ARTISTRY AND ENTERTAINMENT: CLASS AND RACE NAVIGATIONS OF DUKE ELLINGTON AND LOUIS ARMSTRONG

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the early careers of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong and holds them against the larger cultural, social, and economic landscape of the United States during the early twentieth century. Black Americans had been freed from slavery by Emancipation, but the rise of the racist Jim Crow laws, starting in the late 1880s, had stripped away many of their freedoms once again and kept them in a lower caste of the American system. On top of Jim Crow, the United States was facing Prohibition laws, the Great Depression, and World War I, creating a tumultuous landscape for any citizen, let alone Black Americans. Ellington and Armstrong had also worked their way to national fame against the odds, and this thesis shows the paths they took to attain their lasting legacies. Both are examined through case studies, with Ellington finding success through gaining relative respectability in white culture and his dedication to his artistry, and Armstrong finding his through the relationships he garnered in his early career that allowed him to hone and craft his audience-oriented performance philosophy. These case studies are preceded by a chapter describing the intricacies of American culture during this time, and the greater efforts of Black uplift that are interwoven into these two musicians' lives. I will seek to paint a well-developed portrait of the American landscape of the early twentieth century through the lives of prominent Black musicians of this era.

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Chapter One: Introduction

By the start of the twentieth century, African Americans were free citizens of the United States, but were still subjected to lingering racism that was enforced by oppressive Jim Crow laws. Named after a Black minstrel show character that stereotyped Black people as poor, uneducated, dirty tricksters, these laws were a group of local and state statutes that legalized racial segregation. Jim Crow was born from social customs turned into laws that oppressed African Americans for roughly 100 years, beginning in 1887 and only ending in 1968, and largely ignored the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution that freed enslaved people, gave them citizenship, and the right to vote. The Black population gained more rights in the northern states, but more often than not, they were still treated as less-than human. Black Americans had to create their own opportunities and navigate their way up the social ladder with white Americans constantly putting barriers in their way.

Black musicians were often able to raise their social status through the popularity and prominence of Black musical styles such as ragtime, blues, and swing. White musicians appropriated these styles, transforming them to be more culturally palatable to a broader audience but often lost the soul and energy that came with Black musicians playing their music. Two musicians who exemplified the ways that Black musicians found ways to appeal to larger audiences than just other Black Americans in different ways. Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington (1899-1974) was born to a middle-class Black family in Washington DC and had a focus on artistry and sophistication, which allowed him to establish himself as a respectable Black man. Louis Armstrong (1901-1971) was born into an impoverished family in the south but also found his way into national respect and renown, but through entertainment strategies and building

relationships while also finding financial footing. Through separate case studies on each performer as well as viewing the day-to-day struggles that they endured, I will examine the ways in which Ellington and Armstrong navigated the spheres of popular music.

Chapter Outline

Ellington and Armstrong had completely different paths to the top of their fields, but both obtained similar levels of success. I will begin by outlining and describing the environment in which they grew up and began their careers. With the rise of Jim Crow laws and violence accompanying them, Black Americans needed to understand how to navigate these laws, how to fight against them, and how to find community in a segregated country. In chapter two, I will give an overview of how the laws effected Black Americans with a few smaller case studies to provide context for how far-reaching Jim Crow went within the systems and culture of the United States. I will also consider three of the most well-known Black leaders that laid the foundation of future civil rights movements, Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), Booker Taliaferro Washington (1856-1915), and William Edward Burghardt "W.E.B." Du Bois (1868-1963), and how their ideologies eventually led to what is now referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. Although largely a literary movement, the Harlem Renaissance led Black Americans further into the realm of respectability in the eyes of white America through conscious writings and social and cultural shifts within the Black community in the wake of the Victorian sensibilities.[1] As the Harlem Renaissance flourished, so did jazz. Jazz came out of New Orleans at the turn of the

[1] Sonia Delgado-Tall, "The New Negro Movement and the African Heritage in a Pan-Africanist Perspective," *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 31, No. 3 (January 2001): 298-300.

century and quickly spread across the country, but its critics were ruthless, largely due to it being a Black musical style. Many critics used jazz as a mask in an attempt to hide their racism, although they were still quite transparent with their hatred of Black Americans. Many critics labeled jazz as harming the American people; others claimed that it did not take any mental capacity to play as many jazz musicians did not read music with the same proficiency as a classically-trained musician.[2] Many critics of jazz preferred a style of jazz popularized by white bandleader, Paul Whiteman, called "sweet jazz" as opposed to the "hot jazz" played by African Americans, as "hot jazz" was perceived as more primitive and dangerous to white sensibilities.[3] With so much cultural violence towards Black people, many looked to their African roots and to religion. Religion and a cultural history gave them hope and strength during these times, and led many Black people to investigate ways to return to Africa to escape the violence of Jim Crow.

With the discussion of greater socioeconomic challenges of the early twentieth century in the United States established, my first case study in chapter three will show how Ellington used his surroundings to continually hone his craft while spreading uplift messages in his music to the larger Black community. Ellington grew up in a middle-class home that was founded on respectability and hard work – traits that were apparent through his entire career and helped him hone his craft and his brand. Growing up in a middle-class Black family in Washington DC, he was not exposed to much of the rampant racism that was found further south.[4] He used his

[2] James Kraft, "Musicians in Hollywood: Work and Technological Change in Entertainment Industries, 1926-1940," *Technology and Culture* Vol. 35, No. 2 (April 1994): 309.
[3] Chadwick Jenkins, "A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio," *American Music* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 421.
[4] John Edward Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," *Washington History* Vol. 26 (Spring 2014): 38.

privileged upbringing and hard work to make a name for himself in DC by being able to promote himself locally and having access to formal piano lessons and odd jobs to fund his self-promotions. Through the work that Ellington had done in DC, he and his band were able to afford moving to Harlem to continue their careers. In Harlem, his band received a contract for the Cotton Club, a whites-only club with plantation aesthetics that objectified the Black workers through primitivist and exoticized themes. Ellington used this time to experiment with his compositions, playing into the exoticized environment of the venue. He was able to create a national name and brand for himself with the help of his manager, Irving Mills (1894-1985). Ellington's work at the Cotton Club allowed him entry to the Black upper class and he became a race leader through his music and values. He learned how to command respect from audiences rather than demanding or asking for it in Harlem. His participation in film roles subverted the mainstream audience's perceptions of Black people in America.[5] His journey to the top was filled with its own set of trials and tribulations due to his inventive compositional style. Both classical and jazz critics attacked his compositions for not being "Black enough" and insisted that Ellington should stay in his own lane as a Black jazz musician.[6]

The second case study in chapter four will show Louis Armstrong's focus on building relationships to find new opportunities that allowed him to build more relationships. Through this network of personal and professional relationships Armstrong learned how to better himself as a musician and an entertainer. Armstrong struggled to stay in one place or with one

[5] Harvey Cohen, "Duke Ellington on Film in the 1930s," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 96, No. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2013): 411.
[6] Gunther Schuller, "Jazz and Composition: The Many Sides of Duke Ellington, the Music's Greatest Composer," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* Vol. 46, No. 1 (October, 1992): 47.

job for longer than a year or two, but this was in part due to his popularity as an entertainer. He was able to play trumpet, sing, lead bands, perform stand-up comedy, tap-dance, and whatever else he put his mind to while moving from place to place, as was typical of any entertainer with an audience-pleasing philosophy. Growing up in extreme poverty in New Orleans, Armstrong struggled to get a formal education, but he was always excited to learn more about music and frequented concerts, parades, and festivals to be able to hear his idols in person. These concerts were often in a part of New Orleans dubbed 'Storyville,' an eighteen-block section of the city dedicated to vice establishments and the homes of many of the city's Black residents, although the relatively integrated history of the city had spread Black residents across the city. New Orleans has a history of being a melting pot of culture, and there were many distinct populations in the city that created a complicated class hierarchy, especially after the introduction of Jim Crow laws. After leaving New Orleans, Armstrong moved around the country, landing in Chicago for most of his life with a relatively short residency in New York. He crafted friendships and professional relationships wherever he went due to his mastery of the trumpet and his lovable demeanor. These relationships only grew Armstrong's musicality and inspirations through the years. When he moved back to Chicago after living in New York, Armstrong started a group called the Hot Fives that recorded at the Okeh studios in Chicago. Okeh gave Armstrong and the group complete artistic freedom and allowed Armstrong to professionally sing for the first time in his career.[7] Although he did not invent scat-singing, he

[7] Benjamin Givan, "Duets for One: Louis Armstrong's Vocal Recordings," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 87, No. 2 (Summer 2004): 191.

certainly popularized it, and brought uniquely Africanized elements to his musicality as varied vocalizations are a large part of African culture and language.[8]

Literature Review

Many of the sources I found contribute to every portion of the project, but I will discuss them under the chapters where I found them to be most helpful. I have divided the cultural context into three sections for the purpose of this review: Jim Crow and the effects of segregation in the United States, the Harlem Renaissance and racial uplift efforts, and jazz criticism and history. Afterward, I will discuss the major sources I found to be useful for Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, respectively.

Jim Crow and Segregation

Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law* shows the inner workings of zoning laws in the United States in the early twentieth century that segregated cities. In this book, Rothstein discusses the domino effect that Emancipation had on city zoning laws while Black residents moved across the country, with many trying to escape the South. He shows how city governments tackled the issue of public housing for freedmen who suddenly had to fend for themselves, and how many of the cities that provided public housing fell short on living standards. Often, freedmen had to choose between a life of servitude to their former masters to "earn" a living, or to try and find employment that would not fully support their new cost of living. Rothstein goes on to show how racism was intertwined into every part of society and

[8] Givan, "Duets for One," 190.

lawmaking with many white residents not wanting to live in the same neighborhoods as the incoming Black people, inducing a "white flight" and giving landlords and the housing market a chance to raise housing costs everywhere, specifically designed to dissuade Black people from moving in. This went all the way to lawmakers who passed laws allowing the rezoning of cities to corral Black people into defined areas. Later on, Rothstein shows how many of these laws that passed further pushed Black people into poverty and made it more difficult for them to climb social and cultural ladders by limiting intergenerational wealth building.

Karen Sotiropoulos' *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* deals with issues of racial uplift through staged performances whether they were musical or theatrical. She discusses how Black performers were able to reclaim minstrelsy (to some extent) to use their moments on stage to convey messages to their Black audiences that would not make sense to the white audiences. Sotiropoulos notes that while most Black Americans wanted to contribute to the greater uplift efforts, they were split on how to do so. Some Black people, largely in the entertainment field, felt that if they accentuated the racist stereotypes on stage, they could be civilized and respectable off the stage and whites would understand the difference. Other Black race leaders saw the opposite and wanted to drift away from the stereotypical Black idioms as during this time, everything Black was seen as "laughable and primitive." She paints this culture as a spectrum as she shows examples of Black race leaders who fell somewhere in between these two sides, such as Will Marion Cook's dedication to Black melodies, but expertly hiding them within the textures of his scores as to sound respectable and civilized to a white audience. Sotiropoulos also stresses that Black communities supported one another, despite this spectrum of uplift views.

Live music had an active life and audience in the United States, and it was largely in nightclubs. Lewis Erenberg's "From New York to Middletown: Repeal and the Legitimization of Nightlife in the Great Depression" shows the complex spheres that surrounded Black musicians, night clubs, and alcohol during both Prohibition and the Great Depression. Night clubs were often seen as seedy and hot spots for criminal activity, and as Erenberg shows, the association between night clubs and alcohol were then transferred to Black people and jazz. Black musicians played jazz/swing music at seedy night clubs that served alcohol, whether legally or illegally, and this was viewed as a recipe for an unholy scene for many white Americans.

Mark Fleisher takes a more psychological approach in his article "Historical Roots of Chicago's Contemporary Violence: An Interpretation of Chicago's Early Sociologists' Texts on Black Assimilation." In this article, Fleisher discusses the historical trajectory that created a social equivalency of Black Americans with poverty and violence. He shows that Black Americans were aware of this, and to counter it, they had developed biculturalism by which they kept their identities and personalities at home and with the company of other Black people, while acting differently in a public sphere that included white Americans.

Organized gangsters had a tight grip on the American night life for much of the twentieth century, especially during the Prohibition Era, when they provided alcohol and entertainment to the public. Marc Mappen's *Prohibition Gangsters: The Rise and Fall of a Bad Generation* details the lives of many of the prominent gangsters of this period and how they navigated working in the shadows to provide vice entertainment to the public. These gangsters were largely of Italian, Irish, and Jewish origins, immigrant groups that were only slightly higher on the social ladder than Black Americans, and they often employed Black Americans within

their establishments to give them some security and a larger community in which to feel safe. Although many gangsters were generally tolerant and accepting of other races and ethnicities, some of the organization leaders were much less tolerant of Black people, and had no issue with the increasing societal correlation of vice, violence, and indulgence with Black people as they were more prominently featured in the venues they owned than the gangsters themselves.

Harlem Renaissance/Racial Uplift

The Harlem Renaissance was a major social movement largely based in Black literature and artistic development during the early part of the twentieth century that had a significant impact on Black history and culture. My two subjects, Ellington and Armstrong, both spent part of their early careers in Harlem, and I wanted to see the parts of the movement that were paralleled in their careers, or things that they may have picked up from the movement. I found that the uplift ideologies were in line with how they lived their lives. Although I found no direct connections between the artists and the Harlem Renaissance, the larger uplift efforts had seeped into everyday urban Black life, especially in the entertainment world. Being on stage necessitated that these musicians represented their race in a positive light, fearing backlash from both whites and Black people if they spoke out or accentuated stereotypes too much.

Rick McRae's "What is Hip? And Other Inquires in a Jazz Slang Lexicography" gives an insight to the vernacular that came out of Harlem, including "jive language," a name given to the particular slang popularized coming out of Harlem. McRae makes mention that "jive" came from the nicknames and adjectives that jazz musicians used in reference to their music or to

each other, as he describes that it "depends on courtesy, decorum, and mutual respect as well as open-mindedness and willingness to listen." This article sparked more interest in the vernacular and how it translated to jazz musicians, especially knowing that "Duke" was a nickname that came from the jazz-based slang culture.

Also known as the "New Negro Movement," the Harlem Renaissance is covered quite thoroughly by multiple scholars. Virginia Whatley Smith's "The Harlem Renaissance and its Blue-Jazz Traditions: Harlem and its Place of Entertainent," Sonia Delgado-Tall's "The New Negro Movement and the African Heritage in a Pan-Africanist Perspective," and Abdul Alkalimat's chapter "The Political Culture of the Black Community" from their book *The History of Black Studies* all show the importance of an African heritage that united the Harlem Renaissance movement. Smith's article discusses the importance of the Blues in the development of jazz and the cultural bond it brought to the Black communities in the United States, also mirroring the McRae article to an extent with mentions of a "blues voice" and its transference to instrumental music. She also discusses the importance of race leaders within the movement and how differing views of uplift created a stronger sense of an Africanist experience in the United States. Delgado-Tall's argument revolves around a pluralistic point of view that shows the "African experience" within the United States helping to create a color consciousness as Black Americans "begged for humanity" (p.299). Her arguments go in parallel with Smith's discussing the emphasis of the Harlem Renaissance on creating a respectable Black culture that would put them on the same social level as Protestant Anglo-whites, but maintaining their own racial individuality. The African experience is also noted in Alkalimat's chapter as they discuss strategies of social uplift through the usage of music within the folk

traditions of the African diaspora in the rural south. However, Alkalimat takes a closer look at the educational policies of the Renaissance that would unite and uplift Black Americans by showing their emphasis on educating those without any schooling, and providing publications that promoted and encouraged Black scholars and artists.

Much of the Harlem Renaissance and larger Civil Rights movements would not have been possible without the work of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, two race leaders of the early twentieth century with differing views on how racial uplift should happen. Jacqueline M. Moore's book *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* details their lives, ascendency to race leaders, and their individual philosophies on leading Black Americans into a brighter future. Washington and Du Bois were from different generations, with the former having seen an America with slavery and the latter being born after Emancipation. Washington had also been born in the South, while Du Bois was born much further north in a small town in Massachusetts where there were not many African Americans in the community, giving the town a fairly progressive attitude towards them. Their vastly different upbringings gave each man a different approach to uplift, making Washington a bit more wary of white attitudes and Du Bois more aggressive in his uplift strategies. Both men had a passion to educate the Black populations of the United States, but Washington wanted to take a slower, more methodical approach to equality with an emphasis on educating Black people in trade professions and building their economic status before fighting for full equality. Du Bois on the other hand, fought for immediate equality, and theorized a "Talented Tenth," a portion of the Black population that excelled in education, wealth, and artistry to be champions of the race. Although neither fully succeeded in their lifetimes, Moore shows that their work led

to further philosophies and ideologies to uplift Black Americans to equality. After discussing the paths that Washington and Du Bois took to become race leaders, Moore discusses the debates that they engaged in over how best to proceed with uplift in a larger context. She shows the speeches and letters that went back and forth between these men as well as the work they did behind-the-scenes to gain a social advantage over one another. Moore also juxtaposes this larger debate of two battling ideologies by both showing that they could have coexisted with one another, and that these two giants were not the only ones with ideas and movements to uplift the race.

W.E.B. Du Bois was a prominent voice for Fisk University, one of the premiere Black Universities in the United States. Known for its Jubilee Singers that toured the country and abroad, this Black university was also white owned and had a white administration and white teachers. Fisk was a flagship Black University and helped standardize and normalize Black education and uplift in the United States through its esteemed graduates' accomplishments. Fisk's history is detailed by two articles that I have used for this project, "The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925," by Lester C. Lamon, and "Fisk University: The First Critical Years," by Joe M. Richardson. Lamon and Richardson both emphasize the importance that Black Americans had put on receiving an education, and the veiled support of white northerners for this cause. Richardson takes an approach of the start of the University by detailing the purchasing and development of the land in the South, and creating a space to educate and uplift a new generation of Black Americans. Northerners often saw Black education as an essential part of a post-slavery nation, but felt that they had done enough with Emancipation and did not want to help, while southerners were widely against

Black education during this time. Lamon shows that life for white educators of Black people was made more difficult because they could be stripped of social standing and put themselves in danger for educating Black people. At the same time, they knew that white educators were able to secure funding for the schools because they were seen to have a "courage and wise foresight" that Black people were assumed to lack. Lamon shows the growing tension of the school's overall good intentions with its power-hungry president, Fayette McKenzie, that kept Black students "in their place" as to maintain his power and keep uplift efforts at a minimum. The student strike that happened in the wake of McKenzie's leadership caused riots in Nashville and across the country, leading Du Bois and other Black leaders to call for a new presidency of the school and a revamping of the foundation on which the school was founded.

Lawrence Schenbeck also discusses the complexities of racial uplift in his book *Racial Uplift and American Music 1878-1943.* He examines how class also takes a large part in the uplift efforts, stating early on that uplift ideologies had the greatest impact on the Black elites, and was fully embraced by the Black women in the upper and middle-classes. Also early on in the book, he prefaces himself and other scholars in the field by stating that "Blacks wanting to be white" is too simplistic of a view that waters down the goals of uplift and the Harlem Renaissance. Schenbeck goes on to discuss how the Black middle class used a white culture model to construct and represent a positive Black identity to minimize discrimination. However, he states that many northern whites and former abolitionists did not expect the Black exodus from the south and did not warmly welcome them as they felt that they had done enough for the Black population in advocating for Emancipation. Along with the Sotiropoulos book, Schenbeck reiterates the fact that during Black performances, the performers were not trying

to prove anything to the white audiences, rather to instill uplift principles in the Black audiences.

Jazz Criticism and History

Gabriel Solis's article "Soul, Afrofuturism and the Timeliness of Contemporary Jazz Fusion" mainly talks about twenty-first century jazz, but his discussion of a "hierarchy of value" in relation to musical genres, despite all art being deserving of the same qualities of criticism, and a "genre purity" that listeners tend to find themselves invested in when only listening to one type of music and not giving others a chance are relevant to this study. He also discusses the importance of a Black narrative when talking about jazz, despite the whitewashing that has happened through history.

Mary Herron Dupree's article "'Jazz,' the Critics, and American Art Music in the 1920s," similarly discusses the criticism surrounding jazz in the 1920s. In this article however, Dupree talks about the more "gray area" jazz critics who were not openly defending nor attacking jazz, rather how to reframe jazz both as a genre and as a national construct. Dupree notes how many critics criticized the political usage of jazz in the United States, with critics saying that composers trying to uplift jazz were only falling victim to Western art traditions. These critics were not sure how to approach jazz due to this as they too recognized that the United States needed a more solidified American presence in high art spheres, but did not believe jazz was the answer to that problem. They often saw jazz as strictly a popular music form and called for its segregation from higher art styles such as Western Classical Art Music. However, contemporaries like James Hart felt differently, as his article "Jazz Jargon" is quite outwardly

racist towards Black musicians and the techniques they used in jazz. Hart largely focuses on vocalists, and uses multiple descriptors such as “shrieks,” “moans,” and “screams,” to describe a jazz singer.

Howard Rye’s “The Southern Syncopated Orchestra” and Brian Klitz’s “Blacks and Pre-Jazz Instrumental Music in America” paint a picture of how Black musicians were seen during this time. Rye’s article talks about a group of Black musicians in the south, and how criticism surrounding them often hid the racism behind musical critiques of “authenticity.” The article shows multiple instances of critics praising the group for their rhythmic stability, but only because they believed that the rhythmic practices were “in their blood.” Klitz’s article shows a path that this form of criticism took, as he discusses how slaves were often given instruments for their owner’s entertainment because of their “natural musical abilities.” He also points out that the end of slavery and the historical beginnings of jazz are less than a century apart, making many of the racist notions from that period still prevalent during the emergence of jazz.

