Early Jazz*. In his preface, Schuller writes,

The majority of books have concentrated on the legendry of jazz, and over the years a body of writing has accumulated which is little

<sup>5</sup> André Hodier, *Jazz: It's Evolution and Essence*, revised ed., trans. David Noakes (New York: Grove Press, 1979), 10.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For a rather full treatment of the political backgrounds and social aims of early jazz writers, see Randall Sandke, *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics, and Business of Jazz* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 15-37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> For more on the construction of ethnic identity and ethnicity as "invention," see Werner Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

more than an amalgam of well-meaning amateur criticism and fascinated opinion. That this was allowed to pass for scholarship and serious analysis is attributable not only to the humble, socially "unacceptable" origin of jazz, but also to the widely held notion that a music improvised by self-taught, often musically illiterate musicians did not warrant genuine musicological research.<sup>8</sup>

Schuller fails to identify that the historical basis on which he rests his subsequent analyses is the very body of writing he himself decried as merely passing for scholarship. In so doing, he officially installed folklore as the historical base of future studies, a condition still affecting the vast majority of jazz scholarship today.

The sort of racial reduction described above may not have led to significant problems in the recorded history of jazz if *Black* and *African-American* were synonymous terms. However, outside of the simplicity fostered in, and indeed historically espoused by, the United States, they are not. The noun *African American* and its adjective form, *African-American* — words originating in the United States — identify or describe the *race* of a person or people whose genetic roots are at least partially African; who were, by and large, born in the United States or are citizens or legal residents thereof; and who exhibit physical characteristics associated with their African hereditary background. Being a descriptor of race, African-American is, by definition, tied to physical appearance, itself determined by biological factors. Therefore, African-American does not possess or in any way connote the existence of, or adherence to, any specific cultural elements in any given individual. To assign such arbitrarily to any racial classification is surely the very epitome of racism.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), vii.

On the other side of the coin, and despite its conflation with the term African-American, *Black* almost invariably carries overwhelming cultural capital.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary Black political and intellectual leaders have certainly continued, if not amplified, this usage. When Tavis Smiley speaks of "the Black experience" or, more generally, "Black folk," for example, he is clearly not speaking to, for, or about a group linked solely by physical characteristics. 10 Rather than addressing the needs or concerns of a population that includes recent immigrants to the United States from Africa, the Caribbean, or even France — people fitting into one racial category — he is specifically speaking about and to African Americans who share an ethnic identity rooted in the slave populations of the antebellum period of the United States. 11 Protestant Christianity and the music and rhetorical devices of "the Black Church," work songs, spirituals, "soul food," the adaptation of American English, a tradition of innovative dance, the display of Afrocentric motifs in clothing or art, and the blues are a few of the highly recognizable cultural elements central to a definable Black ethnic identity. It is this mode of ethnic expression that has been so conflated with the more generic racial descriptor, African-American, in the United States. The difficulty of this synthesis is expressed in the CNN television documentary, "Who is Black in America?" (one installment of the series *Black* in America, hosted by Soledad O'Brien), when interviewee Edwin Reyes says, "A lot of people off the bat think I'm black. I am Dominican... It's two totally different cultures.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> As a word used to describe a specific culture or ethnicity, *Black* it is capitalized throughout this essay. <sup>10</sup> Tavis Smiley, "Smiley: America 'Hell' for Black Folk; 9/11 'Niggerized' America," excerpt from *A Conversation with Tavis Smiley, with Special Guest Dr. Cornel West* (Cambridge, MA: Ames Court Room, Harvard Law School, 01 December 2006): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ad30WpNpMK8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> It should be noted that the purpose here is not to determine which words should be applied to specific constructs. This essay employs what seem to be the most commonly used terms when race or culture are specifically invoked.

They come from the same ancestry — Africa obviously — but, I mean, we're like 400 years removed."<sup>12</sup>

As previously suggested, the early identification of jazz as the product and property of Black culture has led to problems at all levels of scholarship, problems fostered by suspect concepts that have become entrenched in, and fortified as parts of, a basic understanding of the music. In other words, through efforts to maintain the faulty premise, questionable elements of the history that would be challenged — and perhaps summarily dismissed — in other fields have become fundamental to the mainstream conception of the music. Jazz as folk music; a persistent, deeply embedded creation myth; the centrality of New Orleans as the crucible for this "creation" of jazz; jazz being complete with improvisation, the blues, and swing as defining elements at the time of its emergence and naming; improvisation as singular to jazz; early jazz as an art form created by musicians from an artistic impetus and expressing a Black aesthetic; and early jazz as an expression of social resistance are all examples of problematic concepts that have been elevated to the point that scholars and writers can do little more than insist that the reader share in the faith of their veracity. Indeed, these elements are representative of what Werner Sollors identifies as "the typical features that romanticism dictated a nation [or culture] ought to have: folk and fairy tales, costumes, the vernacular, people's superstitions, an epic tradition, and so on — all of this as the nourishing ground for both high art and peoplehood."<sup>13</sup> Constructed to maintain the position of early jazz as Black music, these common, dubious assumptions in jazz history have been the primary forces blocking their own investigation. They have also served as obstacles to the full

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Edwin Reyes, "Who is Black in America?," *Black in America*, CNN, 9 December 2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Werner Sollors, "Introduction: The Invention of Ethnicity," in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), xiii.

realization of jazz as an important part of a longer, broader history of American vernacular music — a musical tradition which clearly did not and could not have sprung forth fully fledged from Black culture, or even from cultural streams restricted to the United States. Some of these suspect notions will be explored below, but first, it might be helpful to examine the historical use of jazz as a product of Black culture.

The conception of jazz as Black music was fully legitimized by 1946, for it was in that year that Rudi Blesh first published his book, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz*. Indeed, the first chapter is titled "Black Music," and in it, Blesh writes that jazz "began not merely as one more form of Negro folk music in America but as a fusion of all the Negro musics already present here. These, the work-songs, spirituals, ragtime, and blues, all stemmed back more or less completely to African spirit and technique." He continues on this line of thought at some length, calling jazz "the original musical creation of the American Negro... a synthesis of African and European material so predominantly African in character and method that it might be more accurate to define it as an African art form." 15

One requires no great powers of textual analysis to link Blesh's perception of "Negro" is to the culture of former slaves. This tie is evidenced in his lamentation of the "dilution and deformation of jazz [that] took place from 1920 on because of the influences of commercialism, white playing, and [the increased] sophistication of the Negros themselves." Indeed, Blesh demonstrates his meaning quite obtusely in his assertions that jazz was a product of "Negro creative power, suddenly freed as the

<sup>14</sup> Rudy Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid., 6.

Negroes themselves were freed from slavery," <sup>17</sup> and that "it was black music because it came, at first, from the black ex-slaves and not from their lighter and more elegant cousins in the Old Quarter." <sup>18</sup>

In the earlier anthology, *Jazzmen*, edited by Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, the implication of jazz as Black music is clear: a piece titled "White New Orleans" follows a chapter more generally called "New Orleans Music," in which the authors place the origin of jazz squarely in the milieu of stereotyped Southern Black life, offering no inkling of the existence of any cultural substrata. It is no small irony that, in favor of rethinking their cultural understandings, early writers like Bill Russell and Stephen W. Smith frequently tied up their social quest for African American betterment in blatantly racist statements. For example, Russell and Smith wrote, "the remarkable technical equipment of many of the [Black] instrumentalists [in early jazz] can be explained partly by the abundance of time on their hands."

In typical fashion, Schuller lends his accreditation to the concept of jazz as Black music while surreptitiously providing grounds to question this assertion:

Up to the present time... jazz antecedents have been discussed and documented (in so far as documentation has been possible) only in sociological and historical terms. The main events, leading from the importation of Negro slaves into the United States through the rituals of the Place Congo in New Orleans to the spread of "jazz" as a new American music, have been well substantiated, but the details of this historical development must await much more research and documentation. Our knowledge of the links between certain important events — such as the dances at the Place Congo in the mid-nineteenth century and the emergence of the generation of jazz

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Charles Edward Smith, "White New Orleans," in *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), 39-58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> William Russell and Stephen W. Smith, "New Orleans Music," in *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), 1-38.

musicians after Buddy Bolden following the turn of the century — is largely dependent upon educated guessing rather than the sifting of factual data.<sup>22</sup>

How the linking of pivotal events can be "well substantiated" when the very chain is made up of smaller sequences that are only understood in terms of "educated guessing" is beyond the logic-processing capabilities of this writer. Indeed, one should bear in mind that, as a general rule, the authors of the writings from which Schuller worked offered no historical evidence to support such conclusions. As earlier suggested, later scholars have routinely offered weak evidence in their attempts to support and bolster their preferred, unsubstantiated precedents.

Jazz historian Lewis Porter has unequivocally demonstrated his belief that jazz is Black music, stating that the problems of jazz history and research stem from a lack of such recognition among would-be scholars, writing, "Before researchers can do proper work in jazz, they must acknowledge themselves to be scholars of black music." It is not surprising, then, that he provides just the sort of wobbly support mentioned above for the case of jazz as Black music in a chapter of his 1997 book (*Jazz: A Century of Change*) titled, "Where Did the Music Come From?" In it, he cites a piece from the 15 November 1856 edition of the Boston-based *Dwight's Journal of Music* for "its historical value regarding the era before jazz." As Porter notes, the author (writing under the *nom de plume* "Evangelist") was "unusually positive about black culture" in his enthusiastic appraisal of Black music. For Porter, this article clearly represents an accurate assessment of nineteenth-century Black music making, ostensibly reflecting the spirit

<sup>22</sup> Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Lewis Porter, "Some Problems in Jazz Research," *Black Music Journal* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 1988): 201.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Lewis Porter, *Jazz: A Century of Change* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 77.

from which jazz was developed, for he summarizes by saying, "Fifty years after the above article was published, jazz was created by a later generation of African Americans." <sup>26</sup>

Upon examination, however, Evangelist's words do not even reflect his own experiences or expertise, but rather, support for a burgeoning nationalistic trend in the United States and the typical Romantic sentiments one expects to accompany such. After his initial claim that "the only musical population in this country are [sic] the negroes of the South," Evangelist goes on to bemoan the musical state of affairs in the United States, writing, "We are still dependent on foreigners for our music. Italian singers fill our concert rooms, and German bands parade our streets." According to Evangelist, this unfortunate situation existed because of the Americans' silence through their daily toils. In contrast, Evangelist tells us that "the Germans sing along the banks of the Rhine. The Swiss shepherd sings on the highest passes of the Alps, and the peasant of Tyrol fills his valleys with strains wild as the peaks and the torrents around him." 28

Indeed, Evangelist's main point is not to celebrate the peculiar aesthetics of Black music. Rather, he is urging whites to take a lesson from Black culture and to incorporate music more fully into their lives, thereby setting the foundation for the development a truly American music. Evangelist actually demonstrates his ignorance of Southern Black music in revealing the source of his insights, writing, "We at the North hear these songs only as burlesqued by our Negro Minstrels, with faces blackened with charcoal." He

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Evangelist, "Songs of the Blacks," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, 5 November 1958, 51-52, quoted in Porter, *Jazz*, 77-78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid., 79.

goes on to paint romantic scenes of Black music making that he himself has confessed never to have witnessed. He writes, for example,

> Mingled with these love songs [of minstrelsy] are plaintive airs which seem to have caught a tone of sadness and pathos from the hardships and frequent separation of their slave life. They are the Songs of their Captivity, and are sung with a touching effect. No song of a concert room ever thrilled us like one of these simple African airs, heard afar off in the stillness of a summer night. Sailing down the Mississippi, the voyager on the deck of the steamer may often hear these strains, wild, sad, and tender, floating from the shore. 30

Later in the chapter, Porter turns to the 1926 writing of one Rebecca Hourwich who, according to him, was "one of the few white writers who actually heard and liked both African music and jazz and could write about the connections she heard."<sup>31</sup> Porter does point out that her article has "nothing scholarly about it," but he seems more keen to caution the reader about the crude orientation of her racial perception than the fallacies of her conclusions.<sup>32</sup> In her piece, Hourwich is writing of travels that extended "from Capetown, across the lower strip of the continent, through to Portuguese East Africa."<sup>33</sup> She writes of her observations:

> Jazz, as we know it, is unmistakably American. But it is derived directly and indirectly from the music of Africa. If you could hear the native music makers and watch their dances, you would easily recognize the strange lyric bond that links the Dark Continent with the New World... Start the natives singing or dancing and the ensuing scene is one that might be enjoyed at the old market in Montgomery, Ala., the levees at New Orleans or in darktown anywhere.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Porter, *Jazz*, 87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Rebecca Hourwich, "Where the Jazz Begins," Colliers, 23 January 1926, quoted in Porter, Jazz, 87.

To the American it is the one authentic touch of "back home." Inevitably comes the realization: why, this is jazz! This is the land of jazz! The birthplace of jazz!<sup>34</sup>

The principal problem here is one of geography. It should go without saying that Africa is a very large continent, that Sub-Saharan Africa was historically covered by numerous tribes, each with their own identity and forms of cultural expression. Ms. Hourwich's travels took her nowhere near the ancestral homelands of the vast majority of African slaves in the United States; the native people she observed theoretically have as much connection as an Inuit and a member of the Cherokee Nation. Generally, her commentary could be likened to a traveler in Cambodia writing that he or she had found Puccini's musical inspiration for *Turandot*. Porter, however, signals his approval of the worth of Hourwich's testimony by following it directly with, "Of course, African Americans saw the connection between jazz and Africa."<sup>35</sup>

Turning properly now to the list of questionable concepts ensconced in popular and scholarly conceptions of jazz by the conflation of race and culture: If jazz is to be identified as Black music at its inception, it naturally follows that it must be perceived or portrayed, at least to a degree, as folk music, for this is the nature of music gestated within the confines of one culture. Blesh makes this association in no uncertain terms, writing, jazz "began not merely as one more form of Negro folk music in America but as a fusion of all the Negro musics already present here." He goes on to say that "Negro urban folk music in New Orleans resulted in an instrumental music, jazz."<sup>37</sup> Blesh further demonstrates his view of jazz as folk music when he describes Black children

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Porter, *Jazz*, 89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Blesh, Shining Trumpets, 3.

"second lining" in New Orleans — behind groups he has just identified as parading jazz bands — as attendees of "the primary class in the folk-academy of a people's music." Schuller is more cautious in his choice of words, but he backs up Blesh's general thesis, describing jazz as "a relatively unsophisticated quasi-folk music" and claiming that it was "more sociological manifestation than music."

The problem with this mode of thinking lay partially in the fact that bodies of folk music are mostly made up of internally-generated musical material: songs designed to relate and preserve the common experiences and shared values of the society engaged in the creation and continuation of the music. When outside material makes its way into a folk repertoire, it is usually modified in some significant way, often in its lyrical content. This was not true for jazz, particularly in its earliest days. In speaking of the picnics held at Milneberg and Lake Pontchartrain in the first decades of the twentieth century functions that served as key sources of income and important sites of musical crosspollination for New Orleans musicians — John Chilton writes, "The music played at them consisted of popular songs of the day, old folk tunes, military airs, and occasionally, the blues."40 The trumpet player Lee Collins recalled that the Eagle Band, which he heard in his youth in New Orleans and which is commonly given to represent the "rougher," less schooled, early Black style of playing, had a diverse repertoire. The selections he recalled by name were all published, complicated piano rags by Scott Joplin or James Scott: "Maple Leaf Rag," "Rose Leaf Rag," and "Frog Legs Rag." 41 We need

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> John Chilton, Sidney Bechet: The Wizard of Jazz (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Lee Collins and Mary Collins, *Oh, Didn't He Ramble: The Life Story of Lee Collins*, ed. Frank Gillis and John W. Miner (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 63.

go no further on this topic here. Clearly, the preference of published, popular songs and instrumental pieces alone precludes early jazz from being folk music.

Perhaps the most easily refuted idea pervading conceptualizations of jazz is the creation myth. Let it be put forth that, in modern and postmodern thought and discourse, all facets of human culture and understanding can be successfully viewed as "inventions," "constructs," or "creations." However, the idea of a much more literal act of creation has become a fundamental facet of jazz history, one that, at times, rings as religiously as anything found in the book of Genesis. 43

Blesh invokes the most recognized embodiment of the jazz creation myth when he writes, "Buddy Bolden's Ragtime Band of 1893 [is] generally considered the first jazz band." The legendary status granted Bolden, and the narrative license provided therewith, is well known and does not require regurgitation here. However, the creation myth runs much deeper than the priority of the legendary Buddy Bolden. For example, Blesh calls jazz at its imagined first appearance a "new and unique music... with its own style and content." He later clarifies the actual extent of his meaning when he addresses "the misconception... that jazz is potentially a new form, not in itself, but as a part of the European tradition."

Schuller, adopting his usual waffling role, intelligently indicates that jazz is the product of an evolutionary process while providing tacit support for the creation myth:

It is impossible to establish the exact beginnings of jazz as a distinct, self-contained music... But whatever date is picked, it is safe to say that in purely musical terms the earliest jazz represents a primitive

46 Ibid., 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Sollors, "Introduction," in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Sollors, ix-xx.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Note Blesh's biblical tone and use of the word "miracle" in describing the creation of jazz in Blesh, *Shining Trumpets*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 7.

reduction of the complexity, richness, and perfection of its African and, for that matter, European antecedents.<sup>47</sup>

Surely any music that has "exact beginnings" and that is best portrayed as having devolved from its so-called antecedents, rather than evolving from them, cannot be fully conceived of as anything but a self-standing creation.

As previously suggested, this must surely be the easiest problem of early jazz history to correct. It would seem that any serious, musicologically-minded scholar would easily reject the notion in favor of an evolutionary approach. Indeed, jazz historian Ted Gioia has offered a more realistic view in his *History of Jazz*, writing,

Although Bolden has been typically heralded as the progenitor of jazz, such simplistic lineages ignore the broader musical ferment taking place in turn-of-the-century New Orleans. Many musicians — mostly black, but also Creole and white — were experimenting with the syncopations of ragtime and the blues tonality and applying these rhythmic and melodic devices to a wide range of compositions. 48

Note that Gioia's picture of the emergence of jazz — with its wide-ranging musical influences and active, conscious experimentation — also constitutes a challenge to the idea of jazz as folk music.