The slave origins of the blues, and in essence jazz, are shown in Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff’s “They Cert’ly Sound Good to Me”: Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues.” Abbott and Seroff discuss the ways in which Black musicians preserved their folk melodies from their time as slaves which would become a cornerstone for a Black American culture. Their independence, both in life and in music, were constantly being encroached upon by whites, and they struggled to navigate how to maintain their freedoms of expression while also sharing their music. This article also contains the “Dvořák Statement” where the composer commented on how a national American music must

include Black folk melodies and implies that Black people are the foundation of the country, and the music must represent that fact.

Russell Johnson's "'Disease is Unrhythmical': Jazz, Health, and Disability in 1920s America" discusses how jazz and Black culture was treated as a disease, both literally and figuratively. White Americans did not understand "hot" styles of jazz, or the rhythmic motives found in jazz, and so tried to put a medical diagnosis to this societal condition. Johnson talks about how much of this "epidemic" happened after World War I, and many of the "effects" of jazz were instead resultant of soldiers returning from war. He notes that critics would often claim that jazz required no mental discipline to play, and that there was a need of social eugenics to control the Black population in America. Doctors from this time had also brought in "musicotherapists" that would help people suffering from the jazz epidemic to choose more appropriate music.

Duke Ellington

Harvey G. Cohen provided my research with two outstanding articles, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting the Strategy for an African American Maestro," and "Duke Ellington on Film." Both articles reinforce Ellington's image of sophistication and grace and show his navigation through different art forms. The former shows a broader look at the start of his career and his relationship with his manager, Irving Mills, who, in a way, forced the American public to love Ellington and his music through his positive promotions of Ellington as a respectable Black man whose could not be pigeon-holed. Cohen shows Mills and Ellington as an unstoppable duo that took live music, recorded music, and film by storm due to Mills's

business-savvy, and Ellington's nature. In the latter article, Cohen zooms in on Ellington's film career and how the duo navigated his roles. Mills ensured that Ellington would always be cast in a respectable light, although that light would change hues depending on the director. Cohen also shows that the film career helped shift the narrative surrounding Black Americans as Ellington, a Black man, was always seen dressed-up and respectable on screen.

Ellington always strived to experiment and go beyond genre boundaries with his music, and a close friend of his, Gunther Schuller, mentions in an article entitled "Jazz and Composition: The Many Sides of Duke Ellington, the Music's Greatest Composer," that critics, both Black and white, would criticize his music for "not being Black enough." This sentiment is shown in a similar light by Chadwick Jenkins's "A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio," that analyzes the cultural segregation that happened both physically and metaphorically. Jenkins notes a "white fascination with Blacks" where they would intentionally go to Black neighborhoods to observe them from a distance and why this distance was "desirable." In this article, Jenkins also discusses critics talking about Duke's music in a positive light, but almost always reminding the audience of Ellington's race as if to discredit what they had just said about the music.

John Edward Hasse's article "Washington's Duke Ellington" takes the broadest view of Ellington out of the sources I have used. Hasse mainly shows Ellington's upbringing and the morals instilled to him by his family and friends growing up. As a child, Ellington was instilled with the notion that he is "always representing his race" and he used that to his advantage during his career, "outsmarting" the public with his manners and polish while also pursuing his goals. Hasse also recalls Ellington's childhood interests, including his path to-and-from the

piano, as he did not always enjoy playing the piano until he saw the communal powers of music from sneaking into Frank Holliday's Poolroom.

Within Nicholas L. Gaffney's "He Was A Man Who Walked Tall Among Men": Duke Ellington, African American Audiences and the Black Musical Entertainment Market, 1927-1943," Ellington is shown as a "race leader" for Black audiences. Gaffney notes that most scholars have focused on Ellington's time at the Cotton Club, and largely ignored most of his career. His problem with this scholarly focus is that the Cotton Club was exclusive to white audiences, but Black audiences were also watching and listening to Ellington during his career. Due to Ellington's writing, he was able to speak directly to Black audiences while playing for white ones, which led to his music being often played at "rent parties" during the Great Depression and Prohibition as a way for Black Americans to congregate and celebrate one another.

Cab Calloway (1907-1994) was another major Black musician/entertainer/artist during this time who followed a path somewhere between the artistic subversion of race that Ellington followed, and the light-hearted entertainment that Armstrong was known for. In a similar vein to sources used for both musicians studied, Nate Sloan's article "Constructing Cab Calloway: Publicity, Race, and Performance in 1930s Harlem Jazz" shows how difficult it was for a Black man to create a lasting career for himself in the early twentieth century. Calloway and Ellington were both clients of Irving Mills, and Sloan shows the marketing material and strategy to uplift Calloway in this article. Sloan also notes how Calloway was light-skinned and had a flexible voice that allowed him to maneuver a bit more easily than his dark-skinned counterparts.

Ellington's ability to speak through his music is well documented through Douglas Malcolm's "'Myriad Subtleties': Subverting Racism Through Irony in the Music of Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie." In conjunction with the sources around the Black vernacular, Ellington uses his compositions as a form of communicating with his audiences that whites did not understand. Malcolm shows that this was both a way to experiment in his writing and as a form of rebellion, especially when he was playing for exclusively white audiences at the Cotton Club. Also brought to light is the movement for Black musicians to wear white tuxedos on stage to go in line with Ellington's philosophy of sophistication and pride, as well as the irony of mirroring white musicians who would wear black tuxedos in the same black/white color scheme.

Perhaps Ellington's largest, and most ambitious work, *Black, Brown and Beige* was written and performed right at the end of the time period considered for this project, but its inclusion here is as a culmination of Ellington's career and vision for himself. Garth Alper's "Black, Brown and Beige: One Piece of Duke Ellington's Musical and Social Legacy," Mark Tucker's "The Genesis of 'Black, Brown and Beige'," and Lisa Barg and Walter van de Leur's "Your Music Has Flung the Story of 'Hot Harlem' to the Four Corners of the Earth!": Race and Narrative in Black, Brown and Beige" all tackle roughly the same idea of the work being Ellington's magnum opus. They all analyze criticisms after the premiere that it was either "not Black enough" or that Ellington did not have enough "formal training" to write a work of such magnitude. Ellington's meaning behind the work was to show a larger Africanist narrative that would "rescue Negro music from well-meaning friends" with a work that defied genre.

Louis Armstrong

The works on Louis Armstrong with the most depth largely consider his relationships with others and how his connections across the country helped sustain his career. The first of these is Brian Harker's "Louis Armstrong, Eccentric Dance, and the Evolution of Jazz on the Eve of Swing." In this article, Harker describes the unique relationship that Armstrong had with dancers, especially that of married dancing duo, Brown and McGraw. Armstrong constantly searched for his own voice on the trumpet, and looked to emulate other art forms or instruments on his own, and dancers were a large inspiration. Harker shows how this relationship brought virtuosity into Armstrong's rhythmic language as he matched note for note with Brown and McGraw's steps. However, both Armstrong and the dancers were seen as "eccentrics" as they went away from conventional techniques in their performances. Harker describes how they embraced their eccentricities to form a temporary career working with one another to forward their own individual careers.

Brian Harker wrote about another relationship that Armstrong had in his article "Louis Armstrong and the Clarinet," but this time the relationship is centered more around Armstrong's fascination with the clarinet and how it shaped his playing. Harker talks about how in Armstrong's youth, the Dixieland style was still prevalent in Honky-Tonks, and every instrument had a specific role in the ensemble with cornets/trumpets having melodic lines and clarinets having a jumpier obbligato line that emphasized the phrase. Armstrong was fascinated by the clarinet parts and studied them until he could play clarinet parts in Honky-Tonk bands on the trumpet, effectively blurring the boundaries between their traditional roles.

Part of Armstrong's time in Chicago was getting signed on to Okeh Records and starting his "Hot Five." Gene Anderson shows the start of this group and what made them special in "The Origin of Armstrong's Hot Fives and Hot Sevens." Anderson shows the culmination of this group starting when Armstrong took a spot in King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band where he met Lil Hardin (1898-1971). The article shows that although they were a hit recording group that brought a New Orleans flair to Chicago, the members were still always running around town taking every gig that they could and recording at ridiculous times, often sacrificing sleep in favor of playing together.

In New Orleans, the birthplace of Louis Armstrong, Black people and other unsavory folks such as Italians and prostitutes, were at one point confined to a small portion of the city known as 'Storyville.' Alecia P. Long's book *The Great Southern Babylon* shows the inner workings of the city to contain these groups of people after a couple decades of relatively peaceful integration after Emancipation. Long shows the differences in class between upper and middle-class Anglo-whites, Creole Blacks (those who had been born as free Black people in the French/Creole portion of the city), ex-slaves, mixed-race and "passing" Black people, Black and white sex workers, and anyone else that resided within the city or frequented it. With the advent of Storyville, prostitutes, Black people of all backgrounds, and purveyors of alcohol were pushed into this neighborhood with little warning and legal consequences if they did not comply. Long shows the dynamics within Storyville, on its borders with the main city, and in the main city itself to create a picture of how Jim Crow laws affected this once-integrated city.

Another book that deals with Storyville's history is Gary Krist's *Empire of Sin.* In this book, Krist tells the progression of Storyville's inception to its end largely through

interconnected storylines of the people that resided in and frequented the area. On many occasions, Krist brings up the idea of "respectability" and what that meant during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Respectability during this period largely reflects what it means in modern times, but it takes a more conservative, middle-class approach to its meaning by not indulging in sexual affairs or violence, being religious (largely Protestant, although New Orleans had a vast array of cultures and religions present and saw itself as more of a Latin Catholic city), and having some amount of wealth, especially if you were an inheritor of it. Krist states that it was more challenging to become respectable and maintain it within New Orleans than most other places in the United States due to the lax nature of the city's ethics. Later in the book, Krist talks about the story of a young Louis Armstrong and his interactions with the people of Storyville and his navigations around the "sins" of the area.

Louis Armstrong is not just known for his trumpet playing, but his instantly recognizable singing style. Benjamin Givan discusses the origins of how his singing career started, and how he developed a vocabulary for jazz singing with "Duets for One: Louis Armstrong's Vocal Recordings." Givan describes his vocal style through his own words and critic descriptions, taking special note to acknowledge the African origins of some of the melodic and timbral inflections that Armstrong would use in his singing. Armstrong began his singing career with his Hot Five, but Givan shows that he had been denied many opportunities in previous groups he had been a part of. Givan is also able to describe Armstrong's thoughts on the differences and similarities between playing and singing, especially regarding solos and improvisation.

The broadest source I am using for this portion of the project is Hugues Panassié's biography of *Louis Armstrong*. The first section of which has an in-depth historical look at

Armstrong's life and the many moves he made during his career, and his focus on entertainment between music, dancing, comedy, and acting. The second section of the biography disseminates Armstrong's style, showing the subtle improvements and changes he made due to various factors he came across in his life, including hiding his sound in a recording as to not be found breaking a contract. Closing out the book with the largest section by far is an analysis and listing of his recordings including where and when he recorded them, the artists who he recorded them with, the labels that he recorded through, and stylistic notes for listeners.

Another broad source that I have used is a collection of letters, journal entries, and transcribed conversations with Armstrong titled: *Louis Armstrong In His Own Words* edited by Thomas Brothers. Brothers compiles and interprets Armstrong's words in a way that maintains the unique style of literacy that Armstrong had obtained throughout his life. The writings are disjunct, yet completely understandable, as they are written in an improvisatory spoken flow. Armstrong learned how to read and write later in his life and his personality shines through in his writings and gives personal insight on larger parts of his life that scholarly sources have discussed in length from an outside, academic perspective. Brothers maintains Armstrong's personality, and often gives insightful comments prior to sets of Armstrong's writings to help guide the reader through the interesting ways Armstrong has approached his personal writing styles.

Key Terms Used

As this project surrounds the sordid history of racism within the United States, I will be using language from this period of history that was more commonly accepted at the time. Terms such as “Negro,” “Mulatto,” “Quadroon,” and “Nigger” will be used to accurately represent the materials with which I have worked. Terms such as “Negro,” “African American,” and “Black” are largely used interchangeably as they have all been accepted terminology to refer to Black Americans, but again will be used appropriately represent the periods in which each of these terms was used with respect to the race in reference to the source materials used. When using the word “Black” in reference to the race, the upper-case ‘B’ will be used whenever possible to respect the larger Black communities and the progress that they have made in a short time to reclaim the formality of their race within a Western, Eurocentric world.

Methodology

As I began this project, I anticipated looking at the racist stereotypes that had surrounded “jazz” instruments, such as the saxophone. However, my research had guided me down a path that gave me a fuller understanding of the racist history of the United States and how the systems in this country had been founded on a white, protestant ideal that suppressed anyone not within that group. This led me to wanting to study specific Black musicians of this era and how they navigated the racist world of Jim Crow to attain lasting fame. Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong are arguably the most prominent Black musicians from the early-twentieth century and grew up during the introduction and rise of Jim Crow policies, although they had very different childhood home lives.

With this newfound focus, I knew at the start I needed to research Jim Crow laws, and general biographic material of both artists. Finding out where each grew up and exploring their respective socioeconomic situations gave me an idea on how they combatted life's struggles and moved forward into their careers. Ellington's venture into Harlem's nightlife led me to the city of New York and his stint at the Cotton Club. With Harlem, I also found the Harlem Renaissance. Looking into its values and beginnings allowed me to have a better understanding of class and uplift within the African American population, as well as some of the race leaders that laid the groundwork for the Harlem Renaissance to happen such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois. With Armstrong, I needed to find more information on New Orleans, Chicago, and New York as well due to his migratory nature as an entertainer. In New Orleans, I learned of the vice district of Storyville and how segregation shaped the cities across the United States. As Armstrong moved around to Chicago and New York, he met up with old friends and idols and created lasting relationships everywhere he went. These friendships would not only benefit Armstrong socially, but as an entertainer, he learned how to hone his craft by copying entertainment and musical styles from them.

Despite a wealth of knowledge of these topics, I was limited in scope of some research as some topics surrounding these two musicians have been glazed over in favor of other topics. Ellington, for example, has much of his scholarship focused around his time at the Cotton Club, which is undoubtedly one of the most important parts of his career, but much of the research outside of his time there has been skirted over in favor of more discussions on the Cotton Club. This leads me to my other struggle, where much of the scholarship on these two musicians either takes an incredibly zoomed in and niche topic of their life, or completely zoomed out

view that only touches on the larger portions of their lives. This was especially an issue when trying to find scholarship on Louis Armstrong. Scholarship around his life during this era largely focuses on either smaller points of his life, or a larger, biographical view of his life. However, I have compiled what I believe to be an acceptable body of sources to give me a larger, in-depth picture of this era of American history along with how both musicians were able to create a lasting impression on music history.

Conclusions

As I have given this high-level overview of the sources and methodology behind my research and writing, I hope to have given a reasonable picture at the approach I take to describe how through very different means, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong were able to navigate their lives and careers through the taxing time that they grew up in. I expect to provide a fuller understanding of how the early twentieth century and the wake of the events leading to it set the challenges for these two musicians to form their careers. I intend to display how they utilized the lessons they learned during their respective upbringings in their professional lives, garnering them the lasting fame they have today. Ellington finding his way through artistry, sophistication, and grace, while Armstrong found his through relationships, being an entertainer, and virtuosity. Through the case studies, I hope to also shine a light on current musical racial issues by implying parallels between my subjects and their contemporaries to prominent modern musicians as racial tensions continue to transpire within the United States. Black musicians then and now have struggled to maintain a culturized creativity without white critics often watering down their output as either “too Black” or “not

Black enough." Contemporary parallels with Ellington and Armstrong could be drawn with modern rappers, especially with the recent diss verse from Kendrick Lamar against Drake and J. Cole. The track "Like That" from the 2024 album 'We Don't Trust You' by Future and Metro Boomin features Kendrick Lamar dissing Drake and J. Cole after they had mentioned the three of them were the "Big 3" of rap in their song "First Person Shooter" from Drake's 2023 album 'For All The Dogs.' In this verse, Lamar denies the fact that Drake and J. Cole are on the same level as him artistically by saying "Motherfuck the big three, it's just big me." All three artists are influential in their own right, but while Drake (and J. Cole to a lesser extent) have largely focused on pumping out entertaining hits, Lamar has always focused more on refining his artistry and using his influential position to speak out on racial and social issues.

This project has shown me a side of United States history that I was previously aware of but did not fully understand. I still do not have a complete understanding of the topics and themes I have presented, and as a white man, most likely never will. The United States has made gradual progress on its treatment of African Americans, but racism is still very much prevalent mainly in the lingering policies and elected officials that remember a time in which racism was more culturally accepted. By learning more about the challenges that Ellington and Armstrong faced, I am left with an even better impression of the current treatment of Black artists and how the music industry profits off the racialized concepts of sexuality and violence prominent in poor, Black communities within the United States. Kendrick Lamar uses this imagery from his own experiences, but in a much less glamorous way than many of his contemporaries. In his song 'Swimming Pools (Drank),' Lamar focuses on the peer pressure within poorer Black communities to drink and do drugs as it helps them forget about their

socioeconomic problems or fit in with a community that seemingly accepts them for who they are. Lamar's discography is full of topical and heavy topics like these from his own experiences growing up in the ghettos of Compton, but are often taken by the public as party songs because of their mainstream popularity in the rap and hip-hop styles. The parallels of Black uplift efforts throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first are even more pronounced as I see the popularity of rap styles today with the demonization as well as promotion of Black cultures. This is similar to the treatment of prominent jazz musicians at the start of the twentieth century that musicians such as Ellington and Armstrong had endured with discrimination simply due to the color of their skin and the stereotypes in which white populations had forced upon Black populations.

Chapter Two: Black Resiliency

In order to understand the specific struggles and nuances of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong's upbringings and careers, a broader context of the social and political atmosphere of the United States at the turn of the century for Black Americans needs to be understood. After the end of slavery with Emancipation, African Americans were now free, but were now thrust into a society which still did not treat them as fully human. As they tried to integrate themselves into society and earn a living for themselves and their families, white Americans continually pushed them back down with laws that came to be known as Jim Crow laws, starting at the end of the nineteenth century. African Americans did not accept this oppression and abuse, and racial uplift became a more prominent and organized movement during this era. This led to some members of the race, such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois, to rise as leaders for the New Negro Movement, more commonly known now as the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance, beginning in the 1920s, was largely a literary movement that focused on the uplift and racial pride of African Americans. This period also saw the growing popularity of jazz, an African American form. Because jazz was a Black musical style, there was pushback and criticism from racist critics across the country despite its popularity. African Americans held strong as a community throughout this tumultuous period as they turned to religion and their African roots to help guide them with a sense of purpose through their lives. These portions of African American life in the United States directly and indirectly effected Ellington and Armstrong and added to the specific struggles that they both went through in their paths to greatness.

Jim Crow

After the Civil War and Emancipation, the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution were put into place to abolish slavery, give citizenship to African Americans, and give Black men the right to vote. In addition to these amendments, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 attacked racial discrimination by making it a crime for an individual to deny the equal rights and enjoyments of another individual due to race. This act was repealed by the Supreme Court in 1883, as they ruled that the fourteenth amendment did not grant Congress the power to prevent discrimination by private individuals. The targets of racial discrimination were told not to seek reparations on a federal level, rather on a state level.[9] At the same time, states were beginning to pass laws that segregated public and semi-public spaces. These laws began to become known as the "Jim Crow" laws.

Florida began the charge with an act in 1887 that required railroads to create segregated spaces for their passengers. Louisiana followed this example an passed a similar bill in 1890, despite the presence of sixteen Black legislators in the state assembly who had voted against it. Any passenger that did not abide by this law faced a $25 fine or a 20-day jail sentence, with exceptions for cross-race medical care.[10] Following this act, a group of young Black men in New Orleans formed a small group to test the constitutionality of the new laws and hired a lawyer, Albion W. Tourgée, to assist with the legal process. On May 15, 1892, the Louisiana State Supreme Court decided in favor of the group, deeming the law unconstitutional for interstate travel. They found themselves empowered by this decision and decided to test

[9] Archives.gov, "Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)," *https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/plessy-v-ferguson* (2022), accessed May 29, 2024.
[10] Archives.gov, "Plessy v. Ferguson."

their luck with intrastate travel. On June 7, 1892, Homer Plessy, a mulatto (7/8 white), sat in a whites-only compartment of a train where he was confronted by the conductor and was arrested and charged for breaking state law. Tourgée appealed to the state of Louisiana claiming that the "separate but equal accommodations" described by these burgeoning laws were unconstitutional due to the fourteenth amendment. Judge John H. Ferguson ruled against Tourgée's appeal, leaving Plessy to take the case to the Supreme Court to begin the now-famous court case, Plessy v. Ferguson. The Supreme Court upheld the Louisiana state law, describing Plessy's reasoning to be a fallacy as persons of color choose to see themselves as less-than, and that social prejudice cannot be overcome by legislation. This ruling opened the door for more states to follow Florida and Louisiana's examples to create "Jim Crow" laws.[11]

The name "Jim Crow" came from a derogatory character in blackface minstrelsy that dehumanized African Americans and reinforced stereotypes. Jim Crow laws legalized racial segregation on a state level and although the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling had denied any inequality between the two races in segregated areas, the quality of Black areas and facilities were markedly worse than areas meant for whites. Jim Crow laws drew a line between whites and Blacks, creating a binary, and a hierarchal relationship in which one prevailed over the other. White male opinions held the most weight because they held the greatest social authority. They often bent or created rules that benefitted them at the cost of the rights and liberties of other sexes and races in the United States, including criminalizing sex across the color line. White men partly got away with this behavior because they framed their racist acts as respectable men making sure that the streets were safe for their wives and daughters, as

[11] Archives.gov, "Plessy v. Ferguson."

they were raping someone else's daughter.[12] In the deep South, many mixed-race persons attempted to pass as white citizens to avoid the abhorrent punishments, such as lynching, that befell many African Americans.

"Separate but equal" was the overarching theme of the Jim Crow laws that contradicted the status of African Americans as full citizens of the country and societally deemed them as unequal to the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant population. Although African Americans had been freed, much of the country still did not recognize their status as humans and despised or feared their existence. Racism was prevalent as ever in the United States, with heinous acts of violence and language spewed towards them daily. A newspaper editor from Missouri had written a letter to a Black organization, the National Association of Colored Women, declaring his hatred of African Americans. He described them all as criminals and not worthy of equal treatment, and that Black women were little better than prostitutes.[13] Nearly 250 years of slavery and oppression had set up the hatred and stereotypes that whites held towards African Americans. This time in slavery had also not allowed the vast majority of them to build any financial or social stability, which they found to be some of the most challenging aspects of being freedmen. Some had turned back to a form of slavery with their former owners called sharecropping. Sharecropping allowed Black farm workers to earn wages for their work and own land on the owner's property. However, as the owners had given them land and food, they expected to be paid back for those expenses and would take their wages back from the African Americans working for them. The workers ended up owing more money than they had

[12] Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 59, 84.
[13] Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 108.

borrowed in the first place, only to work their lives away for the property owner, trying to pay back their debts.

The southern former slaveowners campaigned and lobbied for Jim Crow laws to deny rights from African Americans, seeing them as lesser, they segregated them socially and physically. This left African Americans in a lower class once again and reignited the fear and hatred across the country.[14] As Jim Crow laws continued to spread, the hatred of Black Americans fueled the fire and empowered whites to take the laws into their own hands. The laws were often enforced by public opinion and custom rather than by law officials, making most regions in the country dangerous for the Black population. Empowered by segregation, whites had a hardened resolve to "keep the Black man down."[15] This is expressed best by a white city official of New Orleans in 1902: "The nigger's all right in his place, but when he tries to get out of it, hit him on the head, and next time he'll come in with his hat off."[16] After the initial set of laws were instated, a domino effect happened, continually stripping away rights and freedoms of Black Americans. Social segregation swept across the nation, from banning interracial marriage once again, all the way to banning interracial boxing. The idea of interracial contact and proximity was even more appalling to some whites than prostitution.[17]

Economic anxieties drove some of the panic and discrimination on which the Jim Crow laws were founded. Amidst the increased production of segregated spaces, there were multiple economic collapses and recessions between 1890 and 1910 with the worst being in 1893, 1896,

[14] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 40-41.
[15] Gary Krist, *Empire of Sin* (New York: Broadway Books, 2014), 105.
[16] Krist, *Empire of Sin,* 105.
[17] Krist, *Empire of Sin*, 237.

and 1907. As southern Black Americans increasingly found themselves unable to rise in economic status due to sharecropping and segregation laws, they began moving north in hopes of finding financial stability for themselves and their families. At the same time, the European economy was also struggling, and many European families were immigrating to the United States in hopes of the same things as southern Black Americans. In hopes of economic stability, migrants flocked to the larger cities in the United States which are largely found in the northern states. With economic recessions and droves of migrants coming into the country, the Jim Crow laws became more appealing across the country to segregate across the color line which included the vast majority of the European migrants who were not of an Anglo-Saxon and Protestant background as they came from Eastern Europe, Italy, and Greece with Jewish, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian backgrounds.

Segregation had shaped the lives of African Americans by forcing them to live their lives in fear, while also encouraging them to uplift themselves. African Americans had to always act on their best behavior, worried about making it to the next day while also trying to prove their humanity. Whites saw them as primitive beings, and that if their culture was allowed to flourish, white culture would "return to native."[18] This general fear of savage culture in the early twentieth century often did not transfer across national borders, especially in Western Europe, a culture that the United States envied and tried to emulate in its art forms. Traveling outside of the country allowed Blacks an image of what an integrated world could look like and helped their response to Jim Crow's oppression. During Ellington and Armstrong's respective

[18] Chadwick Jenkins, A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio," *American Music* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 417.

tours in Europe, they were shocked to find a comparative lack of racial prejudice that they had grown accustomed to at home. Combined with a welcoming presence, Europeans were impressed with the artistry of jazz musicians and their burgeoning style of music, convincing them that their music was worthy of being considered art.[19] In the United States, Blacks were seen as being closer to the original nature of man, embodying the primitive nature and a lack of intelligence, and therefore unable to create meaningful artistic works.

Historic Black Uplift Efforts and Their Leaders

Racial uplift was of utmost importance to African Americans in an era that deemed them as primitive, exotic, and overall unfit to participate in a Western society. Increasing rates of segregation and violence towards their race also drove these efforts. The building blocks of what racial uplift looked like later in the century were built by race leaders during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moral leaders during this time often struggled with their ideas of "good" being distorted by personal histories of class and race prejudice. Leading uplift efforts required individuals to temper their own emotions and sense of justice while also leading others to do the same for the greater good of their people. In this instance, African American leaders had to suppress their feelings toward their white oppressors and work with them to regain their humanity within American society. Black Americans did have help from some white allies that were anti-slavery and pro-Civil Rights, especially in the northeast United States.

[19] Terry Teachout, "Jazz," *The Wilson Quarterly* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1988): 70.

Although the most famous instance of Civil Rights came in the 1960s led by leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, the fight for racial equality in the United States spans over a century before their efforts. Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois were three of the most prominent figures in racial uplift leadership, beginning even before Emancipation. These three set the groundwork for movements such as the Harlem Renaissance, and the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

Emancipation and Frederick Douglass

Born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey in February 1818, the future Frederick Douglass was born a slave. He spent the first twenty years of his life enslaved, and was moved from location to location through various circumstances before making a northbound escape by using the Underground Railroad to gain his freedom. He spent nine years afterwards as a fugitive slave, even traveling to Europe for a time to spread stories of the injustice found in the United States. From an early age, he experienced the horrors of slavery and racism, watching friends and family verbally and physically abused by their masters, and receiving the same punishments himself. Douglass had been separated from his mother and siblings when they had reached an age where their masters deemed they were fit to perform labor. He had very little memory of his mother, and he accepts that most of his memories with her are almost of pure invention. Being ripped away from his family at such an early age and not knowing his father, Douglass had often wondered what it would be like to have had a family growing up and rightfully blamed slavery for taking it away from him. Due to his lighter complexion and facial features, it was often speculated that his mother's master, Aaron Anthony, was his father. For a

time in his youth, he had searched for a father figure in Anthony that would never be there, and spoke out against white fathers of slaves in an 1855 speech, "I say nothing of father…Slavery does away with fathers as it does away with families."[20]

Douglass's time in slavery fostered his hatred for the masters and the system that they perpetuated, and he spent his little free time as a slave educating himself. Constantly studying the language of his masters with the help of some of the white women of their families and studying the surrounding areas to understand the best plan of escape, he plotted with a few other slaves to escape. His personal education further radicalized him and he became a critic of the United States as a whole, deeming that he could not be a patriot of this country as one needs a country to be patriotic for, and he had no country to call home.[21] Later in his life, Douglass used this argument to deny allegations of being a traitor to the United States as he did not claim the U.S. as his country. Douglass used his sharp wit to escape the confines of slavery and begin his career as an abolitionist leader. Later in his life, Douglass wrote about the psychology between a slave and a master, "To make a contented slave, you must make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and as far as possible, to annihilate his power of reason."[22]

The first attempt to escape ended in failure, with two of the slaves confessing to the plan and its conspirators to their master at the time, a famous "slave-breaker," Edward Covey, who had Douglass and many others on a temporary contract from their owner, Thomas Auld. Douglass endured his punishment and later recalled the story of brutality to Auld, who had

[20] David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 13.
[21] Bernard R. Boxill, "Frederick Douglass's Patriotism," *The Journal of Ethics* Vol. 13, No. 4 (2009): 301.
[22] Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 80.

refused to believe most of the story and ridiculed Douglass for creating the situation for himself. Auld gave Douglass a place to stay for the night but sent him back to Covey in the morning. On Douglass's return, Covey chased him with a whip and a rope to continue his punishment, but lost Douglass in the woods, confident that he would return when he was hungry. Douglass did return the following day, but it was a Sunday, and Covey did not beat slaves on the Sabbath.[23] However, the following day, Covey came for blood, but Douglass fought back unexpectedly and won the fight, asserting some dominance over his master. Douglass saw this altercation as a form of rebirth for himself, exiting the confines of slavery and finding comparative freedom, as Covey did not dare to raise a hand against Douglass for his remaining contract.

On Douglass's second attempt to escape, he was successful, journeying north along the Underground Railroad, a system of secret safe houses and pathways for escaped slaves created by freedmen and abolitionists of all races. Douglass later used profits from his lectures to help fund the Underground Railroad for future escapees.[24] He found himself in Baltimore with his first wife, Anna Murray, where he took shipyard jobs to earn some money for future travel north. However, he quickly realized his isolation so far north. Due to his experiences, Douglass felt like prey in this new environment, with every white man as a potential kidnapper to take him back to Auld, and every Black man as a possible betrayer. Douglass and Anna traveled further north to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he officially changde his name from Bailey to Douglass and rid himself of his two middle names as an extra level of precaution against

[23] Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 65.
[24] Benjamin Quarles, "Frederick Douglass," *Negro History Bulletin* Vol. 26, No. 6 (March 1963): 201.

being found. These fears were well-founded given that the Fugitive Slave Law was in effect. This law gave judges monetary incentives to find any Blacks captured in the North to be escaped slaves, which made every free Black person in the United States liable to be kidnapped, judged to be an escaped slave, and sent south to be enslaved.[25] After establishing himself in New Bedford for a few months as a licensed Reverend for the local African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Douglass encountered an agent for *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper created by abolition leader and thinker, William Lloyd Garrison.

Garrison's newspaper further fueled Douglass's radicalism with discussion of slaveholding being both a national and individual sin, and that all antislavery forces should make no compromise with slavery in any form. The newspaper also exposed the gag rules enforced in Congress that suppressed the voices of the few antislavery members in session.[26] Douglass saw Garrison and his ideals as heroic – a moral voice from a white person that he had only dreamed about. Garrison's ideas and actions resonated with Douglass and gave him hope of a world without slavery. He followed Garrison's newspaper and rallies with the Bristol County Anti-Slavery Society until they met at a convention in Nantucket, where Douglass spoke of the horrors of slavery to white abolitionists. Garrison was in attendance and was so moved by Douglass's speech that they formed a partnership to spread abolitionist ideas throughout the New England area. This marked the beginning of Douglass's formal lecturing career.

Douglass told his story on the road, touring across New England. His vivid storytelling and delivery combined with his stature and shock value captivated audiences everywhere he

[25] Boxill, "Frederick Douglass's Patriotism," 302-303.
[26] Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 94-95.

went, creating a name for himself and bolstering the abolition cause. Although some critics accused Garrison of using Douglass as a prop, showing parallels to slaveholders and their slaves, Douglass stayed largely in-line and inspired by Garrison's vision and passion. The critics spouting these falsehoods often heard Douglass speak at rallies or meetings and questioned his credibility. They either thought that his claims of being a former slave were true, but he was being fed speeches by the white abolitionists around him, or that he was lying about being a former slave altogether due to the eloquent nature of his speeches and the confidence of his demeanor. Douglass was a performer for the cause of his activism, and the character he played on his stage was himself. He brought his own fury and depth to his speeches directly from his own experiences, which may have made them seem even more unbelievable that a man could be broken through slavery and yet still have such a fire in his heart to fight against it. This sort of widespread success lent him the confidence to write an autobiography of his early life to help spread the word of abolitionism.

Douglass eventually took his lectures and book to Europe, mainly the United Kingdom, to spread word of the injustice found in the United States. In Europe, he found most of the people judged him more on his character rather than the color of his skin, but the seeds of distrust were ingrained into him, and he was extremely sensitive to personal slights, so he stayed wary of the foreign citizens.[27] However, he found most of them to be friendly and receptive to his lectures, with many purchasing his autobiography after he left the stage. Through his travels into Ireland, he noticed a parallel of the poverty that many of the Irish were living in at the start of the famine to the conditions that he had lived in as a slave and

[27] Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 147.

attempted to expose the evils of this country as well during his stay. He reminded his audiences that if he did not escape his enslaved conditions, that he would be living as the famished Irish people were. He continued by reminding himself and his audiences that he was still a slave, a fugitive one for many years, but still a slave regardless. His words gained him many supporters, especially in Britain to the point where they gathered enough funds to purchase his freedom from Auld and officially made Douglass a free man.[28]

Douglass returned to the United States and continued his career as an abolitionist and a leader of racial and gender equality. He saw discrimination not as a struggle for gender or race, but as a basic human struggle that all had to grapple with.[29] At the advent of the Civil War, he once again toured across the northern states, this time to obtain Black support for the Northern efforts. Douglass first recruited his two sons, Lewis and Charles, for the military as Douglass felt that he was too old to join the battlefield and that he could do more for the war effort behind the scenes. He was correct, as he met with President Abraham Lincoln during the Spring of 1861 to urge him to liberate slaves at the end of the war, and Lincoln saw the benefits in doing so and respected his wishes.[30] In April 1876, well after the Civil War, Emancipation, and Lincoln's death, Douglass gave a speech to commemorate a memorial to Lincoln and Emancipation, showing Lincoln standing over a Black man, breaking his chains. In this speech, Douglass showed his patriotism by honoring what Lincoln and the Northern forces had done for Black people with the Civil War, but he also voiced criticisms of Lincoln. Douglass mentions that he was the white man's president and was devoted to the welfare of the white people during

[28] Quarles, "Frederick Douglass," 201.
[29] Quarles, "Frederick Douglass," 202.
[30] Quarles, "Frederick Douglass," 202.

the first years of his presidency, noting that he "was willing to pursue, recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master."[31] Douglass was a voice of reason and a champion of Black uplift, fueling future generations with his continued fight for equality as he spent the rest of his life continuing his traveling lectures and holding various political offices.

Pragmaticism and Booker T. Washington

Booker T. Washington grew up at the tail-end of slavery, and he often recalled his childhood with pleasure. This may have given him a kinder view of slavery since slavery ended within his first decade of life, but he also wanted to downplay the horrors of slavery as he needed to appeal to white audiences. When speaking to whites, he tried to assure them that he did not resent them for the treatment of Blacks during slavery and wanted to move forward into a brighter world.[32] As his influence and popularity in the United States grew, he began publishing articles in both Black publications and national press, pushing a conservative position on racial equality. Washington's stance was founded on the virtues of an industrial education rather than one based in the liberal arts for Black people so that they could gain work and earn a livable wage. However, he did not publicly support universal voting rights for Blacks or any end to segregation. Among whites he was seen as an accommodationist who was even-tempered and could find compromise between the races. He was a "reasonable Black man who would not rock the boat."[33]

[31] Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 6.
[32] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift,* 17.
[33] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift,* 30.

In 1895, Washington gave a public speech in Atlanta which was well-received by whites and Blacks alike and seemed promising from its immediate reception. He proposed that Blacks would agree to not push for social and political equality as long as whites would not bar them from economic progress. Washington promoted that there was "as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem," and that Blacks should settle for trades that they were already familiar with and that in time, they would have further opportunities. In return for the subservience he was asking of Blacks, he asked that whites give preference to Black workers than new immigrants when hiring for laboring jobs. From this speech, he is most famously quoted as saying, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as they had in all things essential to mutual progress." Washington saw a methodical path to equality through steady progress for the race and hoped that whites would keep their end of the bargain.[34]

Washington also rose to fame as the founder and principal of the Tuskegee Institute, a private Black college in Alabama founded in 1881. Being founded in the south, it was difficult to convince southerners to allow the education of Blacks, but the industrial curriculum found in the school that made the school less threatening to the social hierarchy. At Tuskegee, Washington insisted that his students to be on their best behavior and well-dressed which made convincing southerners easier as the school gained a reputation for turning out polite blacks who respected their social superiors.[35] He came to believe that whites would be more ready to listen to a Black man who was polite, clean, and well-spoken. This was partly true, but

[34] Moore*, Struggle for Racial Uplift*, 32-33.
[35] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift,* 27.

he overestimated white generosity towards Blacks even if they met all of those markers of respectability.[36] Most whites did not recognize or distinguish between Blacks of any class, especially those in the south who had almost exclusively known the uneducated, dirty Blacks in their vicinities. Despite this, Washington continued to advocate for Blacks to use self-help methods to advance their cause by educating themselves and being on their best behavior at all times rather than being uplifted by anyone else.[37]

W.E.B. Du Bois and a New Generation

William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois grew up in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, a small New England town with a small Black population. Being so far north, white racial attitudes were fairly progressive with children attending integrated schools as he grew up, although the adults did not mingle except when necessary. Du Bois was interested in writing from an early age and became the local distributor of the 'Globe' publication, first sending reports of his community's social events, and eventually submitting works that advocated for a literary society among Black Americans and writing convincing call-to-arms about racial discrimination in local politics. [38] Du Bois knew from an early age that there needed to be large, sweeping changes in the entire political and socioeconomic systems in the United States if Black people were to have a chance to prosper. This mirrors the Garrisonian-style of uplift for which Douglass advocated, where they worked for large sweeping changes as they saw slavery and racism built into the foundations of large institutions in the U.S. such as churches and the

[36] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift,* 23.
[37] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift*, xvi.
[38] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift*, 39-40.

legislative system.[39] To Du Bois, economic progress meant nothing if Black people could not control property and land rights with Jim Crow laws becoming ever more prevalent.[40] In 1903, Du Bois wrote an essay titled 'The Souls of Black Folk,' which outlined what it meant to be both American and Black. He described the duality as striving for oneness and not finding it, as he felt there was a veil that hung between the Black world and the white one in the United States. This veil oppressed Black people from expressing their true selves to the white world, but Du Bois did not support embracing or rejecting the white world, rather creating a world in which being Black and American could wholly exist.[41]

Du Bois studied in Berlin for a few years in an exchange program to complete his schooling where he found a society that judged him on his manners and intellect rather than his skin color. It gave him hope that such a society was possible and determination to fight racial injustice back in the United States.[42] He was further radicalized to fight discrimination by two deaths in 1899. One was a Black farmer who had killed a white man in an argument, that resulted in a mob burning the farmer alive, before stringing up his body, and later cutting it into pieces to be auctioned off to the members of the mob. The second death was Du Bois's son, who died of diphtheria. Du Bois had attempted to find a doctor to treat his son the night before his death, but the white doctors in his area refused to treat Blacks, leading Du Bois to blame the evils of segregation for his son's death.[43] Du Bois' radicalization led him to his "Talented Tenth" ideology for racial uplift. He saw the largest problem of the twentieth century as the one of the

[39] Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 94-95.
[40] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift*, 43.
[41] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift,* 56.
[42] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift*, 49.
[43] Moore, *The Struggle for Racial Uplift,* 58.

color line, and his Talented Tenth would be comprised of the top ten percent best and brightest of the race to lead and uplift the rest of the race through education, social services, and political representation. This Talented Tenth consisted primarily of mixed-race or lighter skinned African Americans, which created some unease with Du Bois' supporters.[44] Since Emancipation, the call for a representative African American has involved tensions within African American communities on what a representative would be, whether it would be an atypical member with numerous accomplishments based in a Western viewpoint, or would it be an "authentic" member of the race that represented the masses.[45]

During the Jim Crow era, business owners valued obedience and sober values over literacy for working-class children, and lobbied for schools that maintained those values. They lobbied for these schools to also teach manual labor and domestic service, in order to create a permanent working class. The children who went through these schools were often African Americans or Native Americans, who white Americans believed were incapable of learning more than the skills that these schools provided. Whites saw this as a service to them as they were "civilizing savages and backwards races," when in reality, it was justification to oppress any upward mobility from these students.[46] Despite this oppression, African Americans had an insatiable desire for knowledge, and some had access to wildly passionate teachers that would provide schooling for them. They often had to educate themselves and each other as the South

[44] Juanita Karpf, *Performing Racial Uplift: E. Azalia Hackley and African American Activism in the Postbellum to Pre-Harlem Era (*Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022), 81.
[45] Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing*, 3.
[46] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift*, 20-21.

refused to do so, and the North felt that they had done enough with Emancipation, with many whites simply opposing Black education.[47]

There were some areas of the United States where people were working hard to garner a standard education for African Americans. One place in particular was Fisk University, a Black university in Nashville, Tennessee. Being in the South, it faced some hardships during its construction, as the owners of Fisk struggled to find land to purchase for it when plot owners found out it was to become a place to educate freedmen.[48] As a supporter of Black education, W.E.B. Du Bois stated that the aim of Fisk and other similar schools was to "furnish leaders and teachers with adequate standards of human culture and lofty ideals of life" and "to be broadminded, cultured men and women, who would scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not simply of the alphabet, but of life itself."[49] Fisk had a fundamental issue in its construction, however. It was a Black school with white teachers and a white administration. Finding white teachers to teach Black students at a Black college was a difficult task, teaching at a Black school was seen as decreasing their social standing in a way that teaching at a white school would not. Furthermore, because Fisk was in the South, anyone who taught Black students risked being ostracized and abused by those opposed to Black education.[50] However, there were stigmas around Black educators not being able to secure funds for education like

[47] Joe M. Richardson, "Fisk University: The First Critical Years," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 1970): 27-29.
[48] Richardson, "Fisk University," 25.
[49] Richardson, "Fisk University," 27.
[50] Richardson, "Fisk University," 31.

whites because they lacked the "courage and wise foresight" to do so, which is why Fisk was owned and operated by whites.[51]

Students at Fisk staged a strike during 1924-1925 in direct opposition to the president of the university, Fayette McKenzie. McKenzie dedicated his administration to upholding education standards for the students of the university, but did so without cultivating relationships and involvement from the exclusively Black student population. Instead, he focused on cultivating white business in the community, and forming paternalistic policies to mask and suppress unease by conforming to Southern views of Blacks. He allowed a NAACP chapter at the school, but limited its numbers to keep it noncontroversial and under control from the white administration, while also encouraging the "well-behaved" Blacks to help with the suppression of unease. Tensions grew to a boil when students refused to attend a study hall until they were treated with respect, and McKenzie expelled them from the university. Du Bois had called on the owners and administration with a speech to find a new president who would respect the student body, which angered conservative Blacks and whites. During the strike, propaganda was spread that the strike was turning into a riot, and McKenzie had called Nashville police to arrest seven students "for his own safety." However, these seven students were not on campus at the time of the call. They had come to McKenzie for a request months earlier and had been denied the request, and McKenzie had linked the two events to shift the blame and narrative of the riot. [52] The students at Fisk only wanted to be treated with respect

[51] Lester C. Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925," *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 20, No. 2 (May 1974): 229.
[52] Lamon, "Fisk University Strike," 231-236.

and recognition of their status as people instead of accepting the white paternalism that restricted their freedoms.