Going hand-in-hand with the creation myth, and still discernible in Gioia's refutation thereof, is the portrayal of New Orleans as the crucible of jazz's creation. Ramsey and Smith highlighted both concepts in placing the following words of Bunk Johnson on the first page of text in *Jazzmen*: "So you tell them that Bunk and King Bolden's Band was the first ones that started Jazz in the City [of New Orleans] or any

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35.

place else."<sup>49</sup> In their introduction to the book, Ramsey and Smith follow this by writing of "the relatively small company [of musicians] that made hot spots hotter in New Orleans of the late nineteenth century. These were the men who 'put jazz on the map."<sup>50</sup>

The list of writers lending substance to this questionable, embedded feature of jazz history is long, and their words tend toward plain statement of fact. In their piece in *Jazzmen*, William Russell and Stephen W. Smith write, "Storyville [New Orleans' infamous red-light district] was kind to hot music. With a dozen bands, many trios, and other musicians employed every night, it is little wonder that jazz first sprang up and flourished in New Orleans." Blesh wrote,

That this [the creation of jazz] should have happened in New Orleans is inevitable. Only there, were the brass bands on every street, the instruments cheap and plentiful for the Negroes. Only there, too, were all the rich ingredients that, flowing into the wild, rough, archaic jazz, transformed it into a developed, classic form before 1900.<sup>52</sup>

That more modern scholars of jazz have perpetuated this earlier, unsubstantiated claim can be seen in the work of the biographer and jazz historian, John Chilton. In his biography of Sidney Bechet, he writes, "Jazz, as the music became known, flowered throughout the world from seeds that originally ripened in New Orleans." Interestingly, a short time later, Chilton employs a quote from Sidney Bechet that provides some evidence that jazz was indeed being played outside of New Orleans as early as 1911, much earlier than the standard rhetoric would allow. In speaking of his first touring

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Bunk Johnson, letter to Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, quoted in *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), v.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, "Introduction," in *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), xi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> William Russell and Stephen W. Smith, "New Orleans Music," in *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), 35-36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Blesh, *Shining Trumpets*, 161.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Chilton, *Sidney Bechet*, 5.

experience at the age of fourteen, Bechet recalled, "All this was before records and radio so we didn't know what jazz was being played anywhere else. We just played our own style." 54

The idea of New Orleans as jazz crucible is admittedly one that has met with more skepticism than most in this litany of perceptions often taken as givens which, in truth, deserve more historical scrutiny. Yet this skepticism is often provided only half-heartedly and without contradictory evidence. For example, German jazz historian Joachim Berendt straddles the issue in a manner worthy of Schuller when he writes, "It is certainly a myth that this city in the Mississippi delta was the sole birthplace of jazz, but New Orleans was indeed the point where many important aspects of the music first crystallized." <sup>55</sup>

Future investigations of the role New Orleans played in the development of jazz will likely lead more to theoretical realignment than historical rewriting. The key to a more realistic view of New Orleans' centrality can be found in Berendt's words: If the creation myth inherent in jazz scholarship is dispelled, the need for the music to have a "birthplace" will likewise whither. This is important to consider, for the tremendous evolutionary steps that occurred in American vernacular music in New Orleans in the nineteenth century are certainly significant, but they do not constitute "creation." Rather, they represent both an in-flow and out-flow of musical material. And there is no denying that recorded evidence shows that the musical skills — the understanding of, and the ability to execute, complex uses of voice leading, harmony, and rhythm — of New Orleans vernacular musicians were far superior to those of their contemporaries

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Sidney Bechet, *Melody Maker* (3 June 1939), quoted in Chilton, *Sidney Bechet*, 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Joachim Berendt, *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to Fusion and Beyond*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., translated by H. and B. Bredigkeit with Dan Morgenstern and Tim Nevill (Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992) 9.

elsewhere in the United States.<sup>56</sup> The latter is certainly a product of the local environment.

In essence, in playing ragtime and other popular music of the day, New Orleans musicians were playing the same material that was being played across the country; they were not creating a music within the confines of some imaginary bubble. What they were apparently doing is playing this commercial music differently. That is not to say that they possessed some wildly different conception. Rather, they played ragtime and popular songs differently simply by playing them *better*. To be sure, the musical abilities that facilitated the better playing of vernacular music by New Orleans musicians were at least partly born out of the various ethnic identities prevalent in that city. Ethnographic study of these groups should shed some light on the specific contributions of New Orleans musicians to the evolution of American vernacular music.<sup>57</sup>

Let us suppose for one moment that all of the foregoing concepts associated with the origins of jazz are true, that jazz was, and perhaps still is, a Black folk music created

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Compare the Original Dixieland Jass Band, "Dixie Jass Band One-Step" (Victor 18255, 26 February 1917), 78-rpm recording; Ruth Lee accompanied by Ory's Sunshine Orchestra, "Maybe Someday," (Sunshine 3002-A, June 1922), 78-rpm recording; Spike's Seven Pods of Pepper Orchestra, "Ory's Creole Trombone" (Nordskog 3009A, June 1922), 78-rpm recording; or King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, "Just Gone" (Gennett 5133, 5 April 1923), 78-rpm recording — all by bands dominated by New Orleans musicians — with the instrumental sections of Collins and Harlan, "That Funny Jas Band from Dixieland" (Victor 18235, 12 January 1917), 78-rpm recording or Mamie Smith and her Jazz Hounds, "Crazy Blues" (Okeh 4169, 10 August 1920), 78-rpm recording. The bands on the latter two recordings are clearly attempting New Orleans-style polyphony, but the musicians do not possess the harmonic or rhythmic sophistication to produce satisfactory results. Interestingly, the most musically successful early jazz records made by musicians from outside New Orleans must surely be those of Ciro's Club Coon Orchestra, a group working in London, England with roots in New York's Clef Club. However, the leader of the group was Dan Kildare, a native of Kingston, Jamaica, and his Caribbean heritage raises the possibility of his cultural affinity being possibly more aligned with New Orleans than New York.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> It is the belief of this author that this sort of work need be done somewhat removed from music. Early jazz scholars should work to understand the full cultural palettes that define the influential ethnic groups in New Orleans in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Through this forward-looking process, scholars will be better able to see what each ethnic group brought to the music of the city. Much of the fine work done on the music of New Orleans suffers in this regard because it focuses on the complete picture rather than the pieces that make up the jigsaw, cf. Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years*, 1791-1841 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

in New Orleans. This narrative leaves the music sitting in the city of its birth simply waiting to be discovered by outsiders and given a name. Charles Edward Smith proposed this very situation: "Everybody remembers [Buddy] Bolden and his barber shop and his scandal sheet and his ragtime band, playing a new music that didn't have a name of its own." Chilton echoes him, writing, "It was to be some years before the new style was given its name; the early music improvised by black pioneers such as Charles 'Buddy' Bolden (1877-1931) was classified as ragtime, even by the performers themselves." But if this is the case, the new music, jazz, was surely identifiable by its unique, defining elements. Put another way, the music must have been created whole, complete with its defining musical elements, for its very identification to be possible.

The key defining attributes writers have regularly associated with jazz from its inception are improvisation, the use of the blues, and swing. Porter includes these in his examination of various and possible definitions of the music:

It may be enough to say that jazz is a type of music developed by African Americans in and around New Orleans in the early years of the twentieth century and since practiced all over the world, and in which improvisation is central, a certain type of "swinging" rhythm (relying heavily on a walking bass) is typical (but not essential), and expressive characteristics of African American music generally (such as "blue notes") are important to the generic sound. <sup>60</sup>

While it is Porter's intention only to provide a broad definition of jazz and not to specifically identify the salient features of jazz at its inception, Chilton provides a list of musical elements found in early jazz and expressly identified as "not part of ragtime" that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Charles Edward Smith, "Callin' Our Chillun Home," in *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), 3-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Chilton, *Sidney Bechet*, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Porter, *Jazz*, 17.

could almost serve as an antecedent to Porter's definition. His list of the musical novelties of early jazz fit into three broad categories. First, Chilton writes that the new jazz was "full of 'blue' notes." Second, he states that jazz featured new timbres created by instrumentalists through vocal effects, writing that the musicians "deliberately created a rough, burring effect in their throats." Lastly, he claims that "innovative rhythmic patterns... formed the basis of the 'new' music: jazz used time values that were entirely different from those of the waltzes, mazurkas and schottisches that had long been the standard music of the New Orleans dance halls."

Chilton has notably omitted improvisation, so we will leave that point for the time being. His first two categories together make up what Porter more generally referred to as African American "expressive characteristics," while his third point appears at first glance to be a more refined expression of Porter's vague "certain type of 'swinging' rhythm." Here, however, Chilton seems to have contradicted himself by neglecting the ragtime he previously cited the New Orleans musicians as claiming to have played. Any distinction between what Chilton has identified as new rhythmic innovations and the metrical and rhythmical foundations of ragtime blurs beyond recognition as he continues:

Elements from the African-style dancing that had been a feature of the slave gatherings in Congo Square, New Orleans, during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century drifted through the following generations as an atavistic memory and linked up with exotic rhythms brought into the city from South America and the Caribbean islands. These rhythms were transplanted into European metres of two- and fourbeats in a bar with dramatic results. 65

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Chilton, *Sidney Bechet*, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Ibid., 5.

As chapter four will show, ragtime already possessed the superimposition of such "exotic rhythms" over a duple meter bass line and accompaniment. Apparently Chilton is, therefore, not including swing in his list of the innovative musical features of jazz, but rather ascribing a feature that, contrary to his assertion, did exist in ragtime.

Let us, therefore, return to the blues, as it represents the only consensus found thus far. As already shown, when jazz is represented as folk music, the blues (which *was* a folk music in its earliest incarnations and still exists as such to some extent) becomes its ready counterpart. Blesh, an obvious champion of the "jazz as folk" concept, called the blues "the hot core of jazz" which "seemingly cannot be extinguished." More recently, jazz historian Alyn Shipton submitted that "Jazz began [with music]... involving the use of some notes in both its melodies and harmonies that are flattened to a degree smaller than a semitone," in other words, blue notes. Evidence, however, points to the blues as a separate musical genre that could be incorporated into the ragtime band schema of the day but that was in no way an essential part of vernacular music in New Orleans in the decades surrounding 1900.

In 1911 or 1913 (the latter being more likely), a very young Sidney Bechet joined the noted Eagle Band, a group formed out of the remnants of Buddy Bolden's band after he was committed. The Eagle Band's notoriety came from its ability to play rough, driving music, and, above all, to play the blues. According to Bechet, "The Eagle Band was much more of a barrelhouse band — a real gutbucket band — a low-down band which really played the blues, and those slow tempos. To tell the truth the Eagle Band

<sup>66</sup> Blesh, *Shining Trumpets*, 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Continuum, 2007), 4.

was the only band that could play the blues."<sup>68</sup> Despite Bechet's certain hyperbole, the fame achieved by the Eagle Band for playing the blues demonstrates that the ability to do so well was not common. Wholly Black bands had not yet adapted and incorporated the blues into New Orleans band music, and they were not playing the blues regularly or with much skill. The blues, therefore, simply cannot be viewed as an intrinsic element of jazz. It is probably more realistic to view the use of blues inflections as an expressive tool employed by some New Orleans musicians.

Russell and Smith provide an interesting transition to a discussion of improvisation in early jazz as they intertwine this supposedly characteristic element with the blues and even jazz itself, comingling and conflating the terms freely:

Mirth and laughter find little expression in the song of a people long depressed with thoughts of exile, slavery, and oppression. Music born under such conditions can only express a spirit of resignation touched with yearnings. Thus, the primitive African chants, some consisting apparently only of incessant moans, became the basis of the blues.<sup>69</sup>

The [blues] were improvisational in character. Soon Negro groups, having learned to play by ear, were engaged to play for dances and by 1880 were found on some of the packets on the Mississippi River. On the boats the Negroes worked as porters, barbers, and waiters during the day and entertained passengers with music at night.

Historians point out that few of these early musicians could read music; that they were "fake" players. This is a highly significant fact when one considers how the music of the jazz band evolved and reached maturity during the last years of the nineteenth century. Although naturally influenced by the music of their former masters, the Negroes retained much of the African material in their playing... The Negroes were accustomed to endless repetition of short motifs and were not bothered by the brevity of form in the white man's popular song. Nor did they worry about the trite character of the

<sup>69</sup> Russell and Smith, "New Orleans Music," in *Jazzmen*, 8-9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Sidney Bechet, recorded interview, John D. Reid Collection, quoted in Chilton, *Sidney Bechet*, 15.

melodies, for being unaccustomed to read [sic] music, they quickly altered the tune anyway.

With the New Orleans Negro, improvisation was an essential part of musical skill.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps the most striking facet of Russell and Smith's interpretation of jazz's early development is the idea that the melody of the song or piece being played would be significantly altered from its original form. They expound on this idea later in the chapter, writing that "someone who could read would play over a new tune [on the piano] for the band so they could learn it. By the time the band played it over a few times, its composer would probably never recognize the tune."<sup>71</sup> The ludicrous nature of this claim is easily exposed. Early recordings of popular songs by New Orleans bands such as the 1920 recording of "Margie" by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band or the 1923 recording of Jelly Roll Morton's "Froggie Moore" by King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band exhibit a very clear melody that is almost always present throughout the performance. 72, 73 The tendency toward a clear and present melody in New Orleans vernacular music is supported by the oral testimony of early jazz musicians. Biographer Terry Teachout quotes Louis Armstrong's recollection of his mentor's principle teaching: "Joe Oliver tell [sic] me, play the lead, boy, play the lead so people can know what you're doing... Any time you play straight lead, you just as hot as anybody."<sup>74</sup>

This exaggeration of the presence of improvisation and the perception of it as a necessary component of early jazz is not restricted to the delivery of melody. Blesh hints

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Original Dixieland Jazz Band, "Margie," Victor 18717, 1 December 1920, 78-rpm recording.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, "Froggie Moore," on *Off the Record: The Complete 1923 Jazz Band Recordings*, disc 1, Off The Record ARCH OTR-MM6-C2, 2006, compact disc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Louis Armstrong quoted in Terry Teachout, *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong* (New York: Mariner Books, 2010): 72.

musical education as a freeing factor in hot and spontaneous creation."<sup>75</sup> He develops this thought by asserting, "Unable to read music, [Black marching bands] promptly transformed the marches into Negro jazz."<sup>76</sup> The clear implication is that the members of any given band were improvising an entire performance together, simultaneously.

Russell and Smith support this idea, writing that the reputation of early New Orleans jazz trumpeter Bunk Johnson stemmed from "his ability to improvise second cornet parts."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, *collective improvisation* is a term used almost unanimously by jazz scholars to describe what is actually a carefully constructed polyphonic style routinely employed by New Orleans bands, a style that musicians across the country were copying with varied levels of success by 1920.<sup>78</sup> Russell and Smith go so far as to claim that collective improvisation was the root of the New Orleans style of polyphony, rather than following the more common, more logical approach that suggests that the polyphonic style developed out of other musical genres like the march. They wrote:

at this by presenting early jazz as "a music created... by men using lack of formal

The fact that these men were not primarily note readers also explains, when collective improvisation was attempted, the origin of the characteristic New Orleans polyphony, which in its more complex manifestations became a dissonant counterpoint that antedated Schoenberg. <sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Russell and Smith, "New Orleans Music," in *Jazzmen*, 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Blesh, *Shining Trumpets*, 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Russell and Smith, "New Orleans Music," in *Jazzmen*, 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> For some uses of *collective improvisation* or equivalent terms see Blesh, *Shining Trumpets*, 18 (Blesh actually labels New Orleans-style "group improvisation" an African survival); Mark C. Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006): 48, 63, and 77; Daniel Hardie, *Exploring Early Jazz: The Origins and Evolution of the New Orleans Style* (Lincoln, NE: Writers Club Press, 2002): 211; Bruce Boyd Raeburn, "King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, and Sidney Bechet: Ménage à Trois, New Orleans Style," in *Oxford Companion to Jazz*, ed. Bill Kirchner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 99; Charles Edward Smith, "White New Orleans," in *Jazzmen*, 49; Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 57; Winthrop Sergeant, *Jazz, Hot and Hybrid*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975): 191; and Bob Yurochko, *A Short History of Jazz* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1993): 35.

Given the carefully layered structure generally exhibited in early jazz recordings by New Orleans musicians, Russell and Smith's equating of the level of dissonance found in New Orleans polyphony with that of atonal composition from the Second Viennese School is as baffling as it is misleading.

It should also be remembered that the fact that bands almost invariably played without sheet music in front of them does not represent historical evidence that the members were improvising musicians. This was likely the mere interpretation of contemporary observers, and may, in fact, reflect more the racist assumptions of earlytwentieth century commentators than anything happening in the music. Would a critic ever assume that Luciano Pavarotti was improvising because he was musically illiterate and sang without sheet music in front of him? One must wonder if the later jazz aesthetic embracing a more literal form of improvisation is a direct product of these assumptions.

Some jazz writers have managed to avoid this generally faulty premise. 80 Chief among this small group is James Lincoln Collier. In his "comprehensive history" of jazz, he wrote,

> The players of this early jazz were not improvising in the modern sense of the word, where a musician invents a wholly new melodic line within a given harmonic framework. They were, rather, embellishers. A trombone player, for example, would have a basic part worked out for the tunes in his repertory, which he would vary slightly each time to suit what another player was doing, or out of the simple spirit of the moment.<sup>81</sup>

In his later book, *Jazz: The American Theme Song*, he further clarifies his position:

Early jazz bands grew out of a tradition that was resolutely ensemble, and not essentially improvisatory. The musicians could

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> See Lewis Porter, Michael Ullman, and Edward Hazell, *Jazz: From Its Origins to the Present* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993): 23, 42-43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> James Lincoln Collier, *The Making of Jazz: A Comprehensive History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978): 68.

"embellish," as the term was; but as in the marching band, they were expected to play a more or less preset line... 82

Efforts to maintain the general belief that jazz developed out of the improvisations of Black musicians — theoretically a necessity because of their unschooled status have given rise to the idea that improvisation was unique to jazz in its early period. As historian Burton Peretti put it, "Jazz revitalized improvisation in the music of the Western world."83 While it may be true that improvisation was diminishing as a common performance practice in the Western art music tradition in the late nineteenth century, it was certainly not the distant memory that many jazz authorities have depicted. For example, in a conversation on the life and work of Louis Armstrong, Wynton Marsalis seemed pained to admit that Louis Armstrong was not the first improviser, saying, "We have to say, in the history of music, [that improvisation preceded jazz] because they improvised in the Baroque era and I'm sure in many eras before that."84 While it is true that Wolfgang Amadè Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven were famous keyboard improvisers living after the Baroque era, a later composer gained widespread fame for his virtuosity at the piano and his skill in the art of concert improvisation. 85 Pianist and composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk was a half-Creole New Orleans native with firsthand knowledge of pan-Creole music. Gottschalk's Creole-themed virtuosic piano

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 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz: The American Theme Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 30.
 <sup>83</sup> Burton W. Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992): 113.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Wynton Marsalis and Stanley Crouch, interviewed by Robert O'Meally, *The Artistry of Pops: Louis Armstrong at 100*, Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University, Miller Theatre, New York, 1 February 2000, www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0X24dJHYq4, transcribed by the author.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> The term *concert improvisation* is used to indicate a performance practice particularly common among keyboard-playing composers. Such composers would improvise on preexisting, "loose" compositions of their own or, less often, on well-known salon pieces. Either category implies simple themes with relatively simple, common, and/or repetitious forms upon which the composer/performer would create variations, principally through various diminution techniques. This is a far cry from the more extemporaneous, later form of jazz improvisation that became part of the music's general aesthetic around the time that Lester Young came to prominence and represents a form of improvisation much closer to that employed by early jazz musicians.

compositions have been frequently cited as "pre-jazz" pieces, and at least one of his concert improvisations was published. The title page for *Capricho español*, which is based on Spanish national themes, clearly indicates that the piece was improvised in concert on 16 December 1851. <sup>86, 87</sup> Gottschalk died while on stage in 1869, aged only forty years. Considering, for example, that style-setting New Orleans clarinetists Louis "Papa" Tio and "Old Man" Lorenzo Tio, Sr. were born in 1862 and 1867, respectively, the improvisational gap as Marsalis proposed it — spanning approximately 150 years and the Atlantic Ocean — appears not to exist.

Following entrenched modes of thought, there are those who will readily dispute even the consideration of Creoles of color of the elder Tios' generation as "improvising" musicians. However, there is more than enough historical evidence to support the challenge of stereotypes long associated with "Downtown" Creole musicians and "Uptown" Black musicians in New Orleans. New Orleans-based clarinetist Evan Christopher has researched Creole clarinetists in some detail, paying particular attention to the prominent Tio family. In an article for the *Jazz Archivist* he writes, "the Tio brothers became the very model of Creole versatility, working steadily in many different musical situations and maintaining 'legitimate' musical standards by teaching." The implication is clear: Their work as professional musicians involved playing in vernacular

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Capricho español* (Madrid: C. Monier, Librero de Camara de S.S.M.M., n.d.). The full title page text is "For Miss Fatima de Olavarria: *Capricho español* for Piano. Improvised by L. M. Gottschalk in Concert on 16 December 1851 in the Circus Theatre." Translation by the author, see appendix 2. The Circus Theatre referenced here is in Madrid, Spain.

appendix 2. The Circus Theatre referenced here is in Madrid, Spain.

87 Clyde W. Brockett, "Gottschalk in Madrid: A Tale of Ten Pianos," *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 279-315.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> Like *concert improvisation*, this use of the word *improvisation* is intended to indicate slight variation or embellishment of prepared material and not extemporaneous musical creation.

music settings. 89 Daniel Hardie — offering some raw data in conflict with Lawrence Gushee's, a researcher nonpareil whose facts are rarely, if ever, in dispute — provides some important details of Lorenzo Tio, Sr.'s commercial work. Principally, he lists the typical instrumentation of the Tio-Doublet String Band — with one significant modification — as clarinet, violin, viola, and double bass. 90 By examining advertisements for stock arrangements on late nineteenth-century and early twentiethcentury popular sheet music, one can easily determine that stocks were sold for a wide variety of common ensembles, but not for anything approaching this seeming adaptation of the standard string quartet. It seems that at least some members of this band, comprised solely of Creoles of color, were "improvising." 91

That a teacher like Lorenzo Tio, Sr. refused to teach his students to "fake," "adlib," or "improvise" (all synonyms in early New Orleans jazz) does not mean that said teacher wass incapable of these skills. After all, Lorenzo Tio, Jr. is on records soloing as an early jazz musician, and he did not teach his students (many of whom became famous jazz musicians in the following years) to "fake." Rather, he taught them the musical skills they needed to be able to do so. And a learned musician's prejudice against his or her unschooled counterpart does not necessarily indicate the former's inability to play in the manner of the latter. In short, while there is no evidence to support the idea that early

America: A Negro Oddity" (Detroit: Zickel Brothers, 1895), 1; W. H. Krell, "The Mississippi Rag" (Chicago: S. Brainard's Sons, 1897), 1 in appendix 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Evan Christopher, "Licorice Stick Gumbo: The New Orleans Clarinet Style," Jazz Archivist 16 (2002): 5-

<sup>90</sup> See Hardie, Exploring Early Jazz, 19 & 21-22; Lawrence Gushee, "The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz," Black Music Research Journal 14, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 17-18; and Charles E. Kinzer, "The Tios of New Orleans and Their Pedagogical Influence on the Early Jazz Clarinet Style," Black Music Research Journal 16, no. 2 (Autumn 1996): 279-302. Hardie was apparently not aware that both of the Tio brothers were actually "A. L. Tio" (Antoine Louis Tio and Augustin Lorenzo Tio, Sr.) and so misidentified "Professor A. L. Tio" as a violinist. The moniker is a sure reference to Lorenzo Tio, Sr. The Tio-Doublet String Band was also known as the Big Four String Band, and Tio's work with this small dance group garnered a considerable percent of his professional income for a number of years.

91 See Charles K. Harris, "Cast Aside" (Milwaukee: Chas. K. Harris, 1895), 2; Harry H. Zickel, "Black

New Orleans jazz musicians were improvising freely, there *is* historical evidence that suggests that commercial musicians across the board were developing their own, highly-refined, systematic head arrangements, and that this was the key feature separating New Orleans vernacular musicians from those in other parts of the United States.

There is even some evidence that suggests that Creoles of color had direct influence on the music making of Black musicians, at least by the beginning of the twentieth century. According to John Chilton, the shifting status of Creoles of color in the last decade of the nineteenth century put them in a position to begin teaching Black students:

A Creole teaching a black pupil would have been a rare occurrence in the Reconstruction years following the Civil War, and the reverse even more unusual. But by 1900 this cross tuition — particularly in music — was taking place in several parts of New Orleans, and, as a result, the old down-town and up-town sections gradually lost their definite boundaries when it came to the making of music. 92

The loosening of these boundaries is reflected in Creole clarinetist Emile Barnes' recollection that "Alphonse Picou, George Baquet, Lorenzo Tio [Jr.], Sidney Bechet, 'Big Eye' Louis [Nelson] and Sidney [Desvigne] used to meet up-town musicians in the Alley, a bar-room at St Bernards and Claiborne. They would play and party." While Barnes' statement does not explicitly reflect musical influence by Creoles of color, the Alley was in the traditionally Creole 7<sup>th</sup> Ward, indicating that the uptown Black musicians would have been the ones entering "foreign" territory, thus implying their desire to be there.

Additionally, Creole clarinetist Albert Nicholas was quoted as saying, "Brass bands were mixed bands. Creole and uptown in a brass band — they were solid. They

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Chilton, Sidney Bechet, 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Emile Barnes, interview, Tulane Jazz Archive, 20 December 1960, quoted in Chilton, *Sidney Bechet*, 11.

were one, Joe Oliver and Manuel Perez, see?" And Louis Nelson Delisle, more commonly known as "Big Eye" Louis Nelson, was a Creole clarinetist whom Chilton cites as having "helped create the rougher up-town style that soon gained popularity with dance-hall listeners." Nelson's musical knowledge and abilities have been debased by some authors who wish to place him firmly in the Black musical sphere in the New Orleans of his day. However, in keeping with the possibility raised earlier that New Orleans musicians, and particularly Creoles, could indeed be multifaceted — that they could exhibit and continue their firm commitment to traditional European musical excellence in some settings and function outside of those parameters in others — Chilton writes that, as a teacher, Nelson "tried to get Sidney [Bechet] interested in working on some solfeggio exercises from a standard tutor, but first sight of the manual was enough for Sidney — he left it at Nelson's house and never bothered to pick it up again."

From this cursory examination of some of the problems in jazz history that have been fostered by scholars' failure to fully consider the unique attributes and orientations of the ethnic groups that participated in the evolution of jazz, it is clear that there is cause to more fully investigate the role that cultural streams other than that of Black New Orleanians played in the music's development. Only through the clean division of race and culture can such investigations bear fruit. If it is possible to achieve such a thing in the political climate of jazz scholarship, perhaps the disconnect between jazz and the overall development of vernacular musics in the United States can be rectified, leading to a broader, deeper understanding of the historical cultural connections between the United States and its Latin American neighbors.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Melody Maker (15 July 1972), quoted in Chilton, Sidney Bechet, 18.

<sup>95</sup> Chilton, Sidney Bechet, 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Ibid., 8.

## CHAPTER 2

The Reception and Treatment of Creole Culture in Jazz Scholarship:

A Preliminary Historiographic Study

Les gens du couleur libre, the ubiquitous New Orleans Creoles of color so frequently mentioned in historical works on jazz, are perhaps the most commonly misunderstood and generically maligned ethnic group in the United States. A growing body of recent scholarship examining the history and culture of New Orleans "Creoles" (this simple sobriquet itself is a generally accepted misnomer) has shown many widely held perceptions of this group, so foreign in nature to the United States, to be nothing more than stereotypes and myths, often kept alive and disseminated for political purposes. The Creoles of color that emerge from the scholarly literature are a distinct caste possessing a shared religion, language(s), cuisine, artistic life, education system, and literature. They are a people with a wide range of occupations and economic standing. They are a people diverse in physical appearance. By the end of the antebellum period, the Creoles of color represent a united people despite being made up of families long ensconced in Louisiana and those that arrived from Saint-Domingue by way of Cuba in the first decade of the twentieth century.

A key point gleaned from recent studies is the extent to which Creoles of color in New Orleans throughout the nineteenth-century were united with the broader, European-dominated Creole culture. They read the same newspapers and literature, they listened to the same music, they owned slaves, and they even shared ownership of businesses with some regularity. Compelling evidence has shown the "quadroon ball *plaçage*" system to

be little more than a politically-driven myth. Indeed, the interracial relationships that ultimately led to the formation of a three-caste society in New Orleans and other Spanish and French colonies in the Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean basin have been shown to be long-term affairs, with couples more often than not cohabitating at least as long as those in same-race unions. Many of these couples were married by local Catholic officiates, even if the current legal authorities would not recognize such unions. Accordingly, female Creoles of color were not a class of prostitutes, as they are commonly portrayed, and their offspring were not the shameful issue of "the white man."

Caste formation, and thereby the formation of a distinct Creole of color ethnic group, was largely a product of a unifying, clearly formed political agenda that rapidly diverged from that of the "white Creoles" at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. The bourgeois middle class of European businessmen and tradesmen were able to Americanize, and they did so with fervor to protect their interests, while the Creoles of color were anomalous to the United States. While there were free Blacks elsewhere in the United States, nowhere in the country was the government confronted with such a large population of well-educated free people of color who owned property and, perhaps most importantly, believed in their rights as free people and naturally expected the possibility of upward social mobility as part of their cultural outlook on life. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For the work upon which the foregoing paragraphs are based, and for more on Creole history and culture, see Kenneth Aslakson, "The Quadroon-*Plaçage* Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 709-734; Thomas Fiehrer, "From Quadrille to Stomp: The Creole Origins of Jazz," *Popular Music* 10, no. 1 (1991): 21-38; Id., "Saint-Domingue/Haiti: Louisiana's Caribbean Connection," *Louisiana History* XXX, no. 4 (1989): 419-437; Paul F. Lachance, "The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 109-141; Id., "The Formation of a Three-Caste Society: Evidence from Wills in Antebellum New Orleans," *Social Science History* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 211-242.; and Alfred Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

One would imagine that cultural recognition and study would be natural elements in the works of jazz writers of every stripe, and that jazz scholarship would serve as hub of valuable information for cultural studies of the United States. Jazz scholar David Ake has previously given voice to this idea:

Given the complex history of cross-cultural interaction in this country, it seems almost inevitable that jazz — perhaps the most culturally promiscuous music of the twentieth century — would provide the focal point for so many different claims and interpretations from the academy.<sup>2</sup>

At times such concern for culture seems to be in action: jazz writers as divided in opinion on the racial basis of the music as Rudi Blesh and Randy Sandke have invoked Franz Boas, Melville Herskovitz, and other pioneering cultural anthropologists for their contributions to the formers' work and general understanding. However, this lip service does not translate into substance. Jazz scholarship is a veritable monument to the racial motivations and obsessions of its creators. Racial concerns, which as shown in chapter one mirror the well-established binary racial system upon which the United States is founded, have all but eradicated the earnest study of the cultural foundations of jazz. As the following survey of sources will reveal, this has had a tremendous impact on the perception of New Orleans history in general, and on that of the Creoles of color in particular.

Lawrence Gushee, perhaps the most widely respected and referenced scholar working with early jazz, has had a long history of dealing with Creoles of color.

Unfortunately, his position on the subject has, overall, not been favorable for them. In a

<sup>3</sup> Rudy Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Randall Sandke, Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics, and Business of Jazz (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

1985 response to Alan Lomax's book, *Mr. Jelly Roll*, Gushee clearly takes issue with the idea that Creoles of color constituted an actual ethnic group, at least at the beginning of the twentieth century. He specifically takes issue with three "larger issues" that plague Lomax's work. Two of the three issues centered on the very existence of a verifiable, extant, Creole of color culture: "the continuity of the Afro-American Creoles of New Orleans," or rather, the lack thereof; and "the degree to which jazz is to be heard as 'a wordless Creole counterpoint of protest and pride." He is true to his claim that these questions will not find answers in this article. However, in his 2005 book, *Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band*, Gushee provides his conclusions. He writes of his "notion that this... group was called a 'Creole Band' because all or most of its members were light-skinned," and not because of any cultural or musical affinity with an ethnic group. He does allow for the possibility that the designation may have implied an elevated commercial status, but in so doing, he removes the possibility that it would indicate anything significantly musical.

In this discussion of the Creole Band, Gushee obliquely questions the validity of postbellum claimants to the ethic title, Creole of color, writing of "the free persons of color in New Orleans — and the group that after the Civil War continued *their* [emphasis added] way of life." He identifies some elements of that way of life as "a desire to cultivate formal study of language, literature, and art" and "some modest disposable

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Alan Lomax, *Mr. Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz."* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1950).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Lawrence Gushee, "A Preliminary Chronology of the Early Career of Ferd 'Jelly Roll' Morton," *American Music* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 389-412.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Lawrence Gushee, *Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 294.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid.

income." This would indeed be shallow criteria for defining an ethnic group. However, Gushee has missed some critical historical background.

Gushee addresses the reasons for the band's "Creole" appellation earlier in the book, writing,

> If "creole" is taken to mean, as it was for many Americans around this time, light-skinned (for an African-American) and possibly with some "Caucasian" features, then the term appropriately applies to [William Manuel] Johnson (especially), [James Florestan "Jimmy"] Palao, [George] Baquet, and [Freddie] Keppard. The only band member who seems to have descended from the old New Orleans "creole" group, that is, "colored Creoles," originally composed of "free persons of color," and its relatively French artistic strivings, seems to have been Baquet. 11

Gushee's adherence to the stereotyped image of the well-to-do, elite, haughty Creole of color, with highbrow airs carried over from the "old New Orleans Creole" highbrow status — as we will see, a very common portrayal — is obvious. He is looking for stereotyped characters, and failing to find them, he decides these people and their culture generally no longer exist. It should also be noted that Bill Johnson (Jelly Roll Morton's brother-in-law) was from the area of Biloxi, Mississippi. Gushee would certainly have trouble reconciling this with his image of the archetypical Creole of color, yet Biloxi was the southern French colonial capital before New Orleans assumed the position. Research has shown cultural affinity between the free persons of color that remained in Mobile, Alabama and those in New Orleans. 12 Still, there is much work to do in examining the resilience of Creole culture along the Gulf Coast and up the Mississippi.

10 Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Parish Identities of Free Creoles of Color in Pensacola and Mobile, 1698-1860," U.S. Catholic Historian 14, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 1-10.

Rudi Blesh seems to make clear his understanding of a distinct Creole culture in his preface to the 2002 Da Capo edition of Sidney Bechet's autobiography, Treat It Gentle, describing Bechet as a "handsome, mercurial Creole" and Jelly Roll Morton's recorded interviews with Alan Lomax as a "long, rich Creole saga." However, in his summation, he simply refers to Bechet as "a great black artist." <sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere in his published works, Blesh seems to alternate between identifying Creoles of color as a substratum of Black culture and vilifying them through common stereotypes. In his early jazz history book, Shining Trumpets, Blesh paints a picture of a Creole society that is driven by a "colorist" impulse to realize their superiority over Blacks, yet willing to prostitute their women to gain the favor with whites. He writes:

> Here a class of free Negroes, almost an anomaly in the South, arose early. Some even came to own slaves of a skin darker than their own. In many an eddy the black and white soil settled down and mixed into a damp creamy brown loam, fertile, secret, and rich. These creoles of color can be accounted for in part by human passions, in part by Gallic tolerance, in part by the perennial laissezfaire, child of the indecision and indolence of the Crescent City.

> Tolerance, too, allowed the colored Creoles to become, in the nineteenth century, an elegant society that educated its young in France and supported a large symphony orchestra and chorus. Not a few of its members "passed" into white society. tolerance — or indolent indecision — permitted the blacker slave Negroes to carry on their African music and dancing in Congo Square. 14

The end of this statement serves to clearly separate Creoles of color from the mythical Black breeding ground of jazz. He continues, "Creole society, [the] haughtiest in the

Sidney Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2002), i-iii.
 Rudy Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 152-153.