This type of oppression happened across the country and at all levels of the education system due to a prevailing lack of support for Black education. Many schools in the South found education objectionable, mainly because of the fear that schools would have a large Black population.[53] This fear was deeply rooted after centuries of African Americans having no rights due to slavery and the potential for retaliation or uprise due to a newfound education. Many whites supported the idea of the abolition of slavery and educating Blacks, but were opposed to the idea that they would have equal social and political rights to them.[54] Whites, especially in the South, restricted Black education however and wherever they could. In the early 1930s in rural Louisiana, due to sharecropping and oppression, the school year for Black children was significantly shorter than for white children. The Black children were expected to be hired out to farmers when planting or harvesting was to be done while the white children continued to get an education.[55]

The Great Migration

The Great Migration was a literal migration of Blacks from the south to the north to escape the oppressive southern racism and to find better work for themselves and their families. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the height of the movement was from roughly 1910-1940 and continued into the 1970s, where around six million Black Americans

[53] Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 137.
[54] Long, *The Great Southern Babylon,* 26.
[55] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 4.

moved north. In 1900, about 90% of the nation's Black population still lived in the south and most were still experiencing indentured servitude and sharecropping, where they were essentially continuing to live as slaves. These Black Americans migrated north in search of more social openness and acceptance in an urban environment. Cities had a thriving musical culture in their nightlife which attracted musicians from the south looking to earn a living from their craft. New York and Chicago were two of the biggest magnets to this crowd looking for nightlife and urban culture. New York's Black population grew 51% between 1900-1910 as Harlem was a center of Afro-cosmopolitanism and Black uplift efforts.[56]

Chicago was another magnet for Black migrants, and a little more accessible due to its proximity to major rivers. Not only did Chicago have a thriving nightlife, but it was also an industrial center with plenty of jobs for African Americans that paid better than jobs they held in the south. The Black population of Chicago grew by roughly 250% between 1910-1920 and was a central landing point for those coming from Louisiana and Mississippi. Many came for the jobs that had opened up in war production industries with the advent of World War I, but there was not enough living spaces for the massive influx of people migrating north for these jobs so many lived without electricity, hot water, or bathrooms.[57]

Northerners were unprepared for the Great Migration and had assumed Blacks would stay in the south during and after Reconstruction. Many abolition supporters felt that they had done enough for Black rights with Emancipation but did not want to face the consequences of a

[56] Nicholas Gaffney, "He Was A Man Who Walked Tall Among Men": Duke Ellington, African American Audiences, and the Black Musical Entertainment Market, 1927-1943," *The Journal of African American History* Vol. 98, No. 3 (Summer 2013): 373.
[57] Absher, "Musicians and the Segregated City," 26.

free Black population. They had helped free Blacks, but showed little interest in their fight for social and economic uplift.[58] Many of the migrants were from a younger generation that did not grow up with slavery and did not understand their parent's social subservience to southern whites. They spoke up about Jim Crow laws and were determined to find more racial equality in the north and were disappointed when they found equal amounts of discrimination in the north.[59] Uncomfortable with the newfound presence of Blacks in the north, whites found ways to keep them in their place in a white-dominated society both socially and economically. They insisted that Blacks reinforced minstrel and buffoonish stereotypes when they encountered them in public, and for Blacks to act subservient when necessary.[60] White-owned businesses would also hike their prices for Black customers as they saw them as a way to increase their profits with the rising Black populations in northern cities.[61] The Great Migration was a way for Blacks to escape southern racism, but they continued to find themselves treated as less than human in the north as well.

Many segregation policies were put into place and justified with the notion that it would keep public peace and harmony, and that the "Negroes from the South would rather be by themselves."[62] These policies lasted for most of the twentieth century, defining where Blacks and whites should live and basing social benefits and systems from neighborhood composition such as education and medical access. These were put in place by former Secretary of the Interior, Howard Ickes, who established a "neighborhood composition rule," where federal

[58] Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift*, 27.
[59] Moore, *Struggle for Racial Uplift,* 100-101.
[60] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 41.
[61] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 293.
[62] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 6.

housing projects and funding reflected individual neighborhood racial compositions, giving more public funding and benefits to white neighborhoods, and moving industries closer to Black neighborhoods. Zoning politicians intentionally permitted vice businesses closer to and within Black neighborhoods and prohibited them in white neighborhoods to maintain respectability in the housing market.[63] The zoning of these areas was not necessarily to intensify the poor conditions of Black neighborhoods, but to avoid the deterioration of white neighborhoods. However, because vice and waste facilities were located in and around Black neighborhoods, and much of the housing was not constructed as well as the white neighborhoods, the terms "slums" and "blight" became associated with Black neighborhoods.[64]

Housing for Black Americans during World War I saw similar policies put in place. Freed Blacks had moved north at the start of the war as manufacturing industries were booming with war production, and it was work that they would be eligible for. The federal government stepped in with the influx of southern migrants looking for work in the north and founded explicitly segregated housing for the workers. Temporary and poorly constructed housing was put up for African Americans near railroads and shipyards, while the white housing was farther inland, closer to white neighborhoods, and was more sturdily constructed and able to later be converted into permanent residences.[65] In some cities, the government failed to provide housing for African Americans at all, leaving them in congested slums. Many of these cities attempted to dissuade African Americans from moving north by arresting any Black men on the

[63] Rothstein, *Color of Law,* 21, 49-50.
[64] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 55, 127.
[65] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 5.

street that could not prove that they were employed for the war efforts.[66] Where they could find housing, the landlords would often discriminate and leave open housing in white areas while Black areas were overcrowded.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) helped develop ways, such as the insured amortized mortgage, for citizens to become new homeowners or to help current homeowners better afford their current home. However, they would deny Black homeowners this type of mortgage because they lived in areas of industry as Ickes had moved and regulated where industry could and could not be. This led to deterioration of Black homes due to home ownership and repairs becoming more and more expensive for them and reinforced the associations of poverty and slums with Black Americans.[67] The higher the social associations became, the harder it would be for Black Americans to maintain their own home or purchase a new one. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board deemed Black Americans as a credit risk when applying for loans because they were Black. This decision was apparently not a racial one, but an economic one due to the living situations and neighborhoods that Blacks were located in.[68] Even when Black Americans were successful in getting a mortgage for a new house, they could be denied by the seller in their purchase. The seller or their neighborhood could deem them incompatible for ownership of the property to prevent a Black American and their family from moving into their proximity.[69] The IRS even granted tax-exempt status to institutions that

[66] Rothstein, *Color of Law,* 8, 25.
[67] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 50.
[68] Rothstein, *Color of Law,* 108.
[69] Rothstein, *Color of Law,* 62.

promoted residential segregation such as churches, schools, and hospitals, while also finding ways to tax Blacks more than whites.[70]

Harlem Renaissance/The New Negro Movement

The Harlem Renaissance was born from the white persecution of Blacks, forcing Black Americans to strengthen their cultural consciousness and community. The term "Harlem Renaissance" was not officially used until 1940 and did not gain traction until the 1960s during the height of the Civil Rights movement; it was previously referred to as the "New Negro Movement." Black writer and philosopher, Alain Locke, coined the term "Negro Renaissance" in the mid-1920s, recognizing the naming similarities to Europe's Renaissance, and that it did not "stop at the Alps," hoping the Negro Renaissance would not be secluded to Harlem. Locke differentiated the Negro Renaissance from the New Negro Movement by recognizing the overlap, but that the Negro Renaissance was a "long-term, trans-generational, and interracial cultural shift" while the New Negro represented the youngest generation of Blacks at any given time.[71]

Although popularly dubbed "The Harlem Renaissance," this movement spanned across the entire United States, inspiring African Americans of all backgrounds. Harlem, a district in northern Manhattan, acted as the capital of the movement and a central point of its ideologies. African Americans from the south saw Harlem as a promised land of sorts, as they could escape

[70] Rothstein, *Color of Law,* 101, 154.
[71] Ernest Julius Mitchell II, "Black Renaissance": A Brief History of the Concept," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* Vol. 55, No. 4 (2010): 641-645, 650.

the south's oppressive racism and be a closer to a larger racial uplift movement.[72] The Harlem Renaissance was largely a literary movement, but it focused on civil rights and racial uplift through artistic mediums and promoted educating African Americans in arts and sciences. Their goals were of equality, and they saw a path through incorporating African American culture and pride into American culture without the risk of white gentrification. Part of this process was to construct and represent a positive Black identity. A positive identity in the United States meant to be genteel, and those in lower classes were absolutely not genteel, and one must not associate with anyone that was not genteel.[73] Associating with lower classes meant that one was closer to a lower class, and being Black and in a lower class in the United States would reinforce negative stereotypes associated with the race. The Harlem leadership took pages from both Washington and Du Bois and expanded on them when dealing with a positive Black identity. They wanted to keep individuals responsible for their own actions but to uplift them within a class-based ideology with race leaders as their representatives. African Americans had to subvert stereotypes of education, economic prosperity, and the beauty standards that were based in the white culture of the United States.[74] Their skin color associated them with the negative stereotypes of promiscuity and decadence, which they needed to strip away if they were to be taken seriously in a fading Victorian culture.

Much of the Harlem Renaissance was focused on subverting the public's perception of Blacks and reclaiming some of the negative stereotypes that whites had given them. Leaders of

[72] Sidney H. Bremer, "Home in Harlem, New York: Lessons from the Harlem Renaissance Writers," *PMLA* Vol. 105, No. 1 (January 1990): 48.
[73] Lawrence Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878-1943* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 14-15.
[74] John Howland, "The Blues Get Glorified": Harlem Entertainment, Negro Nuances, and Black Symphonic Jazz," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 90, No. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2007): 325-326.

the movement looked to the arts and to their African roots to help guide them towards a future where equality was possible. However, they also needed to assimilate themselves into the prevailing white culture as they were rushing towards "whiteness," which is a very simplistic view of the entire ordeal, but also quite succinct. The middle-class of Protestant white America had a distinct respectability surrounding them, and Black Americans attempted to emulate this model of respectability. Their publication, "The New Negro," did not focus on radical politics of the time, rather, it reflected the cultural awakening that Black leadership was inciting that would link the New Negro Movement to the African diaspora and the folk traditions that they had maintained in the south during slavery.[75] The writers of the movement drew from this connection, knowing that the Blacks in the United States were a divided people but connected through their common ancestry and culture. They used imagery of moving northwards to mirror and empower the Great Migration.[76] Black leadership also looked toward prominent Black musicians to help guide the race as they were seen as creative heroes and their prominence in the public eye forced them to represent the race. Black musicians were both able to positively progress the status of their race and forward their own careers through the endorsements of their white audiences.[77]

White audiences were increasingly open to Black culture by the 1920s. This was particularly true of jazz and syncopated popular songs. White songwriters and performers began to appropriate the styles and culture into something more palatable for middle-America.

[75] Abdul Alkalimat, "The Political Culture of the Black Community," In *The History of Black Studies*, 63-88. (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 68.
[76] Virginia Whatley Smith, "The Harlem Renaissance and its Blue-Jazz Traditions: Harlem and its Places of Entertainment," *Obsidian II* Vol. 11, No. 1-2 (1996): 32.
[77] Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift*, 26.

During this time, the American people began to realize that their culture was becoming intertwined with Black culture. Some played into it by saying that "Negro was in vogue," but it was to cover their racism of exoticizing and objectifying Blacks.[78] Whites were simultaneously fascinated, repulsed, admiring, and dismissive of Blacks because they were the foundation of their budding culture, their country, and were also the target of hundreds of years of hatred. However, because Black culture was infusing itself into the greater American culture while also still being discriminated against, the Black community needed to find a way to assimilate themselves into white culture.

Assimilation for Blacks came from a fine line of adopting white middle-class values without becoming "white" themselves. The uplift efforts coming out of the Harlem Renaissance promoted white middle-class values such as self-help, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and accumulation of wealth as ways that Blacks could gain respectability in the United States. These traits meant that conservatory-trained Black musicians became the poster children of uplift efforts as they embodied many of these traits through their studies.[79] Cultural distinctiveness has always been a primary point of Black Americans. Whites used Black cultural distinctiveness and their inability to assimilate because of it to justify segregation and discrimination at the start of the century. Black Americans needed to subvert the stereotypes surrounding their culture while also maintaining the pride that they had for it. Langston Hughes is quoted as saying, "This urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour a racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much

[78] Delgado-Tall, "The New Negro Movement," 289.
[79] Howland, "The Blues Get Glorified," 325.

American as possible."[80] Hughes is saying that Blacks were not trying to become white, rather become American while losing the racial connotations with their skin color, something that Du Bois was referring to in his essay, 'The Souls of Black Folk.'

The progress of jazz and racial uplift was connected, as Black Americans were swept from slavery to the working class in such a short amount of time, jazz and its associated styles also underwent rapid change and development due to the social progress of its creators.[81] The blues can only as old as Black Americans being shipped to the United States from Africa, as it is reported to have originated from slaves working on plantations as sharecroppers and being inspired by hymns, work songs, and popular music styles such as ragtime, and the separation of blues and jazz did not happen until the twentieth century.[82] Within a few decades of its inception, Benny Goodman's integrated jazz band made their debut at Carnegie Hall in 1938. This helped jazz on its path to becoming a respectable art style rather than one thought of as a popular music just to dance to with an unwelcome Black pedigree.[83] However, this was not an easy road to respectability, as older generations continued to hold on to their Victorian sensibilities and their commitment to a Eurocentric idea of art. Under these conditions, jazz was not seen as art, as it was Black music that did not have a lengthy written history. Most of the prominent names in the style, and in American music, were of performers rather than the composers of music. Many of these performers were Black as well, and many Anglo-Americans had conflated being American with whiteness and held onto their European heritage.[84]

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[80] Delgado-Tall, "The New Negro Movement," 298-300.
[81] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum* Vol. 25, No. 3 (Autumn 1991): 545.
[82] Smith, "The Harlem Renaissance and its Blue-Jazz Traditions," 23.
[83] Teachout, "Jazz," 66.
[84] Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift*, 130.

Harlem Renaissance leadership maintained a balance of empowering Blacks while also distancing themselves from the typical Black communities across the United States. This was largely not done maliciously, but for the sake of the larger uplift effort. They wanted to shed themselves from the stereotypes by celebrating their differences and racial pride, while also conforming to white notions of respectability. Black elites had attempted to reform southern migrants of their "sordid and low behaviors" as they would accentuate the already fragile racial environment that they were building upon.[85] African American communities were aware of the contradictions in their environment, as Harlem entertainment dually promoted racial pride and perpetuated negative stereotypes to progress their careers in white commercial entertainment.[86]

American music, art, and literature were rarely respected as being capable of high art or achievements in the 1930s, and Black Americans were even less respected when creating art. Americans attempted to take European culture as their own while also distancing themselves from it - wanting to have a respected culture which would stand on its own from Europe's but leaning too heavily on the customs in which Europe's culture functioned.[87] Due to jazz's classification as a commercial popular style of the time, it was seen as distinctly less valuable than the serious composed music coming from Europe. Some critics thought of it as either "bad" or "good bad."[88] Typically the "bad" jazz was associated with Black jazz, otherwise known as "hot jazz" and the "good bad" jazz with white jazz, also known as "sweet jazz." The

[85] Absher, "Musicians and the Segregated City," 37.
[86] Howland, "The Blues Get Glorified," 326.
[87] Carol Oja, "Gershwin and American Modernists of the 1920s," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 78, No. 4 (Winter, 1994): 649.
[88] Theodore Gracyk, "Adorno, Jazz, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 76, No. 4 (Winter 1992): 527.

connotations in name alone of hot versus sweet shows the preference of the American people in the early twentieth century. White bandleader Paul Whiteman popularized sweet jazz, which was made palatable to white society through its emphasis on rhythm and syncopation, which is what white jazz musicians felt was the important part of the styles they had appropriated.[89] Whiteman had consistently downplayed the importance of Blacks in the development of jazz, and often gave himself credit on the emergence and popularity of the genre.[90]

White critics found Whiteman's jazz more palatable and also found ways to assert their distaste for Black jazz however they could. There was a belief that the African American rhythmic practice was "in their blood," and they would publish and distribute racist articles in Harlem to express their distaste of the music. Critics used these articles to attack jazz, but hid their racism behind their critiques, albeit not very well, as they used Black stereotypes as their reasoning for disliking the genre.[91] Black jazz musicians were understandably frustrated, although not surprised, with the pushback on their music. Clarinetist Frank Teschemacher is quoted as saying "you knock yourself out making a great new music for the people, and they treat you like you were offering them leprosy instead of art."[92] Outspoken critics agreed that Black jazz was not an art, and more similar to a disease. Teaming up with medical professionals of the time, they were able to more convincingly say that jazz was impairing the country in unprecedented ways, threatening the health and safety of the nation. They had claimed to

[89] Gayle Murchison, "Back in the United States: Popular Music, Jazz, and the New American Music," In *The American Stravinsky: The Style and Aesthetics of Copland's New American Music, the Early Works, 1921-1938,* 95-123, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 109.
[90] Ryan Jerving, "Early Jazz Literature (And Why You Didn't Know)," *American Literary History* Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter 2004): 658.
[91] Maureen Anderson, "The White Reception of Jazz in America," *African American Review* Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring 2004): 135.
[92] Johnson, "Disease is Unrhythmical," 24.

notice that jazz and its associated dances were causing mental and physical impairments in its listeners, and would use terms like "pathological," "infection," "virus," "epidemic," and "cancer" to describe the music. Its symptoms were paralleled to the symptoms of shell-shock victims returning from World War I, convincing critics and doctors alike that jazz was little more than noise.[93] Critics and medical professionals also saw jazz as an addiction and compared it to substance abuse problems, which would also give implications of a lower class due to alcohol's association with nightlife. One critic comparing jazz to alcohol abuse in the midst of the Prohibition Era had said that "Jazz had done more harm to the American People and society than drink ever did."[94]

Some critics did believe that jazz was a legitimate art form and had a place in American culture. Although, they felt that jazz had no place in a concert hall, rather the highest place that it should be allowed is on the Broadway stage.[95] Jazz defenders struggled to fight against the critics of the genre and often met them halfway as to not stir up too many heated feelings amidst the social and political climate of Jim Crow. The lack of support took a toll on Black Americans, and often led them to feel shameful toward Black art and music due to white stereotypes.[96] Jazz was an immoral genre to many that threatened the livelihood of the United States until the white, Anglo-Protestant man had adopted it. The effects of rampant jazz criticisms during this time are still present today. In music institutions, jazz continues to be treated as a lesser style than the Western classical traditions with jazz history courses often

[93] Johnson, "Disease is Unrhythmical," 13-14, 21-22.
[94] Johnson, "Disease is Unrhythmical," 23.
[95] Mary Herron Dupree, "Jazz," the Critics, and American Art Music in the 1920s," *American Music* Vol. 4, No. 3 (Autumn 1986): 289.
[96] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 81.

labeled as music appreciation classes rather than an actual history class. Teachers often have to use the associations with drugs and alcohol to maintain student interest in these courses, linking vices to artistry and perpetuating the negative stereotypes of the Black genre.[97]

The roots of Black art are inextricably tied to religion and spiritual worship, and they are also at the foundation of Black culture and community during the early twentieth century. Church was an important part of Black leisure time with its social and spiritual freedoms. They were also hubs for political activism for uplift efforts, with Black elites promoting the spiritual as an important part of cultural expression and elevation. Along with church, the YMCAs and Masonic Lodges were seen as bastions of refinement in the uplift effort by promoting a respectable, integrated community.[98] Although some saw sacred African music as a cultural possession and any transformation of it or usage in popular forms was to commit sacrilege and a racial offense.[99] The two main branches of African American religious centers were the African Methodist Episcopal (AME), and the AME Zion. They had no major marked differences, but it is important to recognize that they both existed in parallel with each other before merging much later.