South, lived side by side with the abject blacks and tolerated, if not condoned, the countless *mesamours* of white gentlemen with ripely beautiful quadroons."<sup>15</sup>

The first chapter of John Chilton's biography of Sidney Bechet is interestingly titled "Creole Ancestry," the interest in the title generated by Chilton's lack of recognition of Bechet's cultural inheritance. In the one-paragraph summary of Creoles of color contained therein, he perpetuates many of the negative stereotypes commonly associated with the ethnic group when he writes, "The proudest, and perhaps the most insular, of all the various racial groups [in New Orleans] was that of the Creoles." He continues by skirting the existence of a Creole culture that, according to his narrative, had since disappeared:

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the term 'Creole' was used to describe colonial families who had come from France to settle in Louisiana, but this definition gradually lost its original meaning and the word became applied to anyone whose lineage showed both negro and French (or Spanish) ancestry.<sup>17</sup>

Chilton's attempt at etymology is muddled. He finishes this brief summary of the history and meaning of Creole with a sentence that could have been taken directly from Gushee: "The offspring from these mixed unions were sometimes spoken of as 'Creoles of colour' (*gens du couleur*), but eventually the word Creole became common parlance for any light-skinned Negro." Perhaps this was true elsewhere in the United States, but given that the cultural "otherness" of Creoles of color still exists in New Orleans today, where the term Creole would not be applied to light-skinned Blacks, it must have been all the stronger during Sidney Bechet's childhood in the first decade of the twentieth century.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> John Chilton, Sidney Bechet: The Wizard of Jazz (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibid.

While he stops short of recognizing Creoles of color as a distinct ethnic group, Chilton does provide several details of Creole life and history that are surely reflective of the existence of such. For example, he indicates that Creoles of color were still speaking French or *patois* as late as the 1890s, indicating that they had preserved the use of a language foreign to two dominant cultures, and they had done so over the course of about 130 years. He also relates that Creoles of color had thrived economically up to the American Civil War, writing, "During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Creoles played an important part in the growth of New Orleans, providing the city with a good percentage of its craftsmen and tradesmen... The Bechet family, living in down-town New Orleans, had developed a bourgeois life style during their decades of relative prosperity." This stands in stark contrast to the propertyless slaves before emancipation and the abject poverty that they and their descendants faced after.

Chilton goes on to identify social and geographic separations between Creoles of color and Blacks in postbellum New Orleans:

[Creoles' of color] direct dealings with black people who lived in the up-town section of the city were few and far between, and, even though no formal segregation existed between Creoles and Negroes, most of the [downtown Creoles of color] were of French extraction.<sup>20</sup>

He also implies that political forces exerted by the dominant society were pushing two distinct groups of people together:

The changing laws and restrictions introduced in the 1890s meant that the Bechets, and countless other Creole families, found themselves reclassified in a way that they themselves considered to be a form of relegation. This metamorphosis brought drastic changes.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.

As Fiehrer and others have clearly shown, the process of containing, if not erasing, the legacy of *gens du couleur libre* in New Orleans' typically Creole three-caste society had been going on since the United States assumed control of the colony in 1803.<sup>22</sup> Even if his conception of this process is highly truncated and despite the possible implication that Creoles were not actually being moved down the social ladder, the very fact that Chilton has changing laws and new restrictions to mention demonstrates that Creoles of color had an elevated position in the social hierarchy — even if only slightly — to lose.

Elsewhere, Chilton implicitly indicates cultural differences between Creoles of color and Blacks by reinforcing old stereotypes, stating that "the rough-and-ready ways of [the uptown Blacks] did not charm the average Creole family... Happily, attitudes gradually changed, but even today it is not unknown for a venerable member of an old Creole family to dwell on racial differences." The last sentence clearly reveals Chilton's bias.

In his 1997 book, *Jazz: A Century of Change*, Lewis Porter, in introducing the poet and novelist Clarence Major's theory that the word *jazz* was of Creole derivation, wrote:

In New Orleans, the original center of jazz, many blacks were partly of French ancestry and were known as black Creoles. In addition to English, they spoke a variant of French called "Creole" or "Creole patois" (French for dialect), to which they imported some African words. 24

Even this short statement is problematic. The first difficulty is Porter's use of the term "black Creoles" — a term which seems to have been only used previously by James

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> See Thomas Fiehrer, "From Quadrille to Stomp: The Creole Origins of Jazz," *Popular Music* 10, no. 1 (1991): 21-38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Chilton, Sidney Bechet, 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Lewis Porter, *Jazz: A Century of Change* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 2.

Lincoln Collier and Amiri Baraka (*née* LeRoi Jones), but which Porter casually indicates had been commonly used in New Orleans.<sup>25, 26</sup> If this appellation had been used in New Orleans, one would surmise it to be a translation of *Créoles noirs*, a term this author has never encountered. A second problem lies in the implication that the "black Creoles" spoke a French/African dialect that reflected their mixed-race nature. This implication is completely false. *Patois* was spoken at every level of New Orleans society, and even the fervent Americanization of the postbellum era did not eradicate its use. According to Fiehrer,

The Creole dialect spoken by *slaves* [emphasis added] pervaded white Creole domestic music. It was known not only to rural planters but to many New Orleans élites, as evidenced in midcentury journalism and fiction... To this day Creole remains the maternal language of some 10,000 whites in the parishes of Saint-Martin, Saint-Landry and Pointe Coupéé.<sup>27</sup>

Porter's linking of the French dialect, *Créole*, with Creoles of color seems to stem from nothing more than anachronistic word association.

In 1911 or 1913 (the latter being more likely), a very young Creole, Sidney Bechet, joined the famous Eagle Band, replacing Lorenzo Tio, Jr., a member of the dynasty of Creole clarinetists mentioned earlier, and easily the most prominent New Orleans clarinetist of his generation. The Eagle Band's reputation came from its ability to play rough, driving music, and to play the blues. According to Bechet, "The Eagle Band was much more of a barrelhouse band — a real gutbucket band — a low-down band which really played the blues, and those slow tempos. To tell the truth the Eagle

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> James Lincoln Collier, *The Making of Jazz: A Comprehensive History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978). <sup>26</sup> LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed From* 

It (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Fiehrer, "From Quadrille to Stomp," 26.

Band was the only band that could play the blues."<sup>28</sup> This is very significant. Against the common stereotypes of the music made by both Creoles and Blacks, the employment of Tio and Bechet in the Eagle Band shows that a working knowledge of the blues was not restricted to Black musicians, and that Creoles played more than "sweet" dance music.

This small sampling of the reception of Creole culture, and more specifically Creoles of color, by jazz writers and scholars shows the extent to which attitudes and interpretations of this key New Orleans ethnic group are still derived from pejorative stereotypes. This assumes that writers acknowledge the ethnic group at all, which is frequently not the case. This treatment seems all the more strange since jazz musicians living and working in New Orleans easily recognize the continued existence of Creoles today. According to clarinetist Evan Christopher, a resident of the city, "the Creole presence is still very much felt New Orleans. I play with a lot of those guys... cats like Don Vappie... and Lionel Ferbos."<sup>29</sup> Similarly and perhaps more revealing, trumpeter Jon-Erik Kellso, a New York-based musician who frequently works in New Orleans, recalled "plenty of times when things have gotten really tense — on the stand — because of all that stuff," the "stuff" being cultural friction that still exists between the city's Black population and Creoles of color. 30 If jazz scholars would move beyond the stereotypes, perhaps this friction would be abated, allowing for a clearer picture of life in New Orleans across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and of the early development of jazz.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Sidney Bechet, recorded interview, John D. Reid Collection, quoted in Chilton, *Sidney Bechet*, 15.

Evan Christopher, interview by the author, New York, 5 November 2012. Digital recording.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Jon-Erik Kellso, interview by the author, New York, 5 November 2012. Digital recording.

## CHAPTER 3

Uncovering Historical Evidence of Creole Culture:

Applying Current Oral History Methodology to Imperfect Sources

Perhaps the most critical job of the contemporary oral historian is analysis. Once interviews have been amassed and painstakingly transcribed, a careful process of textual analysis takes place. This process is not unlike the analysis of a musical score. The oral historian must be equipped with knowledge of the conventional history of his subjects just as the musical scholar must have a command of not only rhythm, harmony, and other basic musical elements, but also of style and form. From this foundation, the oral historian is able to identify which elements of his subjects' narratives are strictly true and which are not, while the musical analyst can identify the parts of the piece that are stylistically conventional, and those which are divergent. In both cases, the latter is probably of more interest to the scholar, for the unexpected is where the interesting lies. Rather than embrace the potential interest buried in the untruths of jazz musicians' oral testimonies, even the best jazz scholars have tended to simply discard these portions of interviews as "unreliable."

1938 was an important year in the development of oral history in the United States. From Rebecca Sharpless' account, 1938 might even be considered the birth year of modern oral history, for it was in that year that Columbia University historian Allan Nevins "decried a historical field that lacked life and energy" and set about to reform the practice of history. Over the ensuing decade, Nevins would create the Oral History

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Rebecca Sharpless, "History of Oral History," in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Landam, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 11.

Project at Columbia University, institutionalizing oral history as a tool designed to supplement the existing historical record. The Federal Writers' Project — a part of the Works Progress Administration under the New Deal — was working on its own oral histories in 1938, albeit from a completely different perspective. Between 1936 and 1940, they collected more than 10,000 personal histories from "ordinary Americans." The first collection of these narratives was published in 1939. Whereas Nevins sought to capture the human voice of "great men," whose public actions and influence were already well-documented, the Federal Writers' Project aimed to create a history through the voices of the previously voiceless.

Another, perhaps less significant event occurred in oral history in 1938. While it didn't warrant inclusion in Sharpless' 31-century history of oral history, Alan Lomax conducted and recorded the first of a short series of interviews with pianist, composer, and raconteur Jelly Roll Morton on 23 May 1938. This first interview, in both its strengths and its weaknesses, presents several topics relevant to both oral history and Morton himself. First, thinking in terms of the ideal of shared authority so carefully scrutinized in the practice of oral history interviews today, how do the individual desires or goals of the two participants color or shape the outcome of the interview? Second, does this interview accurately create a picture of Morton's early life in New Orleans? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, in Ronald J. Grele's terms, how does this interview function as evidence?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Sharpless, "History," 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ronald J. Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Landam, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 33-91.

One feature that has become a rather necessary aspect of an acceptable oral history interview is a shared authority between interviewer and interviewee, or narrator, as the latter is commonly labeled. According to the Oral History Association's "Principles and Best Practices for Oral History," "interviewers should work to achieve a balance between the objectives of the project and the perspectives of the interviewees." They should also "extend the inquiry beyond the specific focus of the project to create as complete a record as possible for the benefit of others." As Mary Larson puts it, "oral historians must have an innate ability to adapt and... flexibility and a sense of humor." The creation of the "Principles and Best Practices for Oral History" was decades away as Lomax made his final preparations for his interviews with Morton, so Lomax, naturally, cannot be held this standard. Additionally, at the time, Lomax didn't consider himself a member of the emerging field of oral history. Rather, the Morton interviews represented something of a departure in his work. A second-generation folklorist who specialized in capturing folk music, in his earlier studies, Lomax "had taken down the repertoires of Leadbelly, Molly Jackson, Woody Guthrie, and others, asking them to fill in the background of the songs with stories of their lives." Negotiating the intricacies of an expansive life history of the most mundane, generic of individuals was far beyond the three minute records of folk songs and biographical blurbs he was accustomed to producing, never mind refereeing the storytelling of a personality like Morton.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Oral History Association, "Principles and Best Practices," October 2009. Accessed 7 February 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Mary A. Larson, "Research Design and Strategies," in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Landam, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz,"* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), ix.

Nevertheless, it becomes clear through the interview that Lomax was approaching

the social ideals of the modern oral historian if not exactly executing according to current

practice. In the preface to the second edition of Mr. Jelly Roll, his published product

from the Morton interviews, Lomax writes:

I had come to realize that what these people had to say and their way of saying it was as good as their songs. Editing aimed to transfer the

surge of speech into the quieter flow of type could, I found,

sometimes produce prose as graceful and finely-tuned as the best of

written literature. Its originality and point of view in music was boundless — co-equal with the varied experience and culture of the

people themselves. In those days I dreamed of creating an oral portrait of the American working class — the mule skinners, the

truckers, the sandhogs, the lonesome housewives — turning over the

mike to them, letting them have their say for a change, reversing the direction of our so-called "communication" system, which really has

only one direction: from the establishment down.<sup>8</sup>

Granted, Lomax wrote this in 1973, with decades of hindsight to improve his visual

acuity and with the practice of oral history much more established than it was in 1938,

but his words ring true and it is hard to imagine that, as a folklorist working at the Library

of Congress, he would have been ignorant of the work with which the Federal Writers'

Project was engaged. Regardless, from the perspective of modern oral history, Lomax's

pre-interview preparation of Morton and the questions he asks create serious problems

with the integrity of the interview.

The primary dynamic between interviewer and interviewee is established early. It

does shift subtly throughout the interview, but generally, it is obvious that Lomax is

making requests and Morton is obliging:

LOMAX: Let's hear you play it on the piano.

MORTON: What you want me to do?

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

LOMAX: Bang it away on the piano.<sup>9</sup>

It is also clear from many of Lomax's questions that he is digging for some specific bits of information, or at least guiding the conversation to a desired end. He is particularly keen on keeping the conversation centered on Storyville, New Orleans' fabled red light district. For instance, the following exchange occurs when Morton lingers too long in discussing some the people with whom he interacted in Chicago:

LOMAX: Well, uh... tell us something about what used to happen at those funerals in New Orleans.

MORTON: Well, I haven't finished...

LOMAX: [Interrupting] We'll get back...

MORTON: Well I...

LOMAX: [Interrupting] Let's back down... to New Orleans.

MORTON: You wanna get back down there? Well, I haven't gone from New Orleans see, because, you see, in the Frenchman's, uh, we had, uh, Alfred Wilson and Albert Carroll. 10

Perhaps more telling than Lomax's questioning (which could realistically be interpreted as a crude attempt to keep Morton on topic) is Jelly Roll's quick return to "the script." Within a couple of heartbeats, he is back to discussing the tenderloin of New Orleans, and right back to the same characters he had been describing before his "tangential departure." With the tape rolling, so to speak, Morton also seems to treat his lingering discussion of Chicago as a mistake that needs covering.

According to Morton biographer Laurie Wright, Roy Carew (Morton's publisher in 1938) substantiated suspicions that Lomax knew what he wanted from his interview with Morton and had no qualms about asking for it. Discussions about the interview

<sup>10</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1642B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1638B.

went on between Lomax and Morton for some time before the first session, and Lomax made it clear that he was looking for a complete picture of Storyville from someone who had been there as a full participant. According to Wright, "Morton was very unhappy about this, but gave Lomax what he wanted."11 Indeed, aside from brief mentions of other geographic areas, Morton weaves a vividly detailed recreation of life in the seedy underworld of early twentieth-century New Orleans — complete with a fully fleshed out cast of characters, many of whom are furnished with their own theme songs — across the entirety of the first interview session. It is no wonder that Lomax revealingly says of Morton, "he had thought out and organized his story before he came to the Library." <sup>12</sup>

This raises a new question: if Morton was unhappy or felt he was being used by Lomax, why would he concede to participate in the interview? Perhaps significantly, as an interview subject, Morton straddles the divide between the interests of Nevins and the WPA — he was an individual shaper of history, and the product of that work was already fairly well documented, but he was not a financier, a politician, or a tycoon. In fact, at the time of the interviews, Morton's career had reached its nadir. Like the subjects of the Federal Writers' Project, Morton was poor; he had not been spared the economic realities of the musician's life through the Depression. As Morton recalled:

> The fact was that, at that particular time, the sporting houses were all over the country and you could go in any town: If you was a good piano player, just as soon as you hit town you had ten jobs waitin' for you. So we all made a lot of money, and ten or fifteen or twenty or a hundred dollars didn't mean very much to us during those days — I'd really like to see those days back again I'm telling you the truth. They were wonderful days. 13

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Laurie Wright, Mr. Jelly Lord (Chigwell, Essex: Storyville Publications, 1980), 93. <sup>12</sup> Lomax, Mr. Jelly Roll, x.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1639B.

In echoing this thought, Morton provides a starker vision of his potential financial motivation saying, "When I made a hundred dollars a day, I thought I had a small day. And now today if I make ten I think I've got a great day." Obviously, Morton would have been eager to go to the Library of Congress to put on a private show that might offer the chance of a rekindled career.

Perhaps ironically, Morton's recorded place in history may have even better tied him to "the common man." Morton's work was instrumental in shaping the evolution of jazz from the mid-1920s into the 1930s; many jazz scholars have linked Morton's Red Hot Peppers recordings directly to the big band swing era, a musical era that was at its commercial peak in 1938. By that time, however, Morton's important records were only known among the "True Jazz" *cognoscenti*; he was virtually unknown to most of the swing-crazed public. In a very real sense, he was as voiceless about the history he helped shape as any other "ordinary" American. Without a doubt, Morton used the Lomax interviews as a vehicle to restore his place in jazz history, but the resultant document speaks more to our final question: How does the interview function as evidence?

In the most simple, objective view of evidence, "the most obvious explorations of the errors, elisions, and evasions," <sup>16</sup> Morton's interview does not hold up well to historical scrutiny. He is without fail conveniently located at the center of Lomax's questioning. When Lomax wants to discuss the "bad men" of Storyville, and the notorious Robert Charles in particular, Morton is front and center, sealing his responses

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Gunther Schuller is a fine example of one such a scholar. For more, see: Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press Paperback, 1986), 134-174.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Grele, *History of Oral History*, 61.

with, "according to the information that I gather, which, I feel is very authentic, because I only lived four blocks from Robert Charles at that period." <sup>17</sup>

Conveniently for Lomax and the tale he eventually weaves, Morton was also present when Charles' actions precipitated the New Orleans race riots:

Robert Charles lived in a little bitty small shack-like. There was another one, right next to his — I would say, twin houses. It was stated from time to time that this building was burned down in order to get Robert Charles out. But I can assure you, I was there when it all happened, and I was there when it all stopped. There was no burning, but I think it was smoked, in order to get this gentleman out. <sup>18</sup>

In looking to reclaim his rightful place in jazz history, Morton does occasionally step visibly outside of the realm of truth. His oft-cited, ludicrous claim to the title "Inventor of Jazz" aside, Morton makes discrete claims aimed at placing him above figures that were still well known in 1938. He does so, for example, when he asserts his historical priority over Clarence Williams, a key figure in music publishing and early twentieth-century recording: "In fact, I happened to be the man that taught Mr. Williams how to play." As if we might think to doubt him, Morton quickly adds, "And of course I don't intend to say anything unless it's real facts, and it's really fact." <sup>19</sup>

Noted musicologist Lawrence Gushee has examined the Lomax/Morton interviews in depth, and conducted much of the historical research that Lomax perhaps should have. <sup>20</sup> As a researcher *par excellence*, Gushee has mapped out Jelly Roll's life through the period covered by Lomax's interviews. Most of the details constitute minutia and do not warrant repetition here. Quite importantly, however, Gushee located

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1645B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1646A.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1639B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Lawrence Gushee, "A Preliminary Chronology of the Early Career of Ferd 'Jelly Roll' Morton," *American Music*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Winter 1985), 389-412.