Black churches also provided financial security for many Black musicians who did not want to rely on the commercial nightlife employment. Churches hired trained musicians and groups to perform at services and religious events. They also hired educated Black musicians who struggled to find work in public school systems that refused to hire them based on the

[97] Rob Foster, "Teacher Responses to Cautions About Teaching Negative Biographical Details in Jazz History Courses," *College Music Symposium* Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring 2020): 2.
[98] Absher, "Musicians and the Segregated City," 35.
[99] Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing*, 1.

color of their skin.[100] Although, much like Harlem Renaissance leadership, church leaders were split on jazz and commercial popular music in Black cultural spheres. Preachers in the 1920s and 1930s criticized Black musicians who sang lyrics written by whites that would seemingly accentuate Black stereotypes. They shunned these musicians on the basis of being complicit in the fight against Jim Crow and racial discrimination.[101] The only real agreement on musical forms among Black intellectuals and leaders was on the importance of the spiritual. Jazz had received little mention in Harlem writings in favor of sacred performances and Western classical music performances.[102]

Musician and bandleader Cab Calloway had reflected on his youth in reference to the church and his relationship with religion because of his public persona, personal life, and his skin color indeterminacy making him a prime candidate for being a race representative. Calloway notes that there was a social tension between his family and music teachers, and his personal life that revolved around the Baltimore nightlife. His family and mentors were church-going and middle-class and did not approve of Calloway's social life that featured loud music, drinking, and sexual promiscuity. Calloway did not see any dissonance between his love of entertainment and his enjoyment of religious attendance, but this societal tension reflected a larger cultural shift in the younger generations who rejected the religious norms of their parents in favor of a "good life" that the church had previously shunned. Prior to this

[100] Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift*, 150.
[101] Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing,* 66.
[102] Williams, "Jazz and the New Negro," 7.

generation, the practice of going to church and then enjoying the nightlife could not coexist, and part of the increasing nightlife culture was jazz music.[103]

The younger generation of African Americans had heralded in a new era where jazz musicians became unconventional religious and race authorities. Many jazz musicians held their performances as acts of worship, and their music reflected a commitment to religious values as well as a social and political activism against Jim Crow. Using their music to speak on all of these topics at once, many in the larger Black community began looking up to these musicians to help guide them and work towards a future where equality was possible. The prominent musicians held a place on the stage that, even temporarily, put them as equals with whites that had previously been on that stage. This "jazz religion" had challenged the reserved, refined, and educated atmosphere that middle-class Black Protestants had combined with their modern worship. Jazz had begun to represent and reflect a new age's morals and resilience to fight against Jim Crow's oppression.[104]

The environment for Black artists during the early twentieth century was rigorous as they walked a fine line between appeasing their white audiences and supporters, representing their race in a positive light, and creating art that they were proud of. The efforts of leaders such as Douglass, Washington, and Du Bois had cascading effects to each generation, leading to the Harlem Renaissance and the ability for the Black community to stand up for themselves and show their worth in the world of Jim Crow. They assimilated into white culture as much as they needed to in order to survive and work towards equal rights. Simultaneously, because of

[103] Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing*, 57-58, 65.
[104] Booker*, Lift Every Voice and Swing*, 26.

segregation, the Black community created their own culture that fit their needs. Segregation helped them find their own niche to survive in the United States without submitting to the oppressive white culture that kept them at arm's length.

Chapter Three: Duke Ellington, Beyond Category

Born Edward Kennedy Ellington on April 29, 1899, "Duke" Ellington became one of the most prolific and important musicians of the twentieth century. His driving power was a "matter of wanting to be – and to be heard – at the same level as the best.[105]" Ellington certainly achieved this desire, and lived up to his personal favorite descriptor of anything he admired as "beyond category."[106] He crafted a legacy of being among the best and most significant composers of his time and naturally, many compared his life to that of J.S. Bach, Joseph Haydn, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. These composers, along with Ellington, were all prolific improvisors, a fact that many critics of jazz and Ellington ignored. Instead of creating music like the aforementioned composers, Ellington's goal was to create an authentic record of the Black race written by a member of the race that would stand as a representative alongside the great works of other national cultures in the Western world.[107] This goal was coupled with a commitment to the folk understanding of African American culture and existence and celebrating his people. Through his compositions, he continued to strive to escape boundaries and blur genre lines as he developed his style and how he wanted to present a more accurate African American history.

Much of his upbringing in his middle-class Black family was focused on racial pride and eloquence, with unending support from his parents, James and Daisy, both of whom were also pianists. This sense of racial pride coupled with his middle-class upbringing was a primary factor

[105] John Edward Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," *Washington History* Vol. 26 (Spring 2014): 39.
[106] Gunther Schuller, "Jazz and Composition: The Many Sides of Duke Ellington, the Music's Greatest Composer," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* Vol. 46, No. 1 (October, 1992): 37.
[107] Vaughn Booker, "An Authentic Record of My Race": Exploring the Popular Narratives of African American Religion in the Music of Duke Ellington*," Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2015): 8-9.

in the speed of Ellington's success in the early part of the century. He had a penchant for florid language that gave him an aura of self-confidence, sense of accomplishment, and exceptionalism.[108] This confidence allowed him to succeed and eventually become seen as a race leader, especially with the knowledge he had accrued of his African heritage. In his youth, Ellington had encountered many representations of African and Black American history, but many of them were meant to entertain rather than educate which most likely influenced his interest in a more complete picture and representation of his ancestry.[109] Ellington's attitude toward Black American life would work to his advantage as he navigated, and to some degree bridged, racial tensions during this time as he worked to create a life for himself as an artist rather than an entertainer.

Biographic Material

Ellington grew up in Washington, DC, which during the turn of the century had the nation's largest Black population, and especially the largest presence of Blacks in the middle class.[110] His family was a part of this growing population. His father, James worked as a butler, driver, caretaker, and handyman for a prominent doctor in Washington DC, and worked part-time as a butler in the White House during the Warren G. Harding administration.[111] Ellington's mother, Daisy, was the daughter of slaves. She raised him and his sister Ruth, and taught them proper values and ethics with the support of other women in the family. Ellington is quoted as

[108] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 37.
[109] Mark Tucker, "The Genesis of "Black, Brown and Beige," *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 22 (2002): 134.
[110] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 38.
[111] Tim Buege, "James Edward "J.E." Ellington," https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/209345074/james-edward-ellington (2020), last accessed March 14, 2023.

saying that he was "pampered and pampered by the women" in his family, which also included the other middle-class African Americans in the DC area.[112] These members of Ellington's early life, familial and not, held themselves to a higher standard within a "disciplinary climate" that would expect following generations to achieve social and economic status. Contemporary poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar, notes that Blacks in Washington had "a higher standard of culture among people of color than obtains in any other city." [113] The Ellington household also avoided discussions of race, as they did not deem the conversation necessary if there was a mutual respect. When talking about race in his home life, Ellington is quoted as saying, "There was never any talk about red people, brown people, black people, or yellow people, or the differences that existed between them."[114] He started sneaking out to Frank Holliday's Poolroom when he was 14 where he saw glimmers of equality within the crowds. There was a large variety of people at the poolroom from all walks of life, and he observed them interacting and gained an appreciation how "all levels [people] could and should mix."[115] Ellington was taught from a young age to maintain high standards of behavior and that he was always representing his race in any situation that he found himself in. He adhered to these ideas throughout his career and they contributed to his success within a harsh musical and social climate.

Because both of Ellington's parents were pianists, he began taking piano lessons starting at the age of seven. In high school, he became serious about his music studies. His interest in

[112] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 38.
[113] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 38-39.
[114] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 42.
[115] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 41.

piano was reignited during a trip to Asbury Park with his mother, where they heard a performance of a ragtime pianist named Harvey Brooks and became enamored with the sounds that Brooks was creating.[116] Ellington was slow to learn how to properly read music, but picked up on styles and improvisation quite quickly. He won a NAACP poster contest during his youth which earned him a scholarship to the Pratt Institute in New York. Ellington turned down this scholarship after graduating high school in favor of playing gigs around town with local groups.[117] His first composition, *Soda Fountain Rag* (also known as the Poodle Dog Rag), was written at the age of 14 while he was working at the Poodle Dog Café. The in-house pianist at the Café was a capable musician, but rarely sober, and Ellington often filled in for him when he could not play any more. This enabled Ellington to freely improvise on styles he was interested in and to create compositions through the improvisations.[118]

At the age of 17, having gained the respect of his friends and larger community in DC, he gained the nickname of "Duke." Later in his life, he gave nicknames to those closest to him, almost giving them a brand, much like his own.[119] His nickname had stuck, and he established himself as a popular pianist to hire for any event where there would be dancing. By the 1920s, DC's dance hall scene rivaled New Orleans', which meant more exposure and work for him. He was an intent listener, and as the dance hall scene continued to grow in popularity, so did his influences and list of mentors. Always striving for the top, he had a drive that "was a matter of wanting to be – and to be heard – at the same level as the best."[120] However, he knew that his

[116] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 42.
[117] Gloster B. Current, "Duke Ellington," *The Black Perspective in Music* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Autumn 1974): 174.
[118] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 43.
[119] Neil Leonard, "The Jazzman's Verbal Usage," *Black American Language Forum* Vol. 20, No. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 153.
[120] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 39.

path to the top was not going to come overnight, but he was constantly taking steps in the direction of greatness, as he had always been taught to command respect, rather than demand it.[121]

After leaving high school, Ellington supplemented his income by taking a job painting backdrops and signs for the Howard Theater. He found a way to capitalize on both his gigging and the painting job at the same time by asking those coming to advertise a dance with a poster if they needed a band, and vice-versa.[122] He effectively outsmarted the public with his manners and usefulness while at the same time forwarding his goals. It helped that he had a penchant for proper and embellished language that provided a sense of self-confidence, accomplishment, and exceptionalism – all traits he acquired from his upbringing combined with his natural personality.

Washington DC's Racial Climate

After Emancipation, Black Americans were given more freedoms, which allowed them to build an unspoken class system based on money and the hue of their skin. Generally, lighter-skinned individuals were treated better as they were more easily able to pass for being white, although this was not always the case. Even with Black Americans able to attain wealth and move their way into an upper class, the privileges associated with upper and middle-classes in the United States were generally not extended to Blacks, and their social treatments felt little

[121] Harvey G. Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting the Strategy for an African American Maestro," *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (Autumn 2004): 291.
[122] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 44.

different than when they were enslaved.[123] Segregation was in full force, and white Americans generally did not recognize or care about whether Black Americans held wealth and power or not. The class system held by Black Americans, although based off of Anglo-American values, was entirely separate from the white class system due to Jim Crow. This treatment led Blacks to lash out at one another and created even larger rifts within their communities. upper and middle-class Black people believed that racial discrimination was due to socioeconomic status, and that whites only looked down on them because most Blacks were poor and uneducated. People who had achieved these markers of socioeconomic status distanced themselves from poorer, uneducated Blacks, believing that Jim Crow stereotypes did not apply to them. Whites did not agree and generally did not distinguish between classes when it came to discrimination. However, many Blacks remained convinced from the success of others that economic advancement and good manners were the keys to social uplift.[124]

Within Washington DC itself, the class system was much easier to discern as the city largely avoided share-cropping, the KKK, and the worst of racial violence, leaving Black residents generally safer within city limits. The city was also a center of musical and intellectual resistance to racism because of the relative cultural security of its Black residents. Washington had the nation's largest Black population in 1900 with a strong presence in the middle-class that allowed them to become more respected within the city. However, as Jim Crow spread and more Blacks began migrating north, this population became more segregated from the rest of

[123] Marybeth Hamilton, "The Blues, the Folk, and African American History," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* Vol. 11 (2001): 27.
[124] Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 5.

the city. The Black upper-class in Washington was comprised of roughly 60-70 families that were generally light-skinned with extensive history in the city and had pursued respectable occupations to acquire money and education. These families would have been considered part of W.E.B. Du Bois' ideals of a "Talented Tenth." The middle-class, to which Ellington's family belonged, was comprised of government workers, businessmen, and professionals in trades. This middle-class challenged Victorian and white ideals of stability and refinement, but often held onto those ideals and were critical and weary of jazz, dance, and other popular styles. The lower class was largely comprised of recent immigrants from the south that had been living lives of destitution and economic deprivation.[125]

As part of the middle-class, Ellington was raised in a way that taught him to have good manners and respectability as his life – along with every African American – was constantly a performance that represented the entire race. This performance of demeanor was designed to outsmart the white public and to assist in the uplift of Blacks across the country. Having a respect for education, the broad principles of the art of music, and a desire for order was paramount in his upbringing and Ellington carried these principles with him throughout his life. Ellington was always careful in choosing his words and knowing who he was speaking to, especially when speaking on race and racial tensions.[126] Although he celebrated diversity, the climate of the Black class system dictated that he was well-aware of color/class/caste lines and to not cross them during his youth.[127] According to Black writers of the time, the middle-class

[125] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 39.
[126] Garth Alper, "Black, Brown, and Beige: One Piece of Duke Ellington's Musical and Social Legacy," *College Music Symposium* Vol. 51 (2011): 6-7.
[127] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 39.

was responsible for maintaining a status-quo of achievement and uplift to represent the race and assist with uplift efforts, which is something Ellington and his family had a heavy focus on during his entire life.[128]

New York and the Cotton Club

In 1923, Ellington left his parents' house and moved to New York to pursue a music career alongside the band that he had formed while in Washington. Stories of New York from Sonny Greer, a New York native, had enticed a young Ellington to pick up and move with his band, 'The Duke's Serenaders.' They quickly flopped in New York and had to move back to Washington where they rebranded as 'The Washingtonians' and moved back to New York shortly after. [129]

The Washingtonians spent the next four years in New York gigging and replacing personnel to refine what would eventually be famously known as the "Ellington sound." In 1927, this group began their famous four-year contract at the Cotton Club in Harlem, a whites-only night club designed to look like a southern plantation that objectified its Black employees. Harlem was a center of Black culture and became a by-word for an "edgy, fun time for wealthy whites, where elaborate floor shows with primitivist themes could be found at the big clubs, and blues, jazz, and inter-racial mixing at smaller venues."[130] These types of clubs were fairly common in larger cities in the north like New York and Chicago, and despite the objectification

[128] Vaughn A. Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing: Black Musicians and Religious Culture in the Jazz Century (*New York: New York University Press, 2020), 13.
[129] Hasse, "Washington's Duke Ellington," 46-47.
[130] Alwyn Williams, ""Jazz and the New Negro: Harlem's Intellectuals Wrestle With the Art of the Age," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* Vol. 21, No. 1 (July 2002): 1.

of Black workers and performers, it was a decent way to earn a living as long as they were able to distance themselves from the job in their personal lives. This proved difficult due to the plantation aesthetics and décor found within these venues, especially the Cotton Club, which revitalized a staged relationship of slaveowner and slave between the patrons and workers. The musical ability of slaves was often something that their owners wanted to nurture and encourage for entertainment, and this dynamic was on full display here at the Cotton Club.[131] The Cotton Club helped propel many Black musicians to stardom, but also limited the roles that Black performers could take due to the nature of the establishment and the aesthetics that harkened back to a time of slavery.[132] Another musician that had a very successful stint at this venue, Cab Calloway, commented on this dynamic saying "I suppose the idea was to make whites who came to the club feel like they were being catered to and entertained by Black slaves."[133]

Black entertainers at the Cotton Club and similar venues often played into racial stereotypes to both maintain job security and to more easily separate themselves from the roles that they played. They often distanced themselves in the public eye from activities deemed "too Black" such as dancing and ragtime music to bring more attention to their respectable identities outside of their jobs as their contribution to uplift efforts. Ellington abided by this culture and recognized the work-life separation of his band and the rest of the employees at the Cotton Club.[134] He played by the rules and earned enough respect during his

[131] Brian Klitz, "Blacks and Pre-Jazz Instrumental Music in America," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* Vol. 20, No. 1 (June 1989): 44.
[132] Nate Sloan, "Constructing Cab Calloway: Publicity, Race, and Performance in 1930s Harlem Jazz," *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 36, No. 3 (Summer 2019): 372.
[133] Sloan, "Constructing Cab Calloway," 373.
[134] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 297.

time at the venue that the gangster owners referred to him as a "respectable Negro." This status was also extended to his family members that would visit, breaking the whites-only atmosphere of the Club.[135] This respect and innate talent was recognized by his to-be manager, Irving Mills, and initiated perhaps the most important relationship in Ellington's career.

Irving Mills and Uplift Assimilation

Ellington believed in presenting himself and his bandmates in a way that challenged his white audience's perceptions of African Americans, and his manager, Irving Mills, played a significant role in helping him achieve his vision. Irving Mills, born Isadore Minsky, was a white man of Jewish descent. His family had immigrated to the United States from Ukraine early in his life and it is likely he changed his name later to hide his national and religious heritage. He was a prominent figure in the lives of many African American artists of the early twentieth century, partly to uplift them to prominence and fame, and partly for his own financial benefit. Mills was Ellington's manager from 1926-1939, as well as the manager for Cab Calloway. He got his start with the 'Mills Artists Agency' that purchased music from African Americans for cash to sell under his name. The formation of a national music market and the prominence of radio broadcasts meant that musicians, and especially Black musicians, needed powerful management to help them get recognized and succeed.[136] Black musicians needed all the help they could get in this market, and Mills took advantage of this by buying the rights to their music or taking heavy cuts if they wanted to maintain ownership of their artistry. When

[135] Chadwick Jenkins, ""A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio," *American Music* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 431.
[136] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 291-293.

working with Ellington and Calloway, he took roughly 50% of the profits made from anything that he had a hand in. Despite the aggressive management style, Mills was a champion of the musicians he worked with as he ensured their success and branding while working on separating them from the racial stereotyping that brought them success while working at the Cotton Club.[137] He was also committed to investing in his clients using the money that he garnered from contracts. While working with Ellington, he personally funded the band's attire and made sure that they were always in prime condition by buying new tuxedos or getting previous ones tailored as needed. As Mills worked to separate Ellington's band's image from the Cotton Club, keeping a powerful, respectable image of them was paramount to their, and by extension, his success. The display of fine possessions signified a Black elite that would directly confront racial stereotypes, Jim Crow aggressions, and criticism of jazz.[138]

Mills was a master at marketing his clients, and often used approaches that were similar to the way that corporations would market themselves. He mimicked their strategies of projecting an image that served the public and the nation and hid his true intentions of doing anything he could to profit from his clients. This caused some tension in Mills and Ellington's relationship as Mills focused on the profits while also expanding an audience for African American artists, whereas Ellington wanted to promote dignity, creative possibilities, and the artistic freedom of African Americans.[139] However, Mills' marketing strategies allowed for the financial gain and stardom of Ellington, and after they split ways in 1939, Ellington continued to use the Mills' marketing strategies, showing respect for his long-time business partner.

[137] Sloan, "Constructing Cab Calloway," 374-375.
[138] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 302-303.
[139] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 311.

Racial stereotypes depicted African American music as having no merit, as Black people were seen to be unable to create anything of worth. This coupled with American music not being taken seriously in a global context until roughly the 1940s, Mills had a difficult task in promoting Ellington as respectable.[140] He had a multi-pronged plan to subvert these stereotypes not just for Ellington, but for all of his clients. Mills needed to prove that African Americans were able to create art that could stand the test of time, and marketed Ellington as a "great composer" that put him on the same level as the greats of Europe. Mills also needed to prove that Ellington wrote music that had more substance and lasting power than the flavor-of-the-month popularity of dance band hits. Ellington made all of this relatively easy for Mills due to his upbringing in a respectable environment and provided a stark counterpoint to the decadent and buffoonish stereotypes that haunted African Americans in the public eye.[141] The combined power of Mills' marketing and Ellington's respectable nature helped bring both to a prominent position in the public eye. This partnership extended to Mills helping Ellington start his own partnership of 'Duke Ellington Inc.' that continued to bring the success desired for both, commercial for Ellington and financial for Mills.[142] At the start of this partnership, they were more concerned with building the brand and establishing Ellington as a household name across the nation rather than being serious. This strategy worked to their benefit as they had already established Ellington and his band as respectable Black men within the circles that knew them. Although nothing survives internally from Mills organizations that proves Ellington's sway in

[140] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 292.
[141] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 292, 296.
[142] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 294.

fighting against racial stereotypes, the symbiotic relationship of the two combined with Ellington's upbringing are in line with the marketing plan.

For Ellington's family, racial uplift was treated as a professional priority and he carried this with him for the duration of his career, being dedicated to bringing Black Americans into a respectable light. This was a heavy task for him to carry alone, and he was able to lean on Mills and his band for help. His primary form of bringing respect early in his career was by assimilating into the stereotyped culture of the Cotton Club. Holding an exclusive spot at the Club allowed Duke to experiment with his musical and compositional styles. By exploiting the position he was given there, he took full control over what he presented to his audiences and took advantage of the popularity of the venue to gauge how well-received his acts and music would be.