Morton's baptismal certificate, discovering that Jelly Roll claimed to have been born five years earlier (in 1885 rather than 1890) than he actually was. This seemingly slight alteration gave Morton an appropriate age to have been an active musician in New Orleans at the time when, according to Lomax's assumptions, jazz was emerging. Tracing Morton's genealogy further, Gushee also confirms that Morton's direct predecessors had come from Saint-Domingue. Thomas Fiehrer further clarifies this, identifying their likely arrival as refugees who arrived in New Orleans via Cuba between 1809 and 1810. However, in Morton's words:

My folks were in the city of New Orleans long before the Louisiana Purchase. And all my folks came directly from the shores... uh, not the shores, I mean from France. That's across the world... in the other world. And they landed here in the New World years ago. <sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, the tired, historically challenged narrative Lomax and Morton perpetuate throughout the interview — the tale in which jazz grew out of the brothels of Storyville — raises deeper questions of Morton's own perception of his ethnic identity. Gushee rightly opines that "while he probably played in Hilma Burt's sporting house... his playing career in the District... was sporadic and quite brief." While a methodical and truly admirable researcher, Gushee's social conclusions can be problematic, particularly his failure to recognize Creoles of color as possessed of a culture that is anything other than "American Black." As such, it is highly significant when he says a Creole simply would not have had the exposure to Storyville that Morton claims.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Gushee, "A Preliminary Chronology," 391. Gushee further notes that, "Morton's sister Amide Colas and his uncle Henry Monette believed... that the curch records of Jelly Roll's birth had burned... Assuming that Lomax correctly recorded their thought, they were wrong or deliberately misleading." <sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1640A.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Gushee, "A Preliminary Chronology," 397.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Hilma Burt's is discussed in Morton interview transcript, record side 1641B.

As this idea implies, the fact that Morton was a New Orleans Creole of color, a descendant of the *gens du couleur libre*, is an important part of approaching the textual analysis of the Lomax interviews. It also opens the door to another level of evidence, one in which we can find a wealth of information on cultural changes working within (or against) this ethnic group in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the binary, black/white system of racial identity that the United States carefully nursed throughout most of its first 200 years — a system which, sadly, still operates to some degree today — the Creole of color is an alien concept. 26, 27 During the Jim Crow period, Creoles of color faced an incredibly difficult position: The dominant white society had reaffirmed the "one drop rule," and, in bitter irony, Black culture increasingly embraced it as well. 28 While outright bigotry between these two strata of society in New Orleans was not necessarily the rule among either the Creole or Black populations, Creoles were forced to choose whether they would try to continue their lives in a denied, splintering ethnic group, attempt to join white society (if their physical appearance and financial situation allowed), or assimilate into the developing Black culture. Having been born in 1890, Jelly Roll Morton's narrative is a veritable case study in this act of cultural self-creation that was a reality for so many Creoles of color, especially those working or traveling outside of New Orleans.

Morton actually displays a flexible identity throughout the three 1938 interviews, altering his patterns of speech, his accent, and his personal interests and associations in

<sup>29</sup> Sandke, Where the Dark, 49-54.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> "Creole of Color" is a term that may not be readily recognized today. In French Louisiana, any non-slave born in the colony to original French colonists (the *ancienne population*) was called a Creole, whether they be white or mixed race. Today, Creoles of Color are commonly simply referred to as Creoles.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Thomas Fiehrer, "From Quadrille to Stomp: The Creole Origins of Jazz," *Popular Music*, Vol. 10, No. 1, The 1890s (January 1991), 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Randall Sandke, *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics, and Business of Jazz* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 236-238.

response to Lomax's questioning. In the first, his base persona is nebulous, with fluctuations from any discernable base being fairly slight but clear. Morton's character, as Gushee puts it, maintains "supposed careers as pool shark, brothel pianist, gambler, and pimp." Morton was a thin, lanky man, not at all built to be a fighter, yet his narrative continually places him in the midst of all things gritty:

I never will ever forget too after I beat some guys playing pool, if it wasn't for one of my piano playing friends... you'd never heard this record because the guy was gonna knife me right in the back, I'm tellin' you. He had a knife right on me. He said that I only used the piano for a decoy, which he was right.<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, this story comes at the very beginning of the interview, and it is already the second occasion in which Morton has downplayed the seriousness with which he obviously approached the piano: "At that time I was supposed to be a very good pool player, and I could slip upon a lot of people playing pool… because I'd played piano and they thought I devoted all my time to the piano."<sup>32</sup>

Through the majority of his tale Jelly Roll places himself squarely inside Black culture, yet his accent bears only a mild, almost neutral, Southern tinge. However, this does not maintain throughout the entire interview. As Morton continues the above story of his near-stabbing thusly,

And, of course, uh, he had it, had uh, had it in his mind that I was kind of nice lookin'. Imagine that, huh? Well, I said... [Trails off laughing.]

Of course, he wasn't such a good-looking fellow his-self. He had some awful rubber-looking lips, I'm telling you. [laughs] Yes indeed. He was kinda jealous of me — I suppose he was anyhow. 33

<sup>31</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1638B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Gushee, "A Preliminary Chronology," 391.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1639A.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1638B.

In addition to his word choice and his denigration to the use of common stereotypes of African-American physical appearance, he increasingly affects a stereotypically Black dialect. Morton also regularly and fully adopts these linguistic traits when he talks at any length about the price or quality of prostitutes.<sup>34</sup>

Morton's super-macho character could also be interpreted as a defense of his heterosexuality. According to Morton, "The piano was known at that time to be an instrument for a lady. So I had it in my mind that if I played piano, I would be misunderstood." Morton was certainly not alone in his association of the piano with homosexuality. Lomax reveals his own predisposition to this stereotype when he directly circles around to question him about it:

LOMAX: Did they used to call you sissy?

MORTON: Uh, well, no, they didn't, they didn't call me sissy, but they always said that, uh, that, uh, a piano was a girl's instrument. 36

A short time later, Morton offers, "Then one day at the French Opera House — going there with, with my folks — I happened to notice a pianist there that didn't wear long hair. That was the first time I decided that the instrument was good for a gentleman same as it was a lady." <sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, the one pianist who seems to be something of a hero to Morton comes up in the vein of this discussion. Morton's response to Lomax's obvious discomfort with discussing homosexuality is surprisingly liberal, seeming to convey honest acceptance from a man who had recently returned to the Catholic Church:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1643B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1640A.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1640B.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Ibid.

MORTON: But Tony Jackson liked the freedom that was there. Uh, Tony happened to be one of these gentlemens, uh, that's called, uh, a lot of people call 'em a lady or sissy or something like that. But he was very good and very much admired.

LOMAX: Well, was he, uh, was he, uh, a fairy?

MORTON: Uh, I guess it's a — he's either a ferry or a steamboat, one or the other, I don't know.

[Both laugh.]

MORTON: One or the other. I guess it's a ferry. That's what you pay a nickel for, I guess.<sup>38</sup>

This is but a brief look at the Morton/Lomax Library of Congress interviews, barely brushing the surface of the first of three interviews. Regardless of the quality of evidence they present in terms of verifiable facts, it is clear that this recorded exchange still has much to offer our understanding of jazz history, American cultural identities and dynamics, and the history and practice of oral history, both past and present.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Morton interview transcript, record side 1642B.

## CHAPTER 4

## Musical Affinity in Creole and American Vernacular Music

Jazz evolved from ragtime as yet another successor to the lineage of American vernacular music that had also fostered the commercial minstrelsy and the so-called "coon" songs that grew out of it. The name — an extant word first applied to the music by the press, not by the musicians — was perhaps the most dramatic change in the apparently sudden appearance of the "new" music. In reality, the musical changes were arrived at more slowly and represented a more natural development than the packaging. From its earliest printed uses, however, the word jazz seems to have been destined for linking to a music. In a column dated 5 April 1913, Ernest J. Hopkins addressed the use of the new word in his newspaper, the San Francisco Bulletin, writing, "The sheer musical quality of the word... commends it," adding, "'Jazz' is at home in bar or ballroom; it is a true American." However, at least in San Francisco at the time, jazz still held a wide array of possible connotations. According to Hopkins, it meant "something like life, vigor, energy, effervescence of spirit, joy, pep, magnetism, verve, virility, ebulliency [sic], courage, happiness." It is important to note that, in spite of this gamut of meanings, the association of the word jazz to ragtime already existed, at least implicitly. One of the writers that spurred the need for Hopkin's commentary was the sportswriter, Edgar "Scoop" Gleeson, who committed the first known use of the word jazz to print on 3 March 1913. In a subsequent piece dated 6 March 1913, Gleeson wrote that "members [of the San Francisco Seals baseball team] have trained on ragtime and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Ernest J. Hopkins, "In Praise of 'Jazz,' a Futurist Word Which Has Just Joined the Language," *San Francisco Bulletin*, 5 April 1913, quoted in Lewis Porter, *Jazz: A Century of Change* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 7.

'jazz.''<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is well-documented that early New Orleans jazz musicians called their music *ragtime*, and that they were first exposed to the new name for their music upon traveling to points north. In his article, "The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz," noted jazz scholar and musicologist Lawrence Gushee relates J. Russell Robinson's (an early jazz pianist and songwriter who worked in New Orleans around 1910) reaction to the first records of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band as a realization that the music was "nothing but ragtime, played by ear."<sup>3</sup>

Given this difficulty with names for musics in the overlap of evolutionary transition, it should be come as no surprise that a similar conundrum of identity existed in the early days of ragtime. In 1918 pianist and teacher of music Harold Hubbs lamented that "a great many people, including (apparently) some of its composers, seem to think that [ragtime] is merely another word for syncopation." He countered, "This is by no means true," nebulously citing as evidence the "peculiar kind of syncopation" inherent in the music.<sup>5</sup> Hubbs' assertion of ragtime's uniqueness, however, is representative of a large issue than ragtime's relation to jazz: it is a small indication of a larger debate over the nature, quality, and significance of ragtime that raged throughout the music's popular period in the United States, an era stretching roughly from 1896 to 1920. As Hubbs' statement implies, the central tension in this debate lay between those who regarded ragtime as little more than the manipulation of a specific compositional technique syncopation — previously developed and employed by the "Great Masters" of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Edgar Gleeson, San Francisco Bulletin, 6 March 1913, quoted in Porter, Jazz, 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Lawrence Gushee, "The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz," Black Music Research Journal 14, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 1-2. <sup>4</sup> Harold Hubbs, "What is Ragtime?" *The Outlook*, 27 February 1918, 345.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Edward A. Berlin, Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History, 1<sup>st</sup> paperback ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 2.

Western art music tradition and those who viewed the music as a wholly new, distinctly American genre.<sup>7</sup>

The case against ragtime's rhythmic originality — and therefore the case *for* its lack of fitness to represent a unique national identity — issued mostly from American composers and ranged from vilification of the music to polite, if not overly enthusiastic, acceptance. At the turn of the twentieth century, one writer claimed that "Wagner lapsed into [ragtime] much after the manner of statesmen who sometimes get tired and drop into versification. Mozart also had moments of fatigue or exuberance, when he dashed off a few notes in the measure of the cake-walk melody." The anonymous author goes on to provide more specific evidence: "The song from 'Carmen,' 'Love Is a Wild Bird,' is one of the best examples of rag-time in modern music. In the overture to 'Don Juan' by Mozart and in some compositions of Bach we have good examples of syncopation." Ragtime obviously represents nothing new for this writer. What is more, the music that must therefore logically be regarded as "American popular ragtime" is barely comparable to the output of a European composer sunk in boredom or writhing in the midst of violent mood swings.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Occurring in a period in which the idea and practice of musical nationalism had become commonly accepted throughout Europe, this debate was a natural outgrowth of American composers' and music critics' endeavors to establish an independent musical identity for the United States, work aimed at redefining the path then being set by composers such as Edward MacDowell. Given the positive opinions expressed by prominent European composers Antonín Dvořák and Igor Stravinsky of American music, ragtime occupied a position of prominence, if not always an elevated status, in these exchanges. For an overview of the issue of nationalism and American music as it relates to the reception of ragtime, see especially "Ragtime Wrangling," *The Literary Digest*, 8 January 1916. See also W. J. Henderson, "Ragtime, Jazz, and High Art," *Scribner's Magazine*, February 1925, 200-203; "Music by American Composers," *The Outlook*, 2 December 1914, 746-748; Charles L. Buchanan, "The National Music Fallacy," *The Bookman*, March 1917, 79-83; and idem, "Nationalism and American Music," *The Outlook*, 4 August 1926, 484-486. For more on the reception of, and the reactions to, ragtime by European composers, see Barbara B. Heyman, "Stravinsky and Ragtime," *The Musical Quarterly* 68, No. 4 (October 1982): 543-562.

<sup>8 &</sup>quot;Rag-Time," Musician, March 1900, 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid.

The American composer C. Crozat Converse echoed this general sentiment, stating that Beethoven and Haydn had both written ragtime. <sup>10</sup> Unlike the previous author, Converse maintained that, given its European rhythmic pedigree, ragtime must not be all bad. He even allowed for the possibility that ragtime may one day be the subject of serious study. <sup>11</sup> The American composer Daniel Gregory Mason was one of the most outspoken and fiery members of the opposition to ragtime. At times, he seems to have been personally insulted by the comparison of ragtime to the creations and creativity of specific European composers, yet his response to such continued the denial of the music's originality. <sup>12</sup> He wrote with thinly veiled contempt of

the contention of the champions of ragtime that its type of syncopation is capable of great variety, and even makes possible effects elsewhere unknown, a contention in support of which some of them have even challenged comparison of it with the rhythmic vigors of Beethoven and Schumann. <sup>13</sup>

In support of the vaulted position of European composition, Mason provides examples of Schumann's use of syncopation which are, in his estimation, vastly superior to anything that one might encounter in ragtime. In essence, Mason claims that the syncopations of ragtime are neither new nor particularly meritorious.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

1918, 114-115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Specifically, Converse cites the first allegro theme of Beethoven's *Leonore No. 2* and *Leonore No. 3* overtures, and the second variation in the *Poco adagio; cantabile* from Haydn's string quartet, Op. 76, No. 3 (*Emperor*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> C. Crozat Converse, "Rag-Time Music," *Etude*, June 1899, 185; idem, "Rag-Time Music," *Etude*, August 1899, 256.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> This should come as no surprise. Being solidly late-Romantic and perhaps reminiscent of Mahler or Brahms at the height of his compositional abilities, Mason's œuvre would suggest that he felt no personal need to espouse any particular American identity through his music. Fittingly, Mason's Opus 6 is a piece for piano entitled *Variations on "Yankee Doodle"* (in the Style of Various Composers). While MacDowell is included, the variations are intended to evoke the compositional styles of Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Debussy, Dvořák, and Liszt, literally placing the iconic American patriotic tune into European molds.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Gregory Mason, "Concerning Ragtime," New Music Review and Church Music Review, March

At the center of the other side of the argument lay the notion, whether expressed bluntly or obliquely, that ragtime constituted American folk music, and that as such, it was thoroughly American, depicting the very soul of the American people. One author summarized this side of the debate by comparing ragtime to American democracy, stating that it is music "of the people, for the people and by them." Another author wrote, "There is something to be said for the contention that ragtime is at least one contribution of real folk music which America has offered to the world. It has at any rate one of the characteristics of folk music in that its origin is clouded in mystery." <sup>16</sup> He or she bolsters this assertion with some thoughts from folklorist and pioneering ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis on the subject and summarizes by stating that "'ragtime' is as distinctive as the rhythmic characteristics of Spanish or Hungarian music, and is as capable of use in musical art as any other primitive musical material."<sup>17</sup> Clearly this position holds ragtime to be an individual entity, independent from other musical traditions. In capping the position of ragtime as a uniquely American creation, veritable Renaissance man James Weldon Johnson authoritatively recognized ragtime as "the one artistic production by which America is known the world over. It has been all-conquering, and is everywhere hailed as 'American music.'"18

Perhaps the most widely read pro-ragtime figure — and Mason's chief rival — was the journalist and sometime critic of music and drama, Hiram Kelly Moderwell. In 1915 he wrote, "As the one original and indigenous type of music of the American people... one would think [ragtime] might receive the clammy hand of fellowship from

<sup>15 &</sup>quot;Ethics of Ragtime," The Literary Digest, 10 August 1912, 225.

<sup>16 &</sup>quot;Ragtime," The Outlook, 24 May 1913, 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> James Weldon Johnson, quoted in "The Negro's Contribution to American Art," *The Literary Digest*, 20 October 1917, 26.

composers and critics." Later in the same article, he specifically asserts that "ragtime is a type of music substantially new in musical history," adding that he believes ragtime developed from the lyric patterns used in Black spirituals. Moderwell expounded upon this idea elsewhere, writing, "The Negro has, in short, reproduced on our continent the whole creative process which brought forth the Russian, German and English folkmusic." That ragtime and Black music in general both belong under the umbrella of "folk" is central to Moderwell's larger argument. He makes this abundantly apparent when he writes:

A Russian folk-song was no less scorned in the court of Catherine the Great than a ragtime song in our music studios to-day. Yet Russian folk-song became the basis of some of the most vigorous art-music of the past century, and no musician speaks of it to-day except in terms of respect... I haven't a notion whether ragtime is going to form the basis of an "American school of composition." But I am sure that many a native composer could save his soul if he would open his ears to this folk-music of the American city. <sup>23</sup>

Continuing directly, Moderwell summarizes the entire case of his ideological camp thusly:

But the schools have their reply. "Ragtime is not new," they say. "It is merely syncopation, which was used by Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, and is good, like any other musical material, when it is used well." But they are wrong. Ragtime is not "merely syncopation." It is a certain sort of syncopation — namely, a persistent syncopation in one part conflicting with exact rhythm in another... No one would take the syncopation of a Haydn symphony to be American ragtime. "Certainly not," replies the indignant musician. But if this is so, then ragtime *is* new. <sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Hiram K. Moderwell, "Ragtime," The New Republic, 16 October 1915, 284.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Hiram Kelly Moderwell, "The Epic of the Black Man," *The New Republic*, 8 September 1917, 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Moderwell, "Ragtime," 284-285.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid., 285.