During his time at the Cotton Club, Ellington was most widely known for his "Jungle Music." The owners of the Cotton Club expected him and his band to provide "exotic and primitive scenarios" to add to the ambience that the plantation aesthetics already provided. This style was cultivated through the usage of tom-toms, minor keys, chromatic harmonies, wailing reeds, and growling muted brass that imitated the sounds of wild animals.[143] To further please his audience and distract from his personal experimentation with his compositions, Ellington added in "jungle skits" that "depicted life in the African jungle."[144] Hiding behind these jungle themes, Ellington was able to subvert expectations of what Black music should be and

[143] Brian Harker, "Louis Armstrong, Eccentric Dance, and the Evolution of Jazz on the Eve of Swing," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 61, No. 1 (Spring 2008): 78.
[144] Douglas Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties": Subverting Racism Through Irony in the Music of Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie," *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 35, No. 2 (Fall 2015): 201.

conveyed messages of uplift to any Black audiences that heard through radio broadcasts or anywhere else that he happened to be playing. This messaging would go over the conscious white listener's head but maintained their interest in a way that attacked their preconceptions of the music and of the Black community.[145] Using a technique that would later be dubbed, "Tomming," as a reference to the eponymous character from Harriet Beeher Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' he was able to craft himself under an apparent submission to what the white audiences wanted, but with a hidden aggression towards the oppressive majority culture. Tomming was a term generally used pejoratively towards Blacks who feigned submission to whites but would do so in an exaggerated manner.[146] The oppression of slavery helped a culture of irony and masking to grow within Black populations to avoid direct mentions of their owners and conditions through coded communication. As Black music, specifically jazz, grew in American popularity, the musicians learned how to express coded messages with one another on stage and off through their combination of African rhythmic and harmonic traditions combined with elements of European traditions. These coded messages were commonly inaccessible to white audiences, giving musicians a safe method to speak freely in the world of Jim Crow.[147] Ellington subscribed to this methodology and is quoted as saying: "What we could not say openly, we expressed in music, and what we know as 'jazz' is something more than just dance music."[148]

[145] Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties," 209-210.
[146] Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties," 185-186.
[147] Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties," 188.
[148] Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties," 190.

Ellington had a penchant for subverting expectations to provide a conscious uplift effort. Being raised in an environment that taught him to command respect instead of demanding it allowed him to work with white oppression to create a more respectable image of Black Americans. He carefully formed a public persona and developed tactics to bring respect to his race and decrease the prejudice around jazz.[149] Part of his plan to subvert these stereotypes was an outward image of respectability for him and his band, having to look the part as well as having respectable personalities. Ellington and his band, as well as a few other prominent Black artists of the era, donned white tuxedos to both elevate the perception of them as people and to raise their music to a similar level as classical music. The uniformity of the band's dress made audiences focus on their artistry rather than the color of their skin as no one stuck out from one another. However, Ellington and his band carefully picked white tuxedos over black ones as a color counterpoint to white musicians wearing black tuxedos.[150] A dress code that made everyone wear the same outfit also allowed for the band to be seen as a cohesive unit working together for a greater good instead of a group of individuals. Famous trumpeter, Dizzy Gillespie, commented on the unified front of Ellington's band by saying, "Duke had that band unified. He used his band like an instrument."[151] The unified and respectable image that Ellington's band portrayed made it increasingly difficult for critics to tear down their accomplishments.

Ellington had also commanded respect through his recording output. Despite his prolific compositional output, he wanted full control over what was recorded and how it was recorded. Recording technology of the time was in its infancy and this made recreating the impact of live

[149] Alper, "Black, Brown and Beige," 7.
[150] Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties," 202-203.
[151] Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties," 205.

performances difficult. Ellington realized this and created entirely new arrangements of the works that he wished to record to compensate for the deficiencies in the recording technology and to create a similar sound to what was heard during a performance. He painstakingly added every detail he needed to create the result he desired. Mills helped shape Ellington's public image by publicizing this process and promoting Ellington as a genius who only wrote hits with more longevity than any other dance band. Ellington's commercial longevity was due in part to Mills' marketing, but also to his own personal compositional philosophy and his versality which made pigeonholing his work nearly impossible.[152]

Duke on the Radio

With the advent of radio and national broadcasts, music was able to reach a broader audience than ever before. The wild popularity of radio in family homes created a new way for the public to appreciate and enjoy music and the news. Through the Cotton Club, Ellington was able to garner an exclusive spot on the radio and become a household name throughout the United States. At this point in time, his and Fletcher Henderson's bands were the only two Black bands featured on the radio – a massive accomplishment for Black uplift efforts as radio was the medium that allowed most of white America to first encounter Black music.[153] The exclusivity Ellington held on the radio was unprecedented for a Black American, as most other Black radio acts could not maintain funding or interest and were canceled quickly. This was the fate of Louis Armstrong's radio show, "The Louis Armstrong Show," and Cab Calloway's

[152] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 301-305.
[153] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 298.

"Quizzicale."[154] Many Black artists were only able to maintain consistent air time on the radio through entertainment establishments like the Cotton Club. Ellington worked well in the radio format as he provided both "listening" music and dance band music during broadcasts to provide entertainment for his audiences as well as building his burgeoning brand. The Cotton Club's environment required entirely listening music and the audience to sit in silence, but Ellington's growing fame and popularity allowed him to experiment as he wished.[155]

Despite the racial oppression faced by Black people in the United States, radio provided a sense of security for Black musicians because it lacked the visual medium. This allowed white listeners peace of mind while giving Black musicians a national presence. They were able to mask themselves to an extent that they could not in public, and it allowed them to feel a bit more at ease for a time. Early radio stations worked hard to disrupt this peace of mind by attempting to draw distinct lines between whites and Blacks. Radio hosts intentionally pointed out the race of the musicians if they were Black or encouraged them to accentuate racial stereotypes associated with minstrelsy for the audience. Radio blackface perpetuated preconceived ideas of Blackness on a national level and made whites feel safer by confirming bias against the Black population. Radio broadcasts allowed white audiences to feel safe from Blacks while still enjoying their music providing a fullness of Black presence without the fear of proximity.[156] Broadcaster Abel Green perpetuated this relationship by praising Ellington's

[154] Jenkins, "A Question of Containment," 422.
[155] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 298.
[156] Jenkins, "A Question of Containment," 420-421.

music, calling it “futuristic and jazzique” while at the same time frequently reminding the audience of Ellington and his band’s race.[157]

Although radio hosts continually forced race into the spotlight, radio gave Ellington the national audience beyond the local audiences that he played for either in the Cotton Club, or in public shows in Washington or New York. Spreading his music on a national level gave him access to feedback from a much wider range of people, inspiring him to improve creatively. As a result, he taught himself how to play in both “hot” and “sweet” jazz styles that would appeal to a broad audience. Sweet jazz felt safer for white audiences to listen to as it sanitized the rhythmic and harmonic aspects of jazz music coming from Black musicians.[158] White America’s preference for sweet jazz combined with the racial atmosphere of the country meant that white musicians were more prominently featured on radio broadcasts playing styles that had been created and popularized by Black musicians. New York and Chicago radio stations were typically more hospitable to Black performers than those anywhere else in the country. Black populations in New York heard Ellington on the radio and flocked to his shows outside of the Cotton Club to hear true Black jazz in person, helping him ascend to a type of race leader.[159] By 1931, Ellington was the reason most American families turned their radio on.

[157] Jenkins, “A Question of Containment,” 423.
[158] Jenkins, “A Question of Containment,” 421.
[159] Nicholas L. Gaffney, “He Was A Man Who Walked Tall Among Men”: Duke Ellington, African American Audiences, and the Black Musical Entertainment Market, 1927-1943,” *The Journal of African American History* Vol. 98, No. 3 (Summer 2013): 6.

Duke on Film

In the early twentieth century, with the advent of "talkies," films that had recorded voices and music rather than exaggerated body acting, text cards, and live music accompanying the entire film, prominent musicians were often featured in Hollywood roles. Ellington and his band were featured in many films, but it was more difficult to hide their race than on radio. This provided certain challenges for Ellington and Mills. Mills was proactive in his contracts with film executives, ensuring that Ellington and his band were always cast in a respectable light when on screen. His campaigning for Ellington ensured that they subverted white expectations of Blacks and were not forced to perform the bumbling, decadent, and sassy stereotypes.[160] Flim roles calling for Black actors in respectable roles was largely unheard of during this time, and they were seldom seen as three-dimensional human beings, let alone worthy of contributing anything to art and culture. Ellington and Mills ensured that all Black Americans working with them on set were treated with respect and shown on-screen with the same respect. Ellington was even cast in a role in the film 'Black and Tan,' showing him in a loving relationship with a Black woman, something that humanized both characters and made white audiences very uncomfortable.[161]

Although Ellington and his band were treated with respect on set and on screen, not all Blacks were. Louis Armstrong and Cab Calloway were often both cast into stereotypical roles that made white audiences feel more comfortable despite having national acclaim that was

[160] Harvey G. Cohen, "Duke Ellington on Film in the 1930s," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 96, No. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2013): 407-408.
[161] Cohen, "Duke Ellington on Film," 410-411.

similar to that of Ellington.[162] Ellington was never cast in a lead role or as a star in the main feature film, he performed the opening act that came before the film. Movie studios and producers felt societal and monetary pressure to not cast Blacks at all, let alone in a feature role as it was much harder to hide their race on film than it was on radio or vinyl.[163] Directors almost exclusively hired white bands and actors over Black ones. When they did hire Black actors and bands, they were typically paid much less. Ellington and his band made less money over the course of three films than white bandleader, Guy Lombardo, made in a single film. However, Black bands have historically preserved more dignity than any white bands from the era, as they strove for artistry over entertainment in most cases.[164]

Criticisms and Musical Styles

Ellington was one of the most prolific and well-respected composers of his time, and was known for his speedy compositional process through a variety of styles. He helped transform the public's view of popular music styles and their worth through his meaningful compositional output, but many critics during the height of his career failed to recognize his worth. Their criticisms largely reflected stereotypes of Blacks during the Jim Crow era, and confirmed views that Black music was still inferior to that of European composers. Many critics thought that the prominence of popular music styles in the United States prevented the country from being taken seriously until the 1940s. On top of this stigma, African Americans were not seen as being able to create art worthy of high culture. Ellington escaped many of

[162] Cohen, "Duke Ellington on Film," 408, 421-422.
[163] Cohen, "Duke Ellington on Film," 408-409.
[164] Cohen, "Duke Ellington on Film," 409, 417, 420.

these stigmas with some of his music being labeled as "exciting and intelligent," terms that were nearly exclusively reserved for white compositions.[165]

Ellington's compositional practice stayed consistent with itself even as he grew as a composer and musician. He wanted to attack racial binaries and political oppression through his music in a way that would also intrigue white audiences and maintain their attention.[166] While composing in the Cotton Club, he used the forced binaries and staged roles of the Club's environment to his advantage to experiment with how to convey messages of racial uplift and African history. He had a passion to compile and present his music in a way that would explore a Black and African folk history in a positive light while maintaining the real contemporary experiences of Black Americans.[167] This goal of reflecting a true Black and African experience were not exclusive to Ellington. Black musicians across the country in every style from brass bands, string ensembles, and vocal groups began looking inward, eagerly aspiring to create a respectable Black art form through folk themes and vernacular musical styles. They were less concerned with outdoing white musicians, and more concerned with a culturally owned musical style and history.[168]

White critics were not as appreciative of the emphasis on Black and African traditions and history within Black music. They hid their racism behind a thin veil within their reviews and Ellington used those to his advantage by playing into the stereotypes on the surface, especially with his Jungle Music. Part of his popularity with both white and Black audiences, primarily

[165] Jenkins, "A Question of Containment," 424.
[166] Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties," 210.
[167] Tucker, "The Genesis," 133.
[168] Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me": Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues," *American Music* Vol. 14, No. 4 (Winter 1996): 404.

during his time at the Cotton Club, came from his usage of the racialized elements within his music. Critics had called much of Black musical styles in the larger jazz sphere of the time as primitive and savage, coming from the jungle and "representing a "demoralization of music and a threat to civilization as a whole."[169] Some Black elites and intelligentsia were also understandably opposed to the idea of using racist tropes within Black music. They believed that any representation of racialized tropes within Black compositions brought about an avenue for whites to steal the music and tropes and bring back a form of minstrelsy that created caricatures of African American life. Their opposition came from a fear that popular music styles created by Blacks with racialized tropes would sully the class distinctions inherent in "the best class of Negro music" and the efficacy and value of Black art would be lost.[170] Ellington used these racialized tropes to his advantage and turned them into art. He had an ability to transform and elevate them to a serious expression and representation of African American life and history.[171]

Symphonic Jazz, "Not Black Enough"

Arguably Ellington's most substantial style of music was his Symphonic Jazz in which he blended elements of jazz and Western classical traditions together for a completely new experience. Ellington's Symphonic Jazz was similar to the music of Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, but where their music took jazz harmonies and inspirations from the "sweet" jazz

[169] Russell L Johnson, "Disease Is Unrhythmical': Jazz, Health, and Disability in 1920s America," *Health and History* Vol. 13, No. 2 (2011): 28.
[170] Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing*, 8-9.
[171] John Howland, "The Blues Get Glorified": Harlem Entertainment, Negro Nuances, and Black Symphonic Jazz," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 90, No. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2007): 322.

popularized by Paul Whiteman, Ellington drew from his own compositions and experiences within the dance band and "hot" jazz styles. This new fusion blurred the boundaries between the snobbishness of concert-goers and their perceptions of jazz music and the stereotypes associated with it. Concert music during the 1920s and 1930s sought to incorporate and absorb jazz without becoming jazz.[172] Ellington's Symphonic Jazz was not seen by critics as a high art style because he was Black and primarily known for jazz and dance band music. Rather, they positioned his music as "smart, glamorous, and sophisticated popular music."[173] History holds this portion of his music in higher regard and gives it the recognition deserved. Ellington's Symphonic Jazz compositions during the 1930s and 1940s blurred racial class divisions and held a unique position within the greater uplift efforts. As is consistent with the rest of his life and compositions, these writings were created with "an eagerness to promote elegance, cultural dignity, and the highest potential of Harlem's forms of entertainment."[174]

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the genre of Symphonic jazz from Ellington was "Black, Brown and Beige," a three-movement work that represented African American and African histories with references to African instruments and Black spirituals such as "Come Sunday." This began as an operatic work named "Boola," the name which, Ellington noted after the premiere of the work, Negro historians used to symbolize their race: "if they want to tell you that Negroes took part in this or that event, they will say 'Boola was there.'"[175] This name got scrapped and reworked into Black, Brown and Beige. Ellington wanted to use Boola to

[172] Lawrence Kramer, "Powers of Blackness: Africanist Discourse in Modern Concert Music," *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 22 (2002): 204.
[173] Howland, "The Blues Get Glorified," 322.
[174] Howland, "The Blues Get Glorified," 320.
[175] Tucker, "The Genesis of 'Black, Brown and Beige,'" 139.

"rescue Negro music from well-meaning friends," taking a respectful stab at white composers attempting to incorporate Black idioms within their music.[176] Ellington worked to create a serious jazz-based work based on his upbringing and his personal dedication to being "Beyond Category." The imagery used in Black, Brown and Beige gave a clear and respectable image of historical facts in recognition of Black achievements, but critics were more concerned about the stylistic and compositional control of the work. Critics were divided along the classical and jazz lines, with classical critics complaining about the lack of formal control, and jazz critics complaining about the lack of "real jazz."[177] After the Carnegie Hall debut in 1943, one critic went so far as to say that it was "presented as one number, it was formless and meaningless…The whole attempt to fuse jazz as a form with art music should be discouraged."[178] Other critics had more blatantly racist responses to the premiere of Black, Brown and Beige, insiting that African Americans should stick to their own musical territory, and that complex composition should be left to those who have studied European music. American composer and conductor, Gunther Schuller, echoed these comments by saying: "the unavoidable truth is that large forms do require certain developmental, variational, and integrative skills of the composer." He also argued that Ellington lacked these skills, and he "never really understood the nature of the problem he was facing in undertaking to write in larger forms."[179]

[176] Alper, "Black, Brown and Beige," 1-2.
[177] Alper, "Black, Brown and Beige," 5.
[178] Alper, "Black, Brown and Beige," 5.
[179] Lisa Barg and Walter van de Leur, "Your Music Has Flung the Story of 'Hot Harlem' to the Four Corners of the Earth!": Race and Narrative in "Black, Brown and Beige," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 96, No. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2013): 429.

In addition to critics failing to recognize the importance of Ellington's Symphonic Jazz compositions, both white and Black critics attacked his representation of his race by saying that he was not writing "Black enough."[180] This minimizing of Ellington's writings from both sides of the spectrum falls in place with a cultural phenomenon that author Toni Morrison labels as "Africanisms." Africanisms are signs of Blackness against which the subject of the dominant culture can seek to define itself as white, and "establishes the denotative and connotative Blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people."[181] Scholar Lawrence Kramer extends this idea into the realm of music by saying "Musical Africanisms are generally supposed to occupy and ex-centric position, to stand outside the essence of the artwork even as their presence defines the character of the artwork."[182] Morrison and Kramer's thoughts align with Ellington's place within the larger musical world of the early and mid-twentieth century, as he strove to break down boundaries of style and genre with his music, while also creating a stronger boundary for the uplift of African Americans. He consistently referred to his music as "Negro Folk Music," and it allowed him to present jazz as an important vehicle for a more optimistic view of African American folk and religious history.[183]

[180] Gunther Schuller, "Jazz and Composition: The Many Sides of Duke Ellington, the Music's Greatest Composer," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* Vol. 46, No. 1 (October, 1992): 47.
[181] Kramer, "Powers of Blackness," 201.
[182] Kramer, "Powers of Blackness," 201.
[183] Booker, "An Authentic Record of My Race," 5.

Being a Race Leader

As I have suggested, Ellington's career and celebrity status had brought him to the position of being a race leader and being representative of Black Americans. This occurred in the context of the Great Migration, with the influx of Black Americans to northern states gaining greater access to cultural hubs and his music. The number of Black residents in New York grew by 51% between 1900-1910, and continued to grow as the century continued, with Harlem as a cultural center for Black culture and "afro-cosmopolitanism."[184] Scholars generally focus on Ellington's time at the Cotton Club. This is an extremely important part of his history, but the narrow focus somewhat diminishes his experience and influence with Black Americans. They viewed him as a cultural hero with the emerging New Negro uplift movements. His music spoke to a Black audience on a very fundamental level as he was able to express and offer a form of their history through the narratives Ellington conveyed in a way that non-musicians were not able to express.[185]

From an early age, Ellington was raised and taught to be conscious of his surroundings and the interactions he had with the world around him. He was always careful of with his words when speaking about race relations due to his 8th grade principal telling him that, "When we went out into the world, we would have the grave responsibility of being practically always on stage, for every time people saw a Negro, they would go into a reappraisal of the race."[186] His early education had emphasized Black history which gave him enough of a passion for representing a more full African history and instilling racial pride within himself. Ellington took

[184] Gaffney, "He Was A Man Who Walked Tall Among Men," 373.
[185] Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing,* 15.
[186] Alper, "Black, Brown and Beige," 6-7.

this to heart along with the disciplinary climate that he was raised in. It became even more important with his ascendance to celebrity status where all eyes were on him and linking his actions with the actions of the greater Black population.[187]

Even though he was seen as a race leader, much of his work for uplift went largely unrecognized because it did not fall into the tactics used by political activists. Ellington worked on civil rights through his dedication to racial pride by living and creating in a way that undermined the racial barriers and stereotypes that Jim Crow perpetuated.[188] The musical and cultural contributions that Ellington provided allowed for African Americans to have spaces, physically and aurally, to feel safe and unwind from their taxing day-to-day lives. African Americans found community, comfort, and intellectual and conscious stimulation through Ellington's music. They perceived him as a figure whose music could bring them together and provided "soul-stirring jazz with social relevance."[189] Ellington's music was often featured at rent parties. These parties were located in Black working-class neighborhoods allowing those present to unwind and take back their humanity after a long day of racial discrimination faced while working. The entry fee of these parties was typically twenty-five cents per person, which went towards helping the host afford drinks, live music, and cleaning supplies after the party. They were a foundational part of the Black community in Harlem that gave way to larger parties found in full-scale ballrooms and dancehalls.[190] The night life in Harlem acted as a social leveler of sorts that temporarily broke down class and race barriers in favor of fun. Often, the whites

[187] Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing*, 15, 110.
[188] Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," 291.
[189] Gaffney, "He Was A Man Who Walked Tall Among Men," 368.
[190] Gaffney, "He Was A Man Who Walked Tall Among Men," 371-374.

that attended these parties and the general night life in Black neighborhoods respected their Black neighbors and had a chance to treat them as individuals rather than racial subjects. Ellington's music helped bring these people from all walks of life together and stood as a symbol for the New Negro movement's pride, courage, and commitment to communal support and advancement.[191]

Ellington gained a reputation for being a cultural hero through his dedication to civil rights in his music and his demeanor. He was able to capture the experiences of the African American people through his music and foster an emotional response by creating a dialogue with the people for whom he wrote and performed his music. "I am not playing jazz, I am trying to capture the natural feeling of a people," – Duke Ellington.[192]

[191] Gaffney, "He Was A Man Who Walked Tall Among Men," 371.
[192] Gaffney, "He Was A Man Who Walked Tall Among Men," 382.

Chapter Four: Louis Armstrong, The "Entertainer"

Louis Armstrong, one of history's most influential jazz musicians was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on August 4, 1901. His contributions to jazz, vocal jazz, and the larger world of music history cannot be understated. The term "Armstrong" even entered the jazz vernacular as someone who sustained a loud, high pitch for a lengthy period of time.[193] Scholars and biographers often focus on his career as an entertainer rather than depicting him as an artist. He is known for his music, comedy, tap-dancing, and boisterous personality, but that minimizes his sheer artistic output and influence throughout the twentieth century both in music and racial uplift efforts.