For his clear and simple logic, Moderwell seems to have carried the argument. Ragtime is a unique musical style, not simply a reassembled regurgitation of European musical elements. Judging from this article, however, Moderwell may very well have misunderstood the essential nature of ragtime's independent character.

Looked at more closely, Moderwell provides a definition of ragtime in this statement, writing that it is "a persistent syncopation in one part conflicting with exact rhythm in another." He continues, "But of course this definition is not enough. Ragtime has its flavor that no definition can imprison."<sup>25</sup> Let us consider for one moment the possibility that this rhythmic layering creates that "flavor." If this rhythmic duality is indeed the key defining factor of ragtime as a genre, surely other musicians and critics would have cited it in their own definitions. As a matter of fact, they did.

As early as February 1913, a London *Times* article intended to introduce the American musical genre to English readers defined the key stylistic trait of ragtime "to be a strongly syncopated melody superimposed on a strictly regular accompaniment, and it is the combination of these two rhythms that gives 'rag-time' its character." The author also quotes Louis Hirsch<sup>27</sup> as saying that "the essence of 'rag-time' is the mixture of two rhythms."<sup>28</sup> Despite Mr. Hirsch's expert testimony, it is hardly surprising that a few lines in an anonymously written, two-column article in *The Times* did not garner wide recognition for its analysis of a foreign music. This concept received a more respectable (albeit certainly less widely read) treatment in the Harvard Musical Review about a year

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> "Rag-Time," *The Times*, p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> "Rag-Time," *The Times* (of London), 8 February 1913, p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Louis A. Hirsch (1881-1924) was a composer of music for the theatre during the ragtime era. While not especially remembered today (currently his best-known song is most likely "The Love Nest"), he had a very successful career. Between 1910 and 1924 he wrote music for the Ziegfeld Follies and many Broadway musical productions, garnering a modest amount of fame in New York.

later. In his defense of ragtime's stylistic originality, John N. Burk writes, "Unless set against the unvarying, even bass ragtime is not ragtime." More recently, ragtime experts David Jasen and Trebor Tichenor both incorporated this unique musical feature into their definitions of ragtime. According to Jasen, ragtime "combines a syncopated melody accompanied by an even, steady duple rhythm," while Tichenor more poetically writes, "At some point lost to memory the idea of a consistently syncopated melodic line played against a regular-metered march bass was tried out on the piano."

Despite the centrality of a rhythmic duality in both contemporary and modern definitions of the genre, previous analyses of ragtime have been based around little more than isolated rhythmic motives without consideration of any larger rhythmic constructions. To borrow the terminology of tonal analysis, the analysis of ragtime has been restricted to the observation of foreground elements. A deeper analysis specifically crafted to examine ragtime's unique application of these foreground syncopations may provide further insights into the music's stylistic evolution and history, and its broader role in the development of American vernacular music.

Originally published in 1980, Edward Berlin's *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* still stands as the most comprehensive and thorough published study of ragtime. In the second section of the book, Berlin uses rhythmic and statistical analysis to plot the stylistic evolution of the genre through its popular period.<sup>32</sup> To accomplish this, he first identifies the key foreground syncopations found in piano rags, appropriately labeling

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> John N. Burk, "Ragtime and its Possibilities," *Harvard Musical Review* 2 (January 1914): 12.

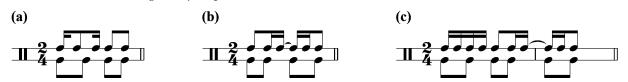
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> David A. Jasen, "Introduction," in *Ragtime: 100 Authentic Rags*, ed. and compiled by David A. Jasen (New York: The Big 3 Music Corporation, 1979), 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Trebor Jay Tichenor, *Ragtime Rarities* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), v; also in idem, *Ragtime Resdiscoveries: 64 Works from the Golden Age of Rag* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), vii. <sup>32</sup> Berlin, *Ragtime*, 61-169.

these *ragtime syncopations*.<sup>33</sup> He then determines the specific use of ragtime syncopations in each of the 1,035 pieces contained in his sample.<sup>34</sup> After collecting this information, he employs statistical analysis to determine the degree to which each type of syncopation is present each year, thereby examining shifting trends in compositional practice over time. Berlin does examine other aspects of the style, but in keeping with his assertion that syncopation is "the dominating and distinctive element in the evolution of ragtime," his ragtime syncopations are central to the analysis.<sup>35</sup>

As this statement implies, Berlin seems to regard the other musical elements of ragtime as generally unworthy of much study. He gives a glancing overview of harmonic conventions — noting nothing outside the scope of fairly basic Western theory — and says of melody, "Ragtime melodies do not bear any distinctive traits except those of rhythm; if the syncopations were smoothed out the melodies would be indistinguishable from those of other dances of the time." Essentially then, the heart of his analytical methodology is formed around the two categories of syncopations shown in Example 1.<sup>37</sup>

**EXAMPLE 1.** Berlin's ragtime syncopations.



<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> This example is essentially a simplified reproduction of one found in Berlin, *Ragtime*, 83. Berlin presents the rhythms in both 2/4 and 4/4 time. In the latter, rhythmic values are simply doubled.

Example 1(a) demonstrates what Berlin calls the *untied syncopation*, while 1(b) and 1(c) represent two forms of *tied syncopations*. Untied syncopations are those which fit within one half of a measure, while tied syncopations most often join the two halves of the measure across the so-called invisible barline. In the tied syncopation illustrated in Example 1(c), the tie extends the syncopation across an actual barline, an exceedingly rare occurrence in ragtime. Berlin does identify a third classification of rhythm common in the early years of the ragtime era but rejects it as a ragtime syncopation since it quickly fell out of favor among composers. Shown in Example 2, this third rhythmic classification differs from Berlin's other ragtime syncopations in that the rhythmic values in the treble and bass are equal, creating a relatively weak feeling of syncopation. Since syncopations of this type are rhythmic augmentations of the syncopation shown in Example 1(a), Berlin names these *augmented syncopations*.<sup>39</sup>

**EXAMPLE 2.** Augmented syncopations.



Berlin's analytical methodology, and particularly his narrow focus on motivic foreground syncopations, continues to form the basis for understanding or investigating ragtime. <sup>40</sup> His primacy as a source may be more a product of exposure than originality or

<sup>38</sup> Berlin, *Ragtime*, 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> See, for example, Phillipe Michel, "Les rythmes du Ragtime: une analyse," *Musurgia* 9, No. 3/4 (2002): 43-54; and Ingeborg Harer, "Defining Ragtime Music: Historical and Typological Research," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 38, No. 3/4 (1997): 409-415. Harer, essentially expands Berlin's approach, making it (perhaps needlessly) more complicated. Interestingly, this article contains no mention of layered rhythms.

quality of method, as the concept of simple rhythmic motives as central to the analysis of ragtime was anticipated (or at least presented concurrently) by others. In 1973, Roland Nadeau isolated as stylistically fundamental the same rhythms that Berlin would later identify as ragtime syncopations. <sup>41</sup> In an article published in 1980 (the same year that saw the publication of Berlin's book), Samuel Floyd, Jr. and Marsha Reisser attempted to link the foundation of ragtime to earlier Black composers of social dances. In analyzing both the earlier social dance pieces and ragtime, they too rely primarily on foreground rhythms. <sup>42</sup>

Basing analyses on foreground rhythmic events to the exclusion of the tonal implications of the music creates fundamental problems. Principally, the nature of such foreground syncopations can be easily misinterpreted. A common untied syncopation is shown in Example 3(a). In analyzing this excerpt, Berlin and others would simply note that each measure contains the rhythm in Example 1(a) with a slightly interesting but essentially ineffectual alteration of the bass. The same excerpt is shown again in Example 3(b), but this time the "bass" notes have been moved into their usual staff. More importantly, the beams have been removed, leaving each melody note independently stemmed. Without the obfuscating beams, a series of repeated notes becomes more clearly evident, as indicated by the arrows. In his work with metrical

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Roland Nadeau, "The Grace and Beauty of Classic Rags: Structural Elements in a Distinct Musical Genre," *Music Educators Journal* 59, No. 8 (April 1973): 57-64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. and Marsha Reisser, "Social Dance Music of Black Composers in the Nineteenth Century and the Emergence of Classic Ragtime," *The Black Perspective in Music* 8, No. 2 (Autumn 1980): 161-193.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> In some ways, the interpretation of ragtime in terms of "colorless" rhythms should not be surprising. In addition to the issues caused by the conventionality of typical rag harmonic schemes, the inconsistency or lack of expression markings in published sheet music and the monochromatic impression fostered by non-expressive piano rolls can combine to suck much of the vibrancy out of what is a very emotive music.

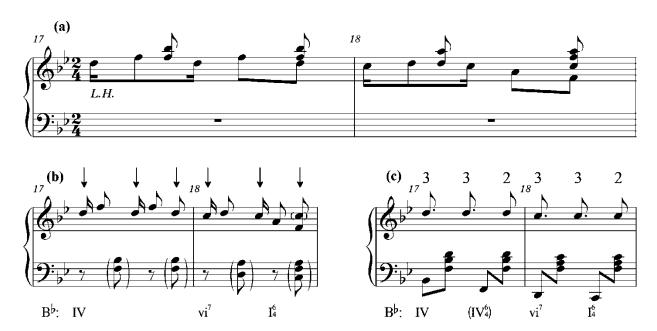
Note that here the  $c^2$  at the end of the two-bar sequence is present in the original composition. Even if it were not, the rhythmic pattern is well enough established that the listener would perceive its completion.

consonance and dissonance, Harald Krebs has shown how numerous musical elements, including the repetition of a pitch, can indicate the existence of a larger metrical layer:

A stratum consists of like events recurring at regular time intervals... Events that may define a stratum... [include] attack points, changes in dynamics (including dynamic accents), changes in timbre, changes in density, pattern recurrence (where the pattern may involve pitch, rhythm or both), recurrence of a single pitch and finally, a succession of pitches of equal significance. Any of these events, taking place repeatedly at equivalent time intervals, can determine a level of motion. 45

For the purposes of ragtime analysis, all of these can likewise be used to identify middleground rhythmic levels even if they do not occur "at equivalent time intervals." Example 3(c) carries this process to a logical conclusion — the melody line is reduced to a fundamental rhythm over a more traditional ragtime bass. Note the numbers above the melodic reduction. These indicate the grouping of sixteenth-note pulses (the most

**EXAMPLE 3.** Kerry Mills, *Happy Days in Dixie* (New York: F.A. Mills, 1896), mm. 17 & 18.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Harald Krebs, "Some Extensions of the Concepts of Metrical Consonance and Dissonance," *Journal of Music Theory* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 1987), 100.

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common pulse level in ragtime) in the melody line.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, this analysis is reinforced by the function of the remaining melodic pitches as part of a longer middleground structural descent.<sup>47</sup>

When taken alone, the patterned grouping of the sixteenth-note pulse level strongly implies an additive structure in the right hand. In other words, what would have been previously identified as simple untied syncopations can, through this mode of analysis, be interpreted as a localized compound meter: 3+3+2. This was previously suggested by Floyd and Reisser with the statement, "It is clear that the 'syncopations' of the melodic lines of classic ragtime pieces do not result from 'off-beat accents' as some denote them, but occur as a natural consequence of the irregularities of multimetric configurations (additive rhythms such as 3+3+2)."<sup>48</sup> Their view of rhythmic motives as contained entities divorced from harmonic or melodic implications led them to a much narrower conclusion as evidenced when they write, "Additive rhythms, so central to classic ragtime, had to wait for the genius of Scott Joplin for their inclusion."<sup>49</sup> Joplin published his first piano rag in 1899. Mills' *Happy Days in Dixieland* 

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Krebs defines the pulse level as "the most quickly moving pervasive series of pulses... a more or less constant series of attacks on the musical surface." Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22. While this strain of *Happy Days in Dixie* does not evidence an obvious sixteenth-note pulse level, as the foundation of the syncopations, it is quite present. There must also be a certain subconscious expectation or understanding of the sixteenth-note pulse level when listening to any ragtime piece as it is such a regular feature of ragtime melodies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> In addition to Kreb's list of rhythmic events, Schenkerian-type voice leading lines can be of great assistance in identifying the "active" pitches in ragtime melodies which, by their nature, tend toward high rhythmic density.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Floyd and Reisser, "Social Dance Music," 172-173.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Some say 1898. See Edward A. Berlin, *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and his Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 33, 293.

(from Example 3) was published in 1896, the year the word "rag" was first used in published sheet music.<sup>51</sup>

The idea of an extant rhythmic duality between the right and left hands (or melody and accompaniment) being perhaps *the* defining characteristic of ragtime would suggest that the standard left hand pulse division must be incorporated with that of the right hand. The resultant divisive rhythmic structure (as opposed to Floyd and Reisser's "additive" structure) can be represented with a compound fraction. The excerpt in Example 3 would have a *primary middleground meter* of 3+3+2/2+2+2+2 where 1 = x, the pulse level. Returning once again to Krebs, one of his key concepts is the inescapable presence (even if it exists only subliminally) of the *primary metrical consonance*. <sup>52</sup> In a well-notated piece, the primary metrical consonance will be defined by the time signature. In the case of ragtime, the primary middleground meter can function much the same way.

In and of itself and despite its divisive rhythmic structure, the primary middleground meter is metrically consonant. The edge created by pervasive metrical dissonance is simply not present in ragtime, and as the primary middleground meter defines the character of the piece melodically as much as metrically, we should not expect it to be. The consonant feeling of the primary middleground meter is almost invariably supported by a common element of European dance music — clear downbeats. In ragtime, the rhythmically divisive units conclude at the end of each measure, allowing the dancers to easily follow the downbeats. Since, as a unit, the primary middleground

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Berlin, *Ragtime*, 64

<sup>52</sup> Krebs, "Some Extensions," 106.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> This idea demonstrates the appropriateness of the term *primary middleground meter*. Since the driving metrical event in the treble and bass parts is the downbeat, these two metric levels could theoretically each

meter is metrically consonant, deviation from or adherence to it will create a feeling of metrical dissonance or consonance, respectively. Applying the above method of mixed, harmonically informed rhythmic analysis to an entire strain of ragtime will demonstrate this.

What more appropriately titled piece of music could be used to investigate the broader implications of this method of analysis than Scott Joplin's *Elite Syncopations*? Published in 1902, *Elite Syncopations* an example of a piece in the mature piano rag style, and its rhythmic and textural characteristics reflect this.<sup>54</sup> Example 4 shows the complete sixteen-measure first strain of *Elite Syncopations*, beginning with the pick-up notes from the introduction and ending as if continuing to the second strain. This example includes a simplified harmonic analysis and labeled non-chord tones, as well as arrows indicating plausible Krebsian rhythmic events in the right hand.

It is immediately evident from the arrows below and on top of the treble staff that two possible interpretive levels may be present in the right hand. Those below suggest a straightforward metrical displacement dissonance, where the eighth-note interpretive level defined by the left hand is imitated in the right but displaced by one sixteenthnote. 55 While this displacement dissonance does falter in the second half of measures five and six, it can still be felt given its strong preparation in the pick-up bar and its exact continuation in measure seven. It can, however, be dismissed as a candidate for the primary middleground meter for two reasons. First, despite Joplin's strong introduction of the displaced 2-level, it is only active for three measures out of each eight-bar period.

be distilled to the downbeat alone, leaving a background meter of 8/8, still written to reference the

sixteenth-note pulse.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> See Berlin, *Ragtime*, 123-146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> See Krebs, Fantasy Pieces, 31.

**EXAMPLE 4.** Scott Joplin, *Elite Syncopations* (St. Louis: John Stark & Son, 1902), mm. 4-19, 21.



Second, the strain is built with the double period structure exceedingly typical of piano rags; the displacement level is severely weakened by the absence of the pick-ups from the introduction in the second period.

The tied syncopations in measures five, six, nine, and ten (as well as those in the corresponding bars of the second period) are evocative of the 3+3+2 model from Example 3. Strengthening this comparison, excepting bars nine and seventeen, the tied syncopation is followed by a clear rhythmic event on the seventh sixteenth-note in each of the above measures. This is a strong indication that the primary middleground meter here may share at least the final 3+2 with the one in Example 3.

The first period in Example 5 illustrates the above observations in analytical reduction. Through the process of reduction, a second 2-level displacement dissonance becomes evident in measures nine to ten. The placement of this brief 2-level displacement between the 3 grouping that begins measure nine and the familiar 3+2 combination that ends measure ten actually suggests the 3+3+2 model, as the beginning and the end of this pattern are evident; the middle is simply interrupted. This is reinforced by the cessation of syncopation in measures eleven and twelve. Being further from the rhythmic foreground, this second displaced 2-level also simultaneously reinforces and dampens the heavy effect of the bare, opening displacement dissonance.

At this level, measure eight becomes somewhat problematic. A possible non-syncopated 4+4 interpretation is indicated below the treble clef staff, but voice leading seems to contradict this. Through the first three complete measures of the strain, c<sup>2</sup> is clearly prolonged. The passing cb<sup>1</sup> and bb<sup>1</sup> in measure seven lead to the a<sup>1</sup> on the

**EXAMPLE 5.** Scott Joplin, *Elite Syncopations* (St. Louis: John Stark & Son, 1902), mm. 4-19, 21. *Middleground reductions*.



downbeat of measure eight, but the  $c^2$  immediately following revives the prolongation. If the  $a^2$  on the downbeat of measure nine is the local destination, it seems much more likely that the  $c^2$  is ascending to a *syncopated* but still harmonically supported  $f^2$  (perhaps strengthened by a sort of hidden dominant-tonic relationship) with the  $e^2$  on beat two of measure eight simply in the "wrong place." Instead of being positioned as a passing tone to the  $f^2$ , in the context of the syncopation it behaves more like a suffix incomplete neighbor. This is in spite of the fact that, by virtue of its vertical placement, it is technically fully harmonically supported — syncopation in action! The last obvious difficulties at this level are the beginnings of measures five and six, but there is an aural solution.

The F-f and G-g octaves on the downbeats of bars five and six, respectively, are forceful notes. If their placement on the downbeats and their agogic accents are not enough to suggest their presence in the right hand, the ringing overtones actually produce an  $f^1$  on the downbeat of measure five and a  $g^1$  on the downbeat of measure six. This is indicated with dotted vertical lines.

The second period in Example 5 (mm. 13-19, 21) shows further middleground reduction of both rhythm (and therefore meter) and harmony based on the analysis above. Measure nineteen does contain some minor interest as the unsupported prefix turn-like figuration leading to the  $g^1$  on beat two slightly obscures the cadential cessation of syncopation, but this is overshadowed by the broader metrical implications of this analysis for ragtime. The 3+3+2/2+2+2 primary middleground meter is fully evident

at this level. It is clear that the syncopated feeling in ragtime is not, as Floyd and Reisser surmised, derived from simple off-beat accents.<sup>56</sup>

This analysis shows that the rhythmic essence of ragtime is, in fact, a layering of syncopations at different levels. In the foreground, the divisive rhythmic grouping between the hands provides obvious syncopation. As derived above and demonstrated by the 2-level displacements in Example 5, a higher level of syncopation can be simultaneously created through disruptions or alterations of the primary middleground meter.<sup>57</sup> When the middleground meter shifts, the listener continues to perceive the primary middleground meter, resulting in implied or, to paraphrase Krebs, indirect syncopation.<sup>58</sup>

Lastly and as previously noted, the first strain of Joplin's *Elite Syncopations* is typical of the ragtime genre in many ways. One such standard feature is the "normalizing" of the divisive rhythmic structure through cadential passages. It is common for cadences in ragtime pieces to contain no syncopation at all. Measures eleven and nineteen in Example 5 show examples of the type of foreground syncopation (almost invariably of the untied variety) found in cadential passages. As demonstrated by the present analysis, these types of syncopations have little bearing on the metrical middleground. To continue borrowing from Krebs' taxonomy, what does impact the perception of different levels of syncopations in such "rhythmically normalized" passages is subliminal syncopation.<sup>59</sup> With indirect syncopation, a divisive or otherwise dissonant rhythmic structure is always present. In subliminal syncopations, the rhythmic and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Floyd and Reisser, "Social Dance Music," 174.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> The displacement dissonance shown in the analysis of *Elite Syncopations* is one of many possible types of disruption. One fairly standard disruption is caused by the rearrangement of right hand groupings. For example, once a 3+3+2/2+2+2+2 is established, the composer may switch temporarily to 3+2+3/2+2+2+2. <sup>58</sup> Cf. Krebs, Fantasy Pieces, 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Cf. Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces*, 46.

metrical texture of the music at hand is completely consonant. Even though no hint of the primary middleground meter remains, it continues to be perceived subconsciously or otherwise. After all, the primary middleground meter is the foundation of a ragtime theme's rhythmic structure if not its very character; in the "mind's ear," this trumps a melodically bland cadence.

Through exploitation of the combined principles of Schenkerian tonal theory and Harald Krebs' analytical approach to metrical dissonance, and with the modification of both, strong indications of the nature of syncopation as it exists on multiple levels in the mature ragtime style are revealed. A binary, polymetric, divisive rhythmic structure comprised of melody and accompaniment, a concept suggested as early as 1913, does indeed lie at the core of the unique character of the genre. Taking a step back, and noting that all music represents an evolutionary course, it is not hard to identify certain affinities between the polymetric qualities typical of the ragtime piano right hand with metric qualities inherent in Latin American and Spanish music. Perhaps this is indicative of a deeper cultural relationship between the American South and Southwest yet to be explored in researching the vernacular music of the United States.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> See Manuel Saumell, "La Matilde Contradanza" (Havana: Eddmanny and Sons, n.d.,) and Gaspar Sanz, "*Canarios*," in *Instruccion de musica sobre la Guitarra Española* (Zaragoza: Heredego de Diego Dormer, 1674) in Appendix 2. Please note that the reproduced sheet music for Sanz's *Canarios* is an aural transcription based on several performances (all listed in the discography) by the author rather than modern notation transcribed from the original tablature.

#### **EPILOGUE**

If the problems in jazz history caused by the conflation of race and culture are to be addressed, the words of historian Paul Gilroy could very well serve as a philosophical focal point for further studies:

Identity is not simply a social and political category to be used or abandoned according to the extent to which the rhetoric that supports and legitimizes it is persuasive or institutionally powerful... It is lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires. <sup>1</sup>

It is my hope that this work, at the very least, provides enough questions to validate the reexamination of the ethnic identities that made up the rich tapestry of life in *fin de siècle* New Orleans, and the cultural expressions thereof, which contributed significantly to the evolution of American vernacular music.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 102.

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### APPENDIX 1:

# ANNOTATED BIBILIOGRAPHY

Many works have been consulted in the process of preparing this draft that have not found their way into a citation. Similarly, some of the cited sources have been used in a very limited way, not reflecting the full scope of the work in question. Nevertheless, these represent important scholarship for examining the cultural history surrounding the early evolution of jazz. The following bibliography is by no means intended to serve as a comprehensive survey of such literature, but rather to give some indication of the broad range of scholarship this author has investigated, and to give the reader some sense of the interdisciplinary possibilities for consideration of the jazz's cultural roots.

Abbott, Lynn and Doug Seroff. "'They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me': Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues." *American Music* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 402-454.

In this article, Abbott and Seroff trace the rise of the blues as a commercial genre.

By examining published sheet music as textual artifacts, they show the relation of commercial blues to vaudeville and, in so doing, to ragtime, jazz, and American vernacular music.

Allen, Richard B. "Creating Undiminished Confidence: The Free Population of Colour and Identity Formation in Mauritius, 1767-1835." *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 4 (December 2011): 519-533.

Allen's study provides an examination of identity formation of *gens du couleur libre* in a colonial setting far removed from the Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean basin yet similarly ruled by the French before becoming a British ("Anglo") colony. The different

geographic origin — and therefore differing cultural heritage — of the majority of the African transplants to this small island is of added interest.

"America's Folk Music." The Outlook, 2 February 1927, 140.

This short, anonymous article draws upon several earlier pieces in *The Outlook* to conclude that the music of Broadway — complete with ragtime as its most fundamental distinguishing element — is American folk music and asks whether George Gershwin's music will establish this "fact" for the "educated musician." A clear distinction is made between the music of Broadway and that of the "Black Belt."

Anderson, Gene. "The Genesis of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band." *American Music* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 283-303.

Anderson traces the roots of the Oliver band to Bill Johnson and Freddie Keppard's Original Creole Band, provides some detail on the subsequent emigration of key New Orleans Creoles of color to Chicago, and examines the working conditions of Oliver's band in that city.

Anderson, Gene. "Johnny Dodds in New Orleans." *American Music* 8, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 405-440.

In this article, Anderson examines Dodds' life and early musical career before his emigration to Chicago. In the process, he provides plentiful information on other New Orleans musicians and the musical landscape in which Blacks and Creoles of color both worked. Much of his work here centers on the investigation of previous biographical work on Dodds.

Badger, R. Reid. "James Reese Europe and the Prehistory of Jazz." *American Music* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 48-67.

This article is useful in considering a broad definition of *jazz* as well as the geographical and cultural origins of the music.

Belmessous, Saliha. "Assimilation and Racialism in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Policy." *American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (April 2005): 322-349.

Though Belmessous primarily draws his material from historical sources related to France's northern colonial interests in North America, his fine scholarship provides some valuable insight into the formation of French attitudes toward race through colonization. He places particular emphasis on the cultural and legal attitudes of the French toward miscegenation.

"The Birth of Our Popular Songs." Literary Digest, 7 October 1916, 892-893.

This anonymous piece examines the evolution of American popular song in New York, citing as examples songs that include those of Stephen Foster, "coon" songs, ragtime songs, and those of Irving Berlin.

Black, Jeremy. "The Making of the British Atlantic," *History Today*, June 2013, 22-25.

Black provides some topical history on Britain's rise to prominence (and the challenging of such by the newly formed United States) in North America and the Caribbean from 1690 to the close of the eighteenth century.

Britton, Celia. "Ethnography as Relation: The Significance of the French Caribbean in the Ethnographic Writing of Michel Leiris." *French Studies* 66, no. 1 (2012): 41-53.

Britton examines Leiris' concepts of *Relation* and *contact* in ethnography and looks at how those ideas were formed by Leiris' work in the French Caribbean.

Importantly, Britton's essay shows how Leiris was influential in the removal of "the exotic" from Antillean ethnography.

Brosman, Catharine Savage. "Depictions of Popular New Orleans Culture by Mona Lisa Saloy and John Kennedy Toole." *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* (April 2012): 47-54.

This article demonstrates how latter-day New Orleans authors preserve the popular culture of that city. As a study, it serves as an interesting literary counterpart to the preservation of such culture — the elements of which are often based on myth — in oral sources commonly used by jazz scholars.

Campanella, Richard. "An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans." *Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (December 2007): 704-715.

Campanella briefly traces ethnic dispersal patterns in New Orleans, beginning around 1800 and ending in 2005 with a study of the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

"Can Popular Songs be 'Stamped Out'?" Literary Digest, 14 August 1920, 31-32.

This article represents contemporary evidence on the nationalist push for a definable American music, and the place that jazz and ragtime as "popular song" may have in the formation of that music.

Chevan, David. "Musical Literacy and Jazz Musicians in the 1910s and 1920s." *Current Musicology* nos. 71-73 (Spring 2001-Spring 2002): 200-231.

Chevan examines the musical literacy and educations of a number of (mostly) prominent early jazz musicians. Notably, not all of those he considers are natives of New Orleans.

Chevan, David. "Riverboat Music from St. Louis and the Streckfus Steamboat Line." *Black Music Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1989): 153-180.

The importance of the Streckfus riverboats to New Orleans musicians has long been noted. The deeper interest in this piece is two-fold: Chevan provides a more dynamic picture of Fate Marable than is typically offered, and he examines in some detail the qualities and qualifications of the musicians that the steamboat line drew from St. Louis.

Clark, Emily and Virginia Meacham Gould. "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727-1852." *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, vol. 59, no. 2 (April 2002): 409-448.

This article examines the sheer prominence with which Creoles of color practiced the Catholic faith in New Orleans, particularly focusing on the majority position of female adherents therein. Clark and Meacham Gould present and tacitly expound upon an interesting concept they refer to as *religious creolization*.

Cofield, Sara Rivers. "French-Caribbean Refugees and Slavery in German Protestant Maryland." *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 10, no. 3 (September 2006): 273-287.

Rivers Cofield's study offers an important look at the reception of French culture by mainstream American elements — and the tensions that resulted from the joining of these two cultures — roughly ten years before the Louisiana Purchase made New Orleans a part of the United States.

"Consular Aid for Ragtime." Literary Digest, 11 April 1914, 825.

This article examines the demand (or lack thereof) for American ragtime sheet music, and thereby the reception of American culture, across Europe on the eve of World War I.

Daniel, Oliver. "Le Jazz Hybrid," Saturday Review, 14 February 1959, 62.

Oliver looks at contemporary composers' use of "jazz" in their music, citing

Louis Moreau Gottschalk as an early example and labeling his music "Creole pre-jazz

effusions."

Dawdy, Shannon Lee. "Understanding Cultural Change through the Vernacular: Creolization in Louisiana." *Historical Archaeology* 34, no. 3 (2000): 107-123.

Dawdy provides important insight into how the process of creolization can inform archaeology and how, in turn, artifacts have informed our understanding of Louisiana Creoles. Included in this important essay is Dawdy's delineation of three distinct phases of creolization in Louisiana which culminate in the cultural clash of ethnic Creoles and Anglo-America in the antebellum United States.

Dessens-Hind, Nathalie. "Les migrants de Saint-Domingue en Louisiane avant la guerre de Sécession: de l'intégration civique à l'influence politique." Revue française d'études américaines 75 (January 1998): 34-46.

Dessens-Hind examines not only the political ramifications of the mass immigration of refugees from Saint-Domingue to New Orleans resulting from the slave rebellion on the island, but also investigates the great degree to which this population successfully integrated into New Orleans Creole society — a fact not necessarily event through study of conventional metrics alone.

DeVeaux, Scott. "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography." *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 525-560.

DeVeaux traces the construction and development of the popular (and scholarly) "official version of jazz history."

Din, Gilbert C. "Carondelet, the Cabildo, and Slaves: Louisiana in 1795." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 5-28.

In this study, Din challenges the notion put forth by his colleagues that a wave of increased repression of, and cruelty toward, the slave population of Louisiana followed the 1795 Pointe Coupée slave conspiracy through a thorough consideration of Spanish and local policy, and a careful examination of the actions of Governor Francisco Luis Hector, Baron de Carondelet.

Din, Gilbert C. "Empires Too Far: The Demographic Limitations of Three Imperial Powers in the Eighteenth-Century Mississippi Valley." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 50, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 261-292.

Din examines the relationships between the United States, Great Britain, France, and Spain, and how sheer distance played a key role in the dramatic decline of the latter three nations' colonial pursuits in the Americas, ultimately leading to the Louisiana Purchase. He further asserts that greater exploration and increased settlement of the Mississippi River and the surrounding territory by any of the three great European powers would likely have assured not only their continued possession of that territory, but their future expansion as well.

Din, Gilbert C. "The Offices and Functions of the New Orleans Cabildo." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 37, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 5-30.

This article outlines in some detail the organizational structure, responsibilities, and governing capacity of the Spanish colonial government in New Orleans, filling the knowledge gaps of an important subject previously underrepresented in historical scholarship.

Eble, Connie. "Creole in Louisiana." *South Atlantic Review* 73, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 39-53.

Eble's article is a brief historiographical study of the meaning and use of the word *creole*, particularly as it has been applied to people and cultures, in Louisiana. Of somewhat tangential interest is her recognition of a return to an older, more inclusive usage of *Creole* in Louisiana today.

"The Effort to Take Jazz Seriously." *Literary Digest*, 26 April 1924, 29-30.

An interesting, wide-ranging, yet brief piece relaying the opinions of music critic Gilbert Seldes, this article is useful for examining contemporary definitions of *jazz*, the idea that jazz did indeed evolve directly from ragtime, and the nationalistic push to enshrine jazz as the American musical wellspring.

Epstein, Dena J. "Slave Music in the United States before 1860: A Survey of Sources (Part 2)." *Notes*, second series, vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 1963): 377-390.

Epstein's bibliographical essay is an excellent review of sources for investigating contemporary receptions of Black music. In this installment, she covers sources dealing with boat songs, "patting Juba," the ring-shout, and the music of Place Congo.

Unfortunately, this author has thus far been unable to locate other installments of this very fine survey.

"An Essay on Vulgarity." The Living Age, 14 June 1919, 657-659.

This very interesting, presumably English essay (reprinted from *The Nation*) examines the contemporary use and meaning of the word *vulgarity* as it was commonly applied to the arts in the post-Victorian Edwardian period and the years of the First World War. Critics' use of the term *vulgar* in describing ragtime is specifically discussed.

Fairchild, Leslie. "Horse-Sense and Horse-Play in Music: Modern Thoughts on an Ancient Conspiracy against the Feet." *The Outlook*, 14 January 1925, 59-60.

Fairchild's article, which praises the rhythmic vitality of jazz, is a useful source for considering contemporary definitions of *jazz*: Fairchild puts forth that, at its core, jazz is "a form of humorous ragtime" characterized by timbral effects employed by instrumentalists. He also thoroughly ties his discussion of the music into the broader discourse on musical nationalism prevalent in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Fay, Frances C. "The Singing Armies." *Bookman*, October 1918, 166-173.

Fay compiles a series of reports on the songs sung on the warfront by various counties' armies, including the popularity of "coon" songs and ragtime songs among American soldiers and that of the latter among the men from Australia (!).

Fiehrer, Thomas. "Slaves and Freedmen in Colonial Central America: Rediscovering a Forgotten Black Past." *Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 39-57.

This excellent article from Fiehrer is a useful source for pondering the effect of Spanish rule on Louisiana's French-rooted Creole culture, particularly when considering the differences inherent in the Spanish and French racial systems.

"Force of Humor' in Music." *Literary Digest*, 14 August 1920, 32.

This article, as brief as it is interesting, cites a piece from the *Daily Chronicle* of London in which the English writer — upon seeing an "[authentic] Southern negro" musical group — expresses his belief that jazz is not the vulgar music that America has sold abroad.

Ford, James L. "The Father of Ragtime." *Bookman*, August 1916, 616-618.

In Ford's biographical sketch of Charles Trevathan, he credits his subject with being one of the progenitors of ragtime. Ultimately, however, he gives the title "Father of Ragtime" to Trevathan's African-American servitor, Cooley, whom, as Ford tells us, collected ragtime songs from the "negro resorts" where they originated.

Fussell, Elizabeth. "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans." *Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (December 2007): 846-855.

As the title of this article suggests, Fussell charts the demographic make-up of New Orleans in terms of racial and/or ethnic groups from 1769 into the twenty-first century. The most significant portion of her data (that spanning the years 1769 to 2000) is broken into five somewhat questionable categories: whites, enslaved blacks, blacks, foreign-born, and others. Interestingly, Fussell implies that New Orleans transitioned from "a tripartite to a biracial society" between 1900 and 1950, beginning later than most

historians have suggested and thereby placing this process squarely in the Jim Crow era of the American South.

Garrigus, John. "Blue and Brown: Contraband Indigo and the Rise of a Free Colored Planter Class in French Saint-Domingue." *The Americas* 50, no. 2 (October 1993): 233-263.

This article provides the beginnings of a three-dimensional picture of Saint-Domingue's free people of color, among whom were the ancestors of several key figures in early jazz, including Jelly Roll Morton. In so doing, Garrigus provides a fairly comprehensive study of inter-colony commerce, giving a sense of Saint-Domingue's position in the region and showing the machinations that drove colonial economies in the Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean basin.

Geggus, David. "The French Slave Trade: An Overview." *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, vol. 58, no. 1 (January 2001): 119-138.