The attention paid to his entertainment career could be due to his audience-oriented performance philosophy. Armstrong put the audience before his own ego and gave them the performance that they wanted to hear. Throughout his career, he performed fixed solos during sets instead of improvised ones (although he was a master improvisor) to alleviate stress on himself and give a consistently great performance.[194] He was a kind and passionate man who created lasting relationships with other artists throughout his career. These artists inspired Armstrong's styles and musicianship, and he did the same for them. Armstrong was someone who valued and practiced working hard, but kept a light-hearted, "carnivalesque" personality – both traits which the people in his life valued highly.[195] The work ethic, audience-oriented philosophy, and carnivalesque personality all went hand in hand to create one of the best

[193] Rick McRae, "What Is Hip? and Other Inquiries in Jazz Slang Lexicography," *Notes* Vol. 57, No. 3 (March 2001): 580.
[194] Benjamin Givan, "Duets for One: Louis Armstrong's Vocal Recordings," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 87, No. 2 (Summer 2004): 207-208.
[195] Charles Hersch, "Poisoning Their Coffee: Louis Armstrong and Civil Rights." *Polity* Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring 2002): 374.

performers of the twentieth century. Armstrong was not one to cut a show short and was even known to stay on stage and continue playing as his mouth bled from overexertion. Audiences saw his dedication to his craft and perceived him as "a man who lives every moment with an intensity that is a never-ending show."[196]

Louis Armstrong never had any interest in Western classical traditions, but he loved music of all kinds. He grew up in New Orleans, immersed in a variety of cultures that had gathered in that city and made their home there including freed Blacks, French, Italians, and Jews. They brought their cultures and music to the city and new styles and forms were created from the melding of old ones. New Orleans was also the birthplace of jazz, and as a child Louis was interested in all of it. He was so interested in jazz, he is now thought of as one of the pioneers of the genre. Armstrong holds a status among many versed in the genre as "the single most creative and innovative force in jazz history."[197] Gunther Schuller echoed this statement in multiple instances, noting that "Louis Armstrong virtually single-handedly invented and taught the rest of the jazz world swing,"[198] and saying "through Louis Armstrong and his influence, jazz became a truly twentieth-century language. And it no longer belonged to New Orleans, but to the world."[199]

Although Armstrong holds a prominent place in history, he was no stranger to the oppressive Jim Crow laws that were enacted through the United States, and especially the South from the 1890s onward. Growing up poor and Black in the South, Armstrong did not have

[196] Hugues Panassié, *Louis Armstrong* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1979), 13, 18.
[197] Gene Anderson, "The Origin of Armstrong's Hot Fives and Hot Sevens," *College Music Symposium* Vol. 43 (2003): 13.
[198] Gunther Schuller, "Jazz and Composition: The Many Sides of Duke Ellington, the Music's Greatest Composer," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* Vol. 46, No. 1 (October 1992): 36.
[199] Terry Teachout, "Jazz," *The Wilson Quarterly* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1988): 69.

many opportunities, but he took every single one he could find. Crafting relationships from an early age and striving for a better life through his passions, he was able to achieve celebrity status during a time of racial turmoil. America loved Armstrong, but even with his popularity across the country, white America still feared the idea of a wealthy Black man possibly living next door, even if it was their "Satchmo."[200]

Youth in New Orleans

Armstrong grew up impoverished in an area of New Orleans dubbed "The Battlefield" due to its violence, but it was also near where the Honky Tonks, bars with live music, were located. On his street, "a row of Negroes of all kind of characters" were all living in poverty but they made the best of their situation with live entertainment and the relative integration that New Orleans had up until the turn of the century.[201] However, despite the surprising amount of racial integration, tensions between races/ethnicities rose and respectability was difficult to achieve and maintain in this city for anyone that was not Catholic or white. Most members of the community were poor; this was true of Armstrong's family which consisted of himself, his sister, and his mother. Armstrong's father was absent during his youth, although his mother had several suitors who acted as stepfathers. Armstrong was very close to his mother growing up, and they maintained a close relationship throughout the rest of her life. He bought an apartment for her in Chicago later in his career to keep her close to him.[202]

[200] Hersch, "Poisoning Their Coffee," 381.
[201] Louis Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong In His Own Words.* Edited by Thomas Brothers. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.
[202] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 57-59.

Perhaps the most important familial relationship in Armstrong's youth was not a blood relation. A Jewish family who lived down the street from the Armstrongs befriended and looked after Louis through his younger years. The Karnofsky family had hired him to do some menial chores so he could make money for his family and for himself and they supported the beginning of his musical career. Later in his life, Armstrong expressed his admiration for the Jewish people, largely due to the warmth he found from the Karnofsky family. From a young age, he noticed the discrimination towards both Blacks and Jews, and even thought that Blacks had a little better break than the Jewish populations, making him even more thankful for the family feeding and supporting him.[203] During the Jim Crow era, racism and xenophobia was endemic across the country, making New Orleans' ethnic diversity a recipe for unrest.[204] However, the Karnofskys took care of Armstrong and, by extension his family, and provided him with his first cornet. It is often noted that Armstrong was sent to the Waif's Home for Boys, an orphanage and detention school that he attended in his youth and found his love of cornet and trumpet there, but in his autobiography, Armstrong recalls Morris Karnofsky helping him buy and clean a dirty, second-hand cornet and applauding his first notes on the instrument to encourage him to continue playing.[205]

Armstrong continued to be inspired by those around him, finding two people in particular to push him to greatness: Henry "Kid" Rena and Joe "King" Oliver. Rena was another trumpeter around Armstrong's age who also attended the Waif's Home, and they were the two

[203] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 8.
[204] Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 45.
[205] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong,* 12-15.

up-and-coming cornet players in New Orleans that frequented the live music around town. They were rivals in life and trumpet as Armstrong and Rena were Black and Creole Black, respectively, with the latter having a slightly higher spot on the social ladder in terms of class. Creole Blacks had slightly more respectability in New Orleans due to their Creole heritage, which may have given Rena the upper hand in some of their public interactions. This rivalry extended to various parts of their life from street competitions where they attempted to outplay one another, to having larger social circles debate which one copied the other on expanding the technical repertoire of the trumpet.[206]

"King" Oliver was a lifetime mentor of Armstrong, nurturing him from a young age. He was Armstrong's most revered idol in music, and Armstrong attended as many of his performances as he could to get closer to Oliver. Eventually, Oliver gave him an old cornet that Armstrong treasured and played for years. Oliver was famous in New Orleans, and eventually across the country for his ability to manipulate and quickly swap between various mutes. Armstrong loved these effects, but was never able to replicate them as well as he desired. He had to find his own virtuosic path in music, eventually redefining what jazz trumpet solos should be with figurations along a melodic line rather than effects. There is no evidence that Oliver was called "King" until he moved to Chicago, but his influence on the music scene in New Orleans is unquestionable.[207] When Armstrong moved to Chicago, Oliver eventually had an opening and invited him to play with his band, The Creole Jazz Band. Reviews for this band includes the first public description of Armstrong, calling him the "little frog-mouthed boy who

[206] Brian Harker, "Louis Armstrong and the Clarinet," *American Music* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 139, 142.
[207] Gary Krist, *Empire of Sin* (New York: Broadway Books, 2014), 196.

played the cornet."[208] The description did not matter to Armstrong as he was playing in a professional band with his idol, which was a dream come true for him and provided a path to success.

Birthplace of Jazz

New Orleans is famously known as the birthplace of jazz, although the specific origins are a little hazy. The musician credited for the innovations that created the style was cornetist Buddy Bolden, another one of Armstrong's heroes. Jazz is said to have begun in the late 1890s by the "good-time earthy people" of New Orleans' Black neighborhoods before Storyville's inception.[209] The residents of New Orleans did not call their music jazz until they traveled North because there was no real distinction between ragtime and jazz for them at the time. The "great colored songwriters" spread this music on river boat trips on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.[210] In this way, Storyville cannot be considered the birthplace of the genre, but it did allow the music to flourish, giving the musicians employment and an audience of Black and white folks. Jazz became a vehicle of solidarity in New Orleans by challenging the spirit of Jim Crow in this way. Some white bands did play in Storyville, but they wanted nothing to do with the Black bands in New Orleans.[211] However, when Armstrong moved up to Chicago, he was able to play music with some more racially accepting white folks. White musicians playing jazz lowered their class status and became less white by playing Black music in the eyes of

[208] Gene Anderson, "The Origin of Armstrong's Hot Fives and Hot Sevens," *College Music Symposium* Vol. 43 (2003): 13.
[209] Krist, *Empire of Sin,* 76.
[210] Lawrence Gushee, "The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz." *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 10-13.
[211] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong,* 33.

"respectable" whites. By bringing whites and Blacks together in an audience or on stage, enjoying the same music, jazz scrambled the social order and hierarchy of respectability in the Jim Crow era.[212] Armstrong used this to his advantage throughout his career, as well as subverting the typical roles of jazz at its inception.

Traditional New Orleans jazz was comprised of a few key elements that were later transformed into a traditional big band setup with specific roles for each instrument type. Trumpets and cornets played as the lead and generally had straight-forward, melodic lines, clarinets played obbligato figurations over the chord structure and melody, and the trombone provided low and slow countermelodies. These three main instruments were often accompanied by a small trap set, an upright bass or tuba, and either banjo or guitar, with banjo being preferred. Vaudeville entertainment values eventually shaped the aesthetics of the jazz realm, with audiences demanding novelty. Audiences expected soloists to provide this novelty by provoking laughter or astonishment. King Oliver mastered novelty techniques with his manipulation of mutes during his solos, imitating various sounds. Armstrong however, could not manipulate mutes like his idol, and instead subverted audience expectations and used arpeggiatic lines within his solos, keeping the entertainment fresh.[213]

Racial Diversity and Tension in New Orleans

The diversity found in New Orleans, along with rising racial tensions during Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow, created tension between the residents. New Orleans

[212] Krist, *Empire of Sin,* 84-85, 135.
[213] Harker, "Louis Armstrong and the Clarinet," 146.

became a portrait of the larger racial atmosphere of the United States during this era of history and showed the tensions between the ethnic groups across the country in a single city. Armstrong spoke out on the racial tensions found in the city later in his life, especially between white, Black, Creole, and Jewish residents. Due to his affection for the Karnofsky family, Armstrong saw the Jewish community as honest and hardworking. Armstrong spoke out against the adversity faced by the Black community in his autobiography saying, "We were lazy and still are. We never did try to get together, and to show the younger Negroes such as myself to try and even show that he has ambitions, and with just a little encouragement – I could have really done something worthwhile. But instead, we did nothing but let the young upstarts know that they were young and simple, and that was that."[214] Armstrong's words show that not only was there racial tension between ethnic groups in New Orleans, but also within the groups themselves.

In the late nineteenth century, before Jim Crow laws were widely enacted, New Orleans was one of the most integrated cities in the nation, and the signifiers of "Black" and "white" were not as clear as they were just a few decades later. Their marriage laws specifically were some of the most progressive laws found in the country as they were identical for any race or gender. Later, during the Jim Crow era, these laws were repealed and marriage across the color line became illegal. Some interracial marriages still happened as did sex across the color line, and in these instances, it was better to be a white man with a woman of color than a white woman with a man of color.[215] The color line was also blurred with an in-between race that was

[214] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 8.
[215] Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 11-12

established before Emancipation deemed the "Creoles of Color." They were free people of color that intermarried with their white and Spanish neighbors, creating a relatively large mixed-race population within New Orleans and with their French heritage, they also added to the Catholic population of the city. They occupied a position between whites and their Black slaves, and took up trades like carpentry, iron work, and shoemaking, and if they earned enough money, they were able to buy slaves of their own.[216] The residents of New Orleans continued to recognize Creoles of Color as a class between whites and Blacks, but when segregation began, the Creoles of Color were seen as being no different to the Black population. Despite the historic tensions between the two groups, they worked together for rights for all people of color.[217]

New Orleans as a Melting Pot – Storyville

New Orleans attracted immigrants from all over the world and developed a mixed culture unlike anywhere else, which in turn attracted more people to discover this wonderland of variety. The city held a range of ethnicities and races such as Americans, Brazilians, West Indians, Spanish, French, Creoles, Germans, quadroons, mulattoes, Chinese, and Negroes. As they grew in population and their reputation preceded them, the rest of the country developed a skepticism and intrigue with the city.[218] A complicated, unwritten caste system was in place between all the ethnicities and races, with white, Anglo-Saxons generally at the top, and Blacks at the bottom. Caught in the middle were the multitudes of immigrants and persons of mixed-

[216] Krist, *Empire of Sin*, 82.
[217] Krist, *Empire of Sin,* 83.
[218] Krist, *Empire of Sin,* 19.

race. Creole Blacks were more respectable than those with no history of race-mixing, but the laws surrounding what constituted as "Black" were strict. Any person with at least one-thirty-second of their lineage mixed with Black blood was considered as colored even if they were raised as white and had no visible sign of being mixed-race. European immigrants such as the Irish and Jews had an easier time passing as white due to their skin color, but were treated as lesser-than if their immigrant status was revealed to the public.

Due to New Orleans' history of integration, there was a fair amount of mixing between the groups up until the turn of the century when Jim Crow laws began to fully take their effect across the country. Although even after this, the German and Irish immigrants still generally got along with their Black neighbors, as none of them were at the top of the caste system and the culture in Europe often favored one's personality and talents over the color of their skin.[219] The vast amount of different cultures and the music they brought with them allowed Armstrong to absorb as many different styles as possible during his youth, which would influence his playing styles later in his life.

New Orleans was a largely Latin Catholic city in the middle of a very Baptist-leaning American South. It had attained its spot as a religious outlier due to it Spanish and French colonial heritage. Adding to the exotic image that they maintained, the rest of the country saw New Orleans as decadent, and that it only held a distinct culture because of its leniency towards vice, even being seen as tolerant towards it. In the late nineteenth century, city officials wanted to do something about this image, the growing public objection of integration with its Black residents, and the growing rates of crime and vice in the city. A man named

[219] Krist, *Empire of Sin,* 77.

Sidney Story came up with a plan to make prostitution illegal everywhere in New Orleans except in an 18-block Black neighborhood that was already filled with vice establishments. On January 1st, 1898, this area came to be known as 'Storyville.'[220]

Storyville was a city-sanctioned, segregated red-light district within New Orleans, and the establishments there never closed because the entertainment offered there was largely enjoyed at night. It was the heart of New Orleans' tourism economy with people coming from across the country to visit the sights, sounds, and experiences found within the red-light district. Storyville was not unique in this era of the United States. Cities often chose to segregate vice into less-desirable neighborhoods where African Americans lived. This meant that respectable residents did not have to endure the "flauntings of prostitutes and their compatriots."[221] Kansas City segregated their Black population and their vice to a 15-block area where they similarly developed their own sub-culture outside the direction of the city.[222] Storyville's beginnings of segregating prostitutes led many to believe that this area was where all undesirable people should reside as sharing space with African Americans was becoming increasingly undesirable to the white population.[223] Part of this disdain towards African Americans was due to a stereotype surrounding them that they were sexually immoral beings, therefore they should be segregated to the vice districts where they belonged. Despite pushing away the Black population, whites also rationalized lynchings of Black men because of the sexually charged racial stereotypes associated with them. Black men were portrayed as sexual

[220] Krist, *Empire of Sin,* 70-71.
[221] Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon (*Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 116.
[222] Marc Rice, "Prelude to Swing: The 1920s Recordings of the Bennie Moten Orchestra," *American Music* Vol. 25, No. 3 (Fall 2007): 260.
[223] Long, *The Great Southern Babylon,* 137.

predators who were a bane to white America, particularly white women, and needed to be taken care of before they caused more harm.[224]

As Armstrong pointed out, there were tensions between Blacks and the Jewish population, and often, Jewish, Italian, and Irish immigrants were lumped together for both Blacks and whites for ease of discrimination. These groups were at the forefront of organized crime, which was at its height during the Prohibition Era. Gangsters owned most of the vice establishments across the country because they found it difficult to achieve status and wealth in American cities because of their ethnic backgrounds. Crime represented an alternative way to find their way to the top.[225] Prostitutes and Black Americans in New Orleans and across the country had a similar goal, and the three groups found a kinship through a symbiotic relationship of vice. Storyville had a place for all three groups, and they helped each other out as much as they could, although not without some differences.[226]

Often, the prostitutes in Storyville were women of color, and this allowed the white men of New Orleans to relive a more racially integrated past, while also maintaining the social power over them that segregation gave whites.[227] While whites got to enjoy the benefits of a vice district, the workers in Storyville were still subjected to the discrimination that surrounded their careers and ethnicities. The spread of venereal diseases was blamed on the prostitutes, rather than their white male clients. As Storyville employed and housed the poor, immigrant, and Black populations, they were also implicated and blamed for the spread of these

[224] Long, *The Great Southern Babylon,* 130.
[225] Marc Mappen, *Prohibition Gangsters: The Rise and Fall of a Bad Generation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 3.
[226] Krist, *Empire of Sin*, 202.
[227] Krist, *Empire of Sin,* 114.

diseases.[228] White men also had their choice of "fancy girls," a slang term for light-skinned slave women that were sold for implicitly sexual purposes; this term continued to be applied to some sex workers even after slavery ended. Brothels in Storyville had bluebooks with identifiers for the race of the women employed with them: 'w' for white, 'r' for colored, 'J' for Jewish, and 'oct' for octoroon.[229] Octoroons were persons with one-eighth of their ancestry linked to an African Americans. Light-skinned women often held an in-between position in New Orleans' culture. They often held some of the cultural luxuries and graces of white women but were still racially discriminated against in society.[230]

Working alongside the prostitutes in Storyville were the Black workers and musicians, because it was where they were allowed to work under the new segregation laws. They were forced to work in gangster-owned clubs across the country, where they often faced frightening situations and violence, whether directly or indirectly. Most gangsters were generally accepting of other races and ethnicities as they were sympathetic to the discrimination they faced, but some higher-up gangsters were less tolerant and continued to refer to African Americans as "niggers."[231]

As the proprietors of vice, gangsters thrived in the nightlife scenes. Storyville was dedicated to vice and nightlife, although many social critics were against the development and maintenance of it, as it went against their Victorian sensibilities. As Italians, gangsters found refuge in Storyville among the rest of the immigrants and Black populations, finding a type of

[228] Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 114.
[229] Krist, *Empire of Sin*, 109.
[230] Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 14.
[231] Mappen, *Prohibition Gangsters,* 88.

sanctuary where they were more or less accepted. Within local politics, Italians were often just as discriminated towards as Black people, and they were all categorized together in terms of being the scapegoats of lawlessness. Concert saloons were often the targets and centers of the lawlessness in New Orleans and attracted gangsters to them. They were raucous theaters where patrons could drink while watching erotic stage performances and listen to Black music all they wanted.[232] Most of the musicians found in these theaters were people of color just trying to make an honest living, with many of them being Creoles of Color that were allowed to live outside of Storyville because of their lighter skin that allowed them to pass as white in some places, although not in New Orleans. Concert saloons were where some of the first small jazz groups, now called combos, were found. The musicians looked out for one another and honed their craft while doing so. They worked hard to maintain as respectable image as they could, scolding those that came in trying to cause trouble before they crossed any lines. Storyville had the best opportunities as a working-class musician, and they aimed to keep it that way.[233]

Chicago

In the summer of 1922, after playing with some smaller groups in New Orleans and working river boat jobs, Armstrong moved to Chicago to join King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. Chicago was a primary destination for Black Americans from Louisiana and Mississippi during the Great Migration. The Black population of Chicago more than doubled between 1910 and

[232] Krist, *Empire of Sin*, 20-21.
[233] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 24, 32.

1920.[234] Black Americans were not just seeking to escape the oppression of the South, but also to find work that would support them and their families, and Chicago was a booming industrial center. The city was especially industrious during this time as it was a central point of war manufacturing for World War I. Chicago offered better wages and generally better social conditions than the South did, although a of riot in the summer of 1919 created a set working-class culture for these Black immigrants as racism was still prevalent in the North.[235] The influx of Black immigrants heightened racial tensions that came to a head as a Black teenager was murdered for swimming too closely to the designated white area on a beach. During the week of the riot, 38 people were killed (23 Black and 15 white), 537 people were injured, and between 1-2,000 people lost their homes, most of whom were Black.

Most Black workers were segregated to the southern part of Chicago, an area deemed "The Stroll" or "The Black Belt." This area of the city was where vice establishments overlapped with respectable middle-class businesses. The nightlife in Chicago, especially in The Stroll, was owned and operated by gangsters such as Al Capone.[236] The Stroll came about in a similar way to the inception of Storyville, as city leaders pushed brothels, saloons, dance halls, and gambling establishments into the south side of the city where the immigrating Black population found housing. Chicago created a "Vice Commission" to get rid of vice, or at least push out of the sight of the public eye, leading to a vice purge in 1912 that left many businesses with the

[234] Amy Absher, "Musicians and the Segregated City: Chicago in the Early 1900s-1930s," In *The Black Musician and the White City: Race and Music in Chicago, 1900-1967*, 16-47, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 17.
[235] Abdul Alkalimat, "The Political Culture of the Black Community," In *The History of Black Studies*, 63-88, (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 72.
[236] Absher, "Musicians and the Segregated City," 23.

decision to purge the vice from their establishments or lean into the world of vice.[237] Once the Vice Commission pushed these establishments to the Black neighborhoods, they observed that vice was "always within or near the settlements of colored people."[238] As these vice establishments were pushed into Black neighborhoods, Black musicians who worked in the "pleasure palaces, resorts, and dives" that were controlled by gangsters, were forced to move their work into The Stroll.[239] This led to city leaders and police blaming Black communities for vice and refused to distinguish between law-abiding Black citizens and criminals. Police arrested and abused Blacks in their own neighborhoods at will, as Black became synonymous with vice, crime, and poverty.[240]

As Chicago grew as a city, it meant that more white families were forced to live near the border of The Stroll. Whites began frequenting performances in locations that previously held a larger Black presence, and this meant more Blacks were denied tickets. Those that were able to purchase tickets for the entertainment provided at these establishments were often refused seating in favor of the white audience.[241] An increase in white presence near Black neighborhoods also meant an increase in racial violence. From 1917-1921, there were 58 firebombings of homes in white border areas of Chicago where African American families had moved to, with no arrests or prosecutions despite the deaths of two African American residents.[242]

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[237] Absher, "Musicians and the Segregated City," 19.
[238] Absher, "Musicians and the Segregated City," 21.
[239] Absher, "Musicians and the Segregated City," 22.
[240] Absher, "Musicians in the Segregated City," 21-22.
[241] Absher, "Musicians in the Segregated City," 25.
[242] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 144.