Geggus traces the specific geographic origins of Africans sold into slavery on the islands of Saint-Domingue, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Cayenne, and Grenada.

Additionally, he investigates the effects of crop type on population distribution and the cultural products that evolved through the distribution patterns of this human trafficking.

Goldberg, Isaac. "Jazz." Forum, April 1932, 232-236.

Writing in 1932, Goldberg — somewhat anachronistically employing the broad definition of the word *jazz* common in the late 1910s and 1920s — praises jazz for "[shaking] our popular music out of its torpor." Conflating the music with ragtime, he essentially tries to cap the debate surrounding jazz as an expression of American national identity (an argument in which Goldberg had previously participated, but one that seems

to have lost most of its steam some years before) by showing how regularly "jazz" was being employed by "serious" composers not only in the United States, but in Europe as well.

Goldberg, Isaac. "Popular Songs and Their Piano Accompaniments." *American Mercury*, September 1928, 58-61.

In this article, Goldberg examines the evolution of American vernacular styles through the piano accompaniments in published sheet music. While an interesting concept for 1928, some of his conclusions are baffling. For example, he writes that ragtime is "essentially rhythmic dislocation" while jazz is "a contrast of rhythms." He also says that jazz (in piano sheet music) "depends upon tricks with chords and counterpoint," yet he fails to provide any examples of such counterpoint.

Gosnell, Jonathan. "Unmasking the Creole Cowboy: Cosmopolitan Cultures in the Gulf South." *French Review* 85, no. 5 (April 2012): 916-928.

In this thought-provoking essay, Gosnell examines the formation of Creole identities and cultures, looking at commonalities that have arisen among various post-Colonial ethnic groups through the cultural creolization. He examines this process — which he identifies as one of deeply layered hybridization — as a primarily urban phenomenon.

Grennard, Elliott. "Jazz as it isn't: Three movies tried to tell the story of ragtime but missed the up-beat." *New Masses*, 21 July 1942, 27-28.

This article is a fine example of American Marxist literature promoting the idea of the "brash and rough" Black origins of jazz. Grennard's telling of Bix Beiderbecke's

story is side interest here, as it provides clear evidence of American Communists' attempts to create a unified Black/white working-class political base through jazz.

Gushee, Lawrence and Harry Carr. "How the Creole Band Came to Be." *Black Music Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (1988): 83-100.

In this article, Gushee presents the preliminary research for his 2005 book, Pioneers of Jazz: The Story of the Creole Band (see Works Cited), and makes a case for the need of the study.

Hammond, John Craig. "'They Are Very Much Interested in Obtaining an Unlimited Slavery': Rethinking the Expansion of Slavery in the Louisiana Purchase Territories, 1803-1805." *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 353-380.

Hammond's interesting article examines the role of the federal government in promoting slavery in the Louisiana Territories in the years immediately following the Louisiana Purchase; the effect that Napoleonic views of, and strategies for, the region may have had on policy makers in Washington; and ultimately, the Americanization (perhaps more accurately, the "Unionization") of more northern parts of the territory. Of particular interest to the subject matter at hand is the light that Hammond sheds on the Americanization of Missouri and other post-Colonial divisions of greater Louisiana, areas that have not been treated as such in previous jazz scholarship.

Hanger, Kimberly. "Conflicting Loyalties: The French Revolution and Free People of Color in Spanish New Orleans." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 5-33.

Hanger uses Pedro Bailly as a case study for the effect of the French Revolution on the political views and activism of free persons of Louisiana, highlighting the disparity between the racial systems of France and Spain.

Hanger, Kimberly S. "'Desiring Total Tranquility' and Not Getting It: Conflict Involving Free Black Women in Spanish New Orleans." *The Americas* 54, no. 4 (April 1998): 541-556.

In this article, Hanger looks at criminal disturbances (direct challenges to the Spanish government's goal of *toda tranquilidad*) in which free women of color were involved as incidents of activism.

Hobson, Wilder. "Hits and Misses." Saturday Review of Literature, 28 May 1949, 53.

Hobson discusses ragtime's relation to jazz, citing its folk origins, while reviewing the work of the then-emerging pianist, Ralph Sutton.

Hobson, Wilder. "Hits and Misses." *Saturday Review of Literature*, 24 September 1949, 61.

Hobson briefly reviews the album *Jazz a la Creole*, released under the auspices of clarinetist Albert Nicholas and featuring Danny Barker, James P. Johnson, and George "Pops" Foster (mistakenly referred to as "Albert"), which he says, "[recalls] the Creole entertainers of New Orleans."

Hobson, Wilder. "Hits and Misses: Okay C.P., Also Wally Rose." *Saturday Review*, 25 July 1953, 49.

Hobson's review of pianist Wally Rose represents one critic's reception of ragtime piano compositions in mid-century America.

"How to Feel Music." Literary Digest, 19 March 1904, 407.

This article, "digested" from a piece in the March issue of *Popular Mechanics*, provides some insight into the contemporary reception of ragtime, explaining in

decidedly non-scientific terms how the music was capable of creating physical sensations in the human body.

Ingersoll, Thomas N. "Free Blacks in a Slave Society: New Orleans, 1718-1812." William and Mary Quarterly, third series, vol. 48, no. 2 (April 1991): 173-200.

In this piece, Ingersoll looks at the legal and extra-legal rights and status of free persons of color in New Orleans and how such changed over time. He highlights exclusionary, "pre-Jim Crow" (my term) measures that were being put into effect in the city in the two years immediately following the Louisiana Purchase.

Ingersoll, Thomas N. "The Slave Trade and the Ethnic Diversity of Louisiana's Slave Community." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 37, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 133-161.

More than a survey of the ethnic groups making up the slave population of Louisiana or a charting of their dispersal, Ingersoll's article is an examination of the economic and legal causes behind the patterns of movement of slave populations from Africa and around the Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean basin.

Joyce, J. "Archive's Spring Exhibit Showcases Creole Heritage." *Jazz Archivist* 1, no. 1 (May 1986): 3-4.

Joyce outlines an exhibit at the Hogan Jazz Archive, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, that showcased the Creole of color antecedents of jazz and the affinity for jazz made be Creoles of color among early twentieth-century French jazz critics.

Kmen, Henry A. "The Roots of Jazz and the Dance in Place Congo: A Re-Appraisal." *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 8 (1972): 5-16.

In this important article, Kmen challenges the supposed eye-witness accounts of African dancing in postbellum New Orleans, investigating the plain historical truths about Congo Square and the general "African-ness" of music in New Orleans at the end

of the nineteenth century. He points to historical evidence that shows African dancing in *la Place Congo* gradually diminished in the first half of the nineteenth century and finally came to an end by of before 1845, despite the fact that such gatherings of slaves had been explicitly illegal in the city since 1817.

Leglaunec, Jean-Pierre. "Slave Migrations in Spanish and Early American Louisiana: New Sources and New Estimates." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 46, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 185-209.

Despite its brevity, Leglaunec's article represents perhaps the most thorough examination of slave importation and re-exportation in New Orleans and the Caribbean extant.

McCusker, Maeve. "Figuring Abjection: The Slave Mother in the Early Creole Novel." *French Studies* 67, no. 1 (2012): 61-75.

McCusker's examination of two Martinican novels from the 1830s provides important insight into the symbolism that free Creole society (cf. Fiehrer, *From Quadrille to Stomp*) found in the slave populations that surrounded them and serves to emphasize the very real cultural distance between the later-named Creoles of color and African slaves.

McKnight, Mark. "Charivaris, Cowbellions, and Sheet Iron Bands: Nineteenth-Century Rough Music in New Orleans." *American Music* 23, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 407-425.

In this important article, McKnight examines the very real, largely ignored tradition of "rough music" in New Orleans across the nineteenth century. In so doing, he questions "Anglo-centric jazz historiography" and its tendency to revel in "roughness,"

leading to what is, perhaps, an erroneous conflation of early jazz with New Orleans' "rough music" tradition.

Milhaud, Darius. "The Jazz Band and Negro Music." *Living Age*, 18 October 1924, 169-173.

In this article, often cited as important, definitive validation of jazz's American status and the music's African roots, the French composer — whose status as an expert in jazz as early as 1924 should certainly be questioned — praises the "new music" for its rhythmic vitality and instrumental effects, the two elements he views as the genre's defining characteristics. He goes on to claim that he finds in the music and dance retention of "primitive African qualities" and "wild African character," this even to some degree in the more "perfected" music of Paul Whiteman and Billy Arnold.

"Music Demanded by the Times." Literary Digest, 5 May 1923, 34.

This article, "digested" from a piece in a contemporary issue of *Musical America*, examines life in the post-Romantic United States and points to "ragtime' and jazz music" as true folk expressions of a Modernist America.

"Negroes in America." *Literary Digest*, 20 December 1919, 40 & 142.

This very interesting installment of the *Literary Digest* series of essays, "Education in Americanism: Lessons in Patriotism prepared for *THE LITERARY DIGEST* and especially designed for School use," includes sections on "Negro folk-music" (in which it is cautioned that ragtime should be clearly demarcated from "pure 'spirituals") and Black political participation (including the supposed Socialist and Communist tendencies of, and the organizational appeals to, Black Americans).

"The Permanence of 'Ragtime' Music." Literary Digest, 29 March 1902, 427.

In this very interesting, early piece of critical writing on ragtime (which is condensed from a *Chicago Tribune* piece), "composer of popular music" and performer of ragtime, Preston Brooke, is quoted as saying, "I believe that ragtime existed in the lower animals long before the advent of man." He wastes little time in connecting this idea with the "old plantation darky." Strangely, he makes these statements in what is, on the whole, a defense of ragtime. His abject racism aside, Brooke interestingly labels the dancers of "juba" and the "old-time... backwoods... 'fiddlers'" ragtime performers.

"Philosophizing Rag-Time." Literary Digest, 15 March 1913, 574-575.

In his framing of this summary of the London *Times* piece of 8 February 1913 simply titled "Rag-Time," the anonymous author tacitly supports ragtime through his emphasis of the American character of the music as part of the broader early twentieth-century argument on the need for a nationalistic American musical identity.

"Ragtime' and Royalty." Literary Digest, 10 October 1903, 464.

All early commentary on ragtime is important in gauging the reception of the music, and this piece is no exception. The anonymous author ties together pieces from three different newspapers (the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Times*, and the Chicago *Record Herald*) with a quote on ragtime's life expectancy from John Philip Sousa, revealing larger contemporary arguments on the nature, quality, and durability of the music.

"Respectablizing Jazz." *Literary Digest*, 24 November 1923, 31.

In this article, an anonymous *Literary Digest* author frames excerpts of Deems Taylor's review (originally published in the New York *World*) of a recital by vocalist Eva Gautier in which she included several selections of "jazz." The idea that jazz songs are "folk-music if ever any music was" allows Taylor to place the songs of Irving Berlin, Walter Donaldson, George Gershwin, and others in a position of parity with those of Béla Bartók, securing for them a rightful spot in the recital hall.

Roberts, John Storm. "Taking the Broad View in Black Music Research." *Black Music Research Journal* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 5-8.

In this sometimes perplexing article, Roberts seems to frustrate his overall point—that to study the musics of, or those influenced by, the African diaspora one must embrace the interconnectedness of that diaspora—repeatedly. In the same paragraph in which he suggests that researchers essentially need to ignore common categories (he offers "black U.S." and "Caribbean" as examples), he strangely suggests many early jazz musicians in New Orleans were Cuban or Mexican and *not* Creole. In latching onto these national labels, Roberts fails to see the broader category of *Creole* as a cultural indicator that supersedes them and which is actually more reflective of his own call for a realized diasporic interconnectedness.

Russell, Sarah. "Intermarriage and Intermingling: Constructing the Planter Class in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1803-1850." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 46, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 407-434.

Russell examines what is, in essence, the Americanization of "Creole whites" in the agricultural parishes outside New Orleans across the half-century following the Louisiana Purchase. Thomas Fiehrer, Alfred Hunt, and other historians have dealt with this phenomenon in the urban setting of New Orleans, but Russell demonstrates that the

process of merging ethnicities among "whites" (commonly viewed as rife with conflict) was fairly straightforward and easy thanks to the planters' realization of the need for solidarity in maintaining the slave system central to their way of life.

Scott, Rebecca J. "The Atlantic World and the Road to *Plessy v. Ferguson.*" *Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (December 2007): 726-733.

In this informative, compact article, Scott examines the cultural identities of free persons of color in the context of the broader Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean basin, showing that such identities could just as easily reflect individual perceptions as those inherited from family lineage. At the same time, she clearly demonstrates the geographic mobility of free persons of color from across this geographic area and points to their insistence on equal rights and treatment — a cultural element embraced by the group — as a key contributing factor for such.

## APPENDIX 2:

## SHEET MUSIC

The following pages contain facsimiles of all original sheet music referenced throughout this work. They are organized alphabetically by the composers' last names, and page numbers are provided in the following list of contents:

Composer	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Page</u>
Louis Moreau Gottschalk	Capricho español	110
Charles K. Harris	Cast Aside	129
Scott Joplin	Elite Syncopations	137
W. H. Krell	The Mississippi Rag	146
Kerry Mills	Happy Days in Dixie	152
Gaspar Sanz	Canarios from Instruccion de Musica	160
	sobre la Guitarra Español (1674)	
Manuel Saumell	La Matilde Contradanza	164
Harry Zickel	Black America: A Negro Oddity	165

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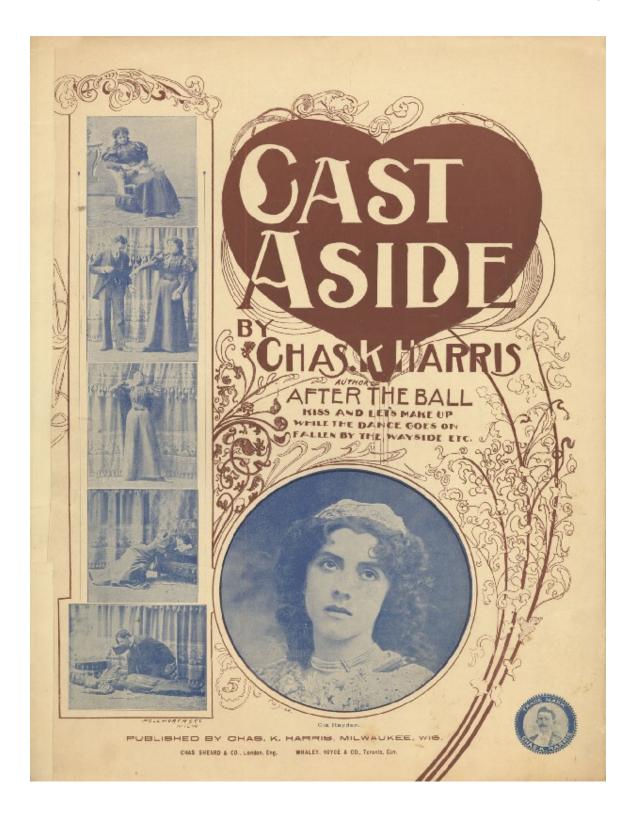












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9. The Haward Two-Step 50	17. While the Dance Goes On, nine
10. The Niverboy Donze 50	parts with piano
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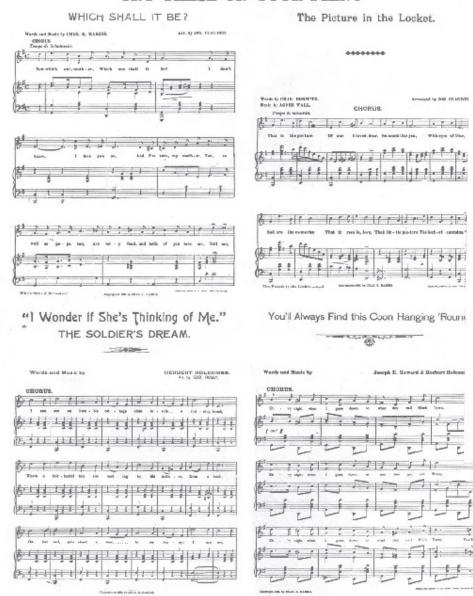
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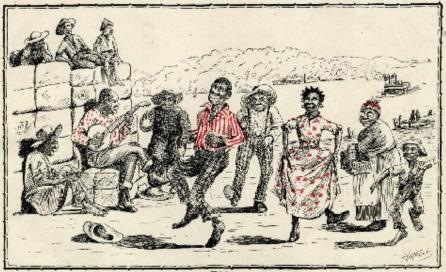
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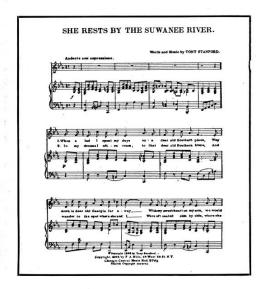






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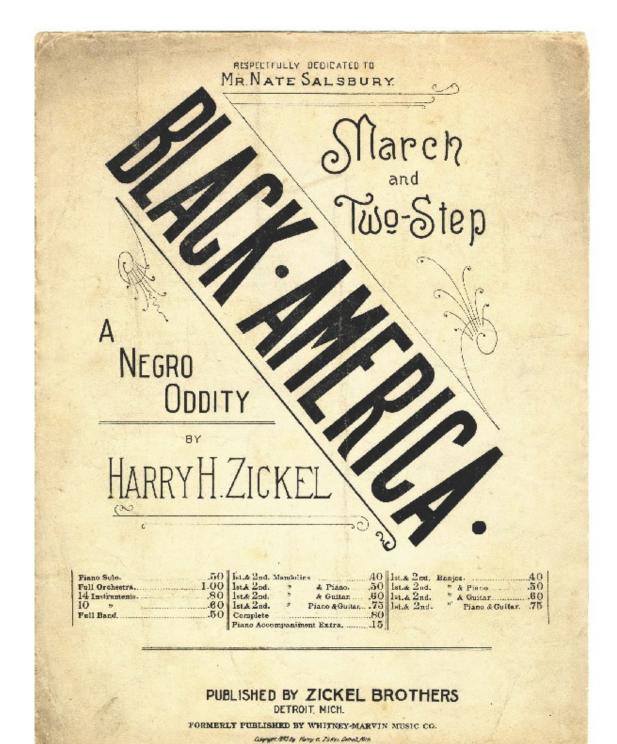
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