Armstrong was finally able to work with his idol on a big stage, and this is where he met his second wife, Lil Hardin. She was the pianist for Oliver's band at the time and had caught Armstrong's eye. They quickly fell in love with one another, and everything seemed to be going Armstrong's way. However, he felt inadequate playing with these greats that he had looked up to in his youth in Oliver's band, which included Johnny (David) Dodds on clarinet and Johnny St. Cyr on banjo, and King Oliver on trumpet. Armstrong notes that he felt that "…this can't be me here playing with all of these masters. To play with such great men was the fulfillment of any child's dream, and I had reached that point in music."[243] Armstrong loved his position but felt understandably overwhelmed from the experience. His mother must have felt his struggles because she made the trip up to Chicago from New Orleans to surprise him one night. She ran right up to him on the bandstand and was reunited with her "little sloe-footed boy."[244]

Fletcher Henderson and New York

Although a relatively short chapter in Armstrong's life, moving to New York and joining Fletcher Henderson's band was important to his fame and success. Henderson was a prominent bandleader in New York and, much like Ellington, showed great care about his appearance so that he could help Black music become a dignified art form and profession. He did this by attempting to create music that appealed to both Black and white audiences, although he was disparaged in his early career by both sides.[245] When Henderson eventually found fame, there

[243] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 52.
[244] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 57.
[245] Jeffrey Magee, "Before Louis: When Fletcher Henderson Was the "Paul Whiteman of the Race," *American Music* Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter 2000): 392-394.

was an oversupply of instrumentalists looking for work and that allowed him and other bandleaders to be picky about who they allowed into their bands. Five years before Armstrong joined the group, Henderson had asked him to join the band, but Armstrong politely declined because he had just married his first wife and was playing river boat shows.[246]

When Armstrong finally joined Henderson's band in late 1924, he immediately became a hit across Harlem, with people lining up in the streets to hear him play. Henderson gave him nearly every opportunity he asked for. He put Armstrong's name up on the marquee next to his own at the Roseland Ballroom labeling him the "World's Greatest Jazz Cornetist." The following summer, they were the first Black band to tour across the New England states. They were based mostly in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and frequently played in neighboring towns for dances and parties. After this tour, after only a year of playing with Henderson, Armstrong's time with the band came to a close. Lil came to visit Armstrong on occasion, but their marriage was being strained from the long-distance. She asked him to come back to Chicago and play with her band and live up to his title of being the World's Greatest Jazz Cornetist, and he accepted. Armstrong had to break the news to Henderson, which was met with grace. Henderson was sad to see his star leave the band, but understood Armstrong's decision, letting him know that there would always be a spot open for him in the band.[247]

[246] Panassié, *Louis Armstrong*, 7.
[247] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong,* 93-94.

Back to Chicago

On arriving in Chicago in 1925, Armstrong's professional life exploded. He joined Lil's band at the Dreamland Cabaret. She had a trumpet opening due to a player quitting the band. He stayed with that group until 1927, and just like in New York, became the talk of Chicago, getting more popular every night. King Oliver was still playing with his band just a few blocks down the road from Armstrong, and no doubt they crossed paths.[248] At the same time, Okeh Studios officially signed Armstrong on as a client with a band that he called his "Hot Five." Headed by Ralph Peer, Okeh gave Armstrong and his band complete artistic freedom on their recordings, something nearly unheard of in this era, especially for a Black man. Armstrong assembled his band and Okeh allowed him to offer them attractive amounts of money to sign on with the studio. The original members of the Hot Five were Armstrong on trumpet, Lil on piano, and New Orleans natives, Kid Ory, Johnny Dodds, and Johnny St. Cyr playing trombone, clarinet, and banjo respectively. They brought a New Orleans flair to Chicago that even King Oliver had not been able to replicate. The Hot Five saw Armstrong as a "wonderful leader who respected his sidemen and put the band before his personal acclaim."[249]

Although Okeh was able to offer the group a lot of money, enough for Kid Ory to break up his band to join the Hot Five, but they still worked nearly every day of the week to earn a living and to generally enjoy making as much music as possible. They often had rehearsals or recording sessions in the middle of the night in between other engagements.[250] This amount of work to survive was relatively common for Black musicians in large cities. White jazz musicians

[248] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 94-95.
[249] Anderson, "The Origins of Armstrong's Hot Fives and Hot Sevens," 14-18.
[250] Anderson, "The Origins of Armstrong's Hot Fives and Hot Sevens," 18.

were almost always paid substantially more than Black musicians in cities such as Chicago and New York and had no problem making a living from a moderate work week.[251] Armstrong also moonlighted with other companies outside of his contract with Okeh both for playing experience and extra money.

Relationships in Armstrong's Life

Armstrong's personality along with his musicianship and passion for learning led him to a bounty of friendships and working relationships that he held dear during his life. These relationships both provided a sense of community for Armstrong as well as giving him inspiration to improve his own playing and styles. Often, the popularity of jazz musicians during the big band era meant they lived a nomadic lifestyle, moving from gig to gig and never staying in one place for long. Musicians in these bands built strong relationships and comradery. The close proximity that these musicians had to constantly keep with one another gave them a better understanding of each other and built high levels of comradery amongst the band.[252] Although Armstrong didn't tour often, the comradery he built with his fellow musicians on stage was still an important part of his life.

From an early age, Armstrong was building relationships in New Orleans, whether it be with King Oliver, Kid Rena, Kid Ory, or the Karnofsky family. They all inspired and encouraged him and his music from an early age when he was exploring the Honky Tonks around town. The odd jobs that the Karnofsky family had him do to earn his wages often took him to Italian

[251] Douglas Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties": Subverting Racism Through Irony in the Music of Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie," *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 35, No. 2 (Fall 2015): 200.
[252] Malcolm, "Myriad Subtleties," 196.

neighborhoods where he was exposed to Italian music, gaining a higher appreciation and interest for vocal music.[253] As Armstrong was exposed to different styles and genre in the melting pot of New Orleans, he subconsciously began crafting the interests and styles of his later performing years, with vocal music being a large part of his life. Armstrong also idolized and befriended clarinetist and saxophonist Sidney Bechet. Bechet was one of the greats that came out of New Orleans, and his playing heavily influenced Armstrong's solo style. Clarinet solos in New Orleans Jazz often played obbligatos around the melody, a task which was difficult for cornets or trumpets to achieve.[254] Armstrong's inability to match King Oliver's skill in manipulating mutes did not stop his willingness to learn the music of his idols. He ended up deferring to Bechet in style as a kid, and when they were older and playing in ensembles together, they played off one another's ideas, showing an inherent respect for each other.[255] Armstrong's mimicry of the clarinet allowed him to innovate and blur the traditional roles for instruments and gave him the tools for success to stand out as a virtuoso cornetist.

After he returned to Chicago, Armstrong began to play shows with dancers, and he held them all in high regard. He kept signed photographs of all of the dancers he had worked with over the years.[256] One of the original functions of jazz music was to accompany social dancers, so the performers had to build a strong sense of body language and physical cues to match their music to the level of intensity that the dancers desired. Although it is easier with dancers on stage, Armstrong worked hard to accompany the dancers he worked with in this way.

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[253] Joshua Berrett, "Louis Armstrong and Opera," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 76, No. 2 (Summer, 1992): 219.
[254] Harker, "Louis Armstrong and the Clarinet," 140.
[255] Harker, "Louis Armstrong and the Clarinet," 150.
[256] Brian Harker, "Louis Armstrong, Eccentric Dance, and the Evolution of Jazz on the Eve of Swing," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 61, No. 1 (Spring 2008): 70.

Perhaps the most prominent dancers that Armstrong worked with was a pair going by the stage name of 'Brown and McGraw.' They were a Black married couple who performed in an "eccentric style" of dance, one that was fast, acrobatic, and unpredictable – markers which also described Armstrong's style of playing due to his clarinet influences.[257] The combination of Armstrong and Brown and McGraw was a crowd-pleasing experience, as they played off of one another's performances, Brown and McGraw attempting to match their steps to Armstrong's acrobatic playing, and vice-versa. They helped one another develop a sense of "Black Rhythm" to stand out, placing a higher emphasis on syncopation and swing rhythms.[258] In accompanying dancers, Armstrong had a lower profile than the dancers on stage. This mattered little to Armstrong as he enjoyed playing with them and had other claims to fame. Dancing was generally a respectable career path, especially in the entertainment industry, but often Black dancers were overly sexualized and seen as decadent due to their race and the music they danced to. Control of one's body was tied to positive moral values in this era, and Black dance was not seen as a controlled movement.[259] However, these relationships between instrumentalists and dancers became more popular and influenced larger groups such as Cab Calloway's Orchestra to do the same.

In Vaudeville, acts were deemed "eccentric" if they departed from conventional techniques or styles, although nothing in Vaudeville was truly conventional. Eccentric acts were often associated with Black artists that strayed from legitimate, or Western, traditions, and this

[257] Harker, "Eccentric Dance," 70.
[258] Harker, "Eccentric Dance," 83-86.
[259] Christopher Wells, "*You* Can't Dance to It": Jazz Music and Its Choreographies of Listening," *Daedalus* Vol. 148, No. 2 (Spring 2019): 7.

term functioned to "other" these performers, i.e. jazz and its associated dances.[260] Many of the eccentric dancers of the late 1920s were drawn to the Cotton Club where they were objectified and exoticized, but could perform with high-profile acts such as Duke Ellington.[261] Armstrong's fame as an eccentric cornetist worked with his image because of his comedic style that played into the racial stereotypes.

Lil Hardin and the Importance of Black Women in Uplift

Lil Hardin was a pianist who graduated as Valedictorian from the prestigious Black university, Fisk University. She met Armstrong when he first played with Oliver's Creole Jazz Band and they immediately hit it off, both musically and romantically. Armstrong says in his autobiography: "I particularly enjoyed Lil that night, with that four beats to the bar – for a woman I thought she was really wonderful…She was lucky to come out of Fisk University into the arms of all the real great Jazz musicians. It was startling to find a woman Valedictorian to her class fall in line and play such good jazz. If she hadn't run into the NOLA greats, she probably would have married some big politician or maybe play the Classics for her livelihood."[262] Armstrong was obviously infatuated with Lil, and she felt the same. After meeting and playing with each other for a time, they both divorced their respective partners to be with one another. Armstrong's marriage in New Orleans was failing and he was looking for an opportunity to get out of it, and Lil was the perfect match for him.[263] She supported

[260] Harker, "Eccentric Dance," 71.
[261] Harker, "Eccentric Dance," 72.
[262] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong,* 50.
[263] Panassié, *Louis Armstrong*, 9.

Armstrong in his career, being a powerful voice of reason and influence in his life. Without Lil's influence, Armstrong may not have become a household name. After Armstrong had been playing with Oliver's band for some time, Lil realized that if he continued playing next to Oliver, Armstrong would never get the recognition that she thought he deserved. She encouraged him to explore new horizons, which led him to Fletcher Henderson's band in New York, and then back to Chicago to be with her, play in her groups, and to start his own.[264]

Lil Hardin Armstrong was a prime example of Black women being essential to racial uplift efforts due to her tenacity, education, and celebrity status. Most of the prominent jazz musicians in history have been men, which has minimized the efforts and accomplishments of the women in the genre.[265] African American women were uniquely suited for uplift efforts as they bore the burden of enduring both racism and sexism, which also makes Lil's achievements that much more impressive. As women, they were also tasked with mothering children and raising them to be respectable individuals. They shared this with all women and would insist on the same courtesies as white women held, with being treated more tenderly and carefully as they bore children. Black women argued that the race would only improve in proportion to the treatment of its women.[266]

Presenting a public image of being a respectable and modest woman was exponentially more difficult for Black women than for white women. Black women owned the responsibility of presenting themselves as respectable, and during motherhood, raising children to be

[264] Anderson, "The Origins of Armstrong's Hot Fives and Hot Sevens," 15.
[265] Vaughn Booker, "An Authentic Record of My Race": Exploring the Popular Narratives of African American Religion in the Music of Duke Ellington," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2015): 9.
[266] Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 105.

respectable, law-abiding citizens with a healthy fear of the law.[267] Leaders of the "New Thought Movement," a movement that rejected the concepts of sin, guilt, and damnation, placed a heavy emphasis on uplifting Black women and mothers. E. Azelia Hackley and W.E.B. Du Bois were two of the contemporary leaders and they promoted an idea called "uplift eugenics," where they wanted Black mothers to have more children and parent them as responsibly as possible. They held baby contests to judge infants on their worth with the slogan of "Better Babies Build a Better Race!" By judging infants on their worth due to the pedigree of their parents, it would dissuade lower-class people from having children which could have a cascading effect throughout the race and would alienate any that did not adhere to the ideas of the New Thought Movement. These uplift eugenicists rode a fine line with racists that proposed laws that would constrict reproductive rights for Black Americans and would have imposed methods for reducing and eliminating mixed-race children. Mixed-race children were largely blamed on Black populations rather than white ones due to the negative stereotypes of sexual promiscuity associated with the Black population. Jim Crow supporters feared the increase of Black children that Du Bois and Hackley were proposing.[268] They feared it because there would be an increase in the Black population, making them harder to segregate and oppress, and with the emphasis on a more well-educated generation, the oppression would become more difficult, as was seen with the case of Frederick Douglass.

[267] Juanita Karpf, *Performing Racial Uplift: E. Azalia Hackley and African American Activism in the Postbellum to Pre-Harlem Era (*Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022), 5.
[268] Karpf, *Performing Racial Uplift*, 80-86.

Vocal Jazz and the Black Vernacular

Armstrong was not only a virtuosic cornetist, he has also gained lasting fame for his singing. With his unique timbre and style of singing, it would be difficult to exaggerate his influence on vocal jazz. Armstrong had never really found any difference from playing trumpet and singing, and loved them both, but found that "singing was more into my blood than the trumpet."[269] Singing really had been with him longer than the trumpet, because he sang on street corners in New Orleans, encouraged by the Karnofsky family and inspired by the various vocal music he had heard around the city. He is quoted as saying, "When I reached the age of eleven I began to realize that it was the Jewish family who instilled in me singing from the heart. They encourage me to carry on."[270]

Armstrong's professional singing career did not begin until he returned to Chicago and started his Hot Fives, and was given creative liberties by Okeh. He had asked both King Oliver and Fletcher Henderson to give him a chance to sing with their groups and was denied by both, except for a few small speaking roles and a chorus on "Everybody Loves My Baby" with Henderson.[271] Armstrong assumed that they were afraid to take a risk and were afraid to tarnish their reputations, not knowing that he had been singing his entire life.[272] Henderson had also disregarded the wildly popular reactions Armstrong's vocal chorus and did not take a chance on another one.[273] This could have been due to the unique timbral effects of Armstrong's singing and to his unorthodox approach. Gunther Schuller describes Armstrong:

[269] Givan, "Duets for One," 191.
[270] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 18.
[271] Givan, "Duets for One," 191.
[272] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 64.
[273] Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong*, 64.

"Louis's singing has added a new school of technique to Western Music, not withstanding the fact that its orientation is completely African in origin."[274] He continues, noting that Armstrong's singing calls attention to a "range of subtle melodic inflections and timbral effects that are neither readily transcribed into Western musical notation nor easily described verbally."[275] Schuller focused on the African traditions built into Armstrong's singing, as the Black vernacular had crept into all forms of African American life, including music. African languages have an emphasis on tonality and sounds that distinguish between words similar to vowels and consonants in Western languages. Keeping remnants of their previous culture such as vocalizations in their vernacular helped slaves retain some semblance of identity and dignity. These vocalizations and an emphasis on tonality and timbre transferred over to instrumental and vocal music during the jazz age.[276]

Vocalizations and the instrumental comparisons were essential to jazz musicians finding their voice through their music. Often, jazz critics favored the instrumental over the vocal, parallel to the industry's favor of men being instrumentalists and women being vocalists, and the industry's preference for men over women in general.[277] Armstrong and Hardin subverted this expectation and found success as a male vocalist and female instrumentalist, but other subversions of this stereotype were few and far between. Jazz critics often attacked the implementation of vocalizations in jazz, whether vocally or instrumentally, as a scapegoat to mask their racism towards the performers themselves. This masking did not consider that voice

[274] Givan, "Duets for One," 190.
[275] Givan, "Duets for One," 190.
[276] Doug Miller, "The Moan Within the Tone: African Retentions in Rhythm and Blues Saxophone Style in Afro-American Popular Music," *Popular Music* Vol. 14, No. 2 (May 1995): 161.
[277] Vaughn A. Booker, *Lift Every Voice and Swing: Black Musicians and Religious Culture in the Jazz Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 98.

and vocalizations were synonymous with sound concept with the uniqueness of every person's voice and their unique instrumental or singing timbre, and that any person, white or not, had a sound concept to provide through their voice. Black musicians used their vocalizations and voice to give them a sense of individuality and provide themselves with a platform from which to speak.[278]

Remnants of the African languages and cultures survived through a history of slaves communicating with one another to avoid suspicions from slaveholders, and found their way into the Black vernacular as what was referred to as "jive language" or the "Negro dialect." One critic described it as "An amalgam of Negro-slang from Harlem and the argots of drug addicts and the pettier sort of criminals, with occasional additions from Broadway gossip columns and the high school campus."[279] Jive language, or Negro dialect, showed both a Black identity and could be conflated with racist stereotypes. To whites, it signaled "darky behavior," whereas within the African American communities, it was a polarizing form of vernacular.[280] To some, it also represented the negative stereotypes associated with their race and represented an uneducated and impoverished image of the race, while to others it represented a more freeing and "authentic" voice for them to claim as their own.[281] The latter saw using slang as a means to reject the mainstream and to not seem overly highbrow, because they wanted to distance themselves from the oppression of white society. Younger generations of African Americans especially used slang to reject the Victorian ideals, the Black elite, and any remnants of slavery

[278] Cheryl Keyes, "Sound, Voice, and Spirit: Teaching in the Black Music Vernacular," *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 2009): 19.
[279] McRae, "What is Hip?," 574-575.
[280] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 114.
[281] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 114.

that they had seen growing up. The ideals they were rejecting placed a larger focus on gaining a standard education as a form of status, something that many Blacks were unable to obtain during this era.[282] This dichotomy of younger generations preferring slang and a Black vernacular is shown through Sidney Bechet and Dizzy Gillespie. Bechet saw slang as a form of posturing, an attempt to look cool, while Gillespie viewed it as an essential part of his racial identity.[283]

By fully committing himself to his art and to the Black culture, Armstrong found himself as a race leader of sorts. He worked on the front lines of show business to reclaim what a Black identity meant and did not feel the need to fully submit to a white-centric idea of respectability. Armstrong had a healthy fear of racism and the violence that came with it, and as an entertainer, he would play the part he needed in any situation to ensure his safety while also forwarding his own career for more opportunities to learn and perform music. This sort of pragmaticism is mirrored in how Booker T. Washington lived his life. Washington wanted equal rights for African Americans but did not want to push his agenda too quickly fearing backlash both physically and for his career. Washington and Armstrong both held prominent positions of visibility and influence in their respective lifetimes, and both navigated racial tensions to ensure uplift for themselves and their community.

[282] Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race,* 120.
[283] McRae, "What is Hip?," 583.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Looking at the cultural context of the early twentieth century as well as the early career trajectories of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, the struggles and societal burdens that African Americans hold should be more obvious to any reader. Racism had been built into the United States far before Emancipation and continued to be fortified throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century. African Americans had fought for decades as freedmen and centuries as slaves for Civil Rights, and although they have full constitutional rights in the United States, continue to feel the effects of Jim Crow laws. Black music has continually been appropriated by whites, and often ostracized by elites as a lesser art form – jazz at the start of the twentieth century, rhythm and blues at mid-century, and rap/hip-hop at the present. Although both jazz and rap were the most popular musical styles of their respective times, they have both struggled to be taken seriously by critics. Rap is well represented in the academic world and there has been renewed interested following Kendrick Lamar's Pulitzer Prize win in 2018 with his album "DAMN." Lamar's thoughtful and conscious lyrical rap style enabling him to be awarded with this honor speaks to Ellington and Armstrong's work and dedication to racial uplift during their lives. This award was not without pushback from right-wing classical purists, as they did not view a rap album to be on the same level of excellence as the works by composers following the traditional western art music traditions, similar to the pushback of jazz's emergence into a respected musical genre.

As I discussed the context surrounding the cultural, social, and economic climate of the United States during the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, I made clear that race and class ruled much of the day-to-day lives of Americans, especially anyone that was not of

Anglo-Protestant heritage. Black Americans endured the worst treatment of them all, as the Jim Crow laws ignored their constitutional rights gained from Emancipation. These laws segregated Black Americans into neighborhoods containing vice districts, made home-ownership and attaining jobs exponentially more difficult, and gave confidence to white America to publicly discriminate against them. Ellington and Armstrong's musical careers were somewhat mirrored by two Black uplift leaders that came before them, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois and Ellington both came from Black middle-class backgrounds in communities that were more highly integrated than many places in the country. When dealing with racial matters, both came to command respect from their audiences through their actions and the ways that they navigated tensions during the era of Jim Crow. Washington and Armstrong on the other hand took more pragmatic approaches to racial tensions, as they both grew up in environments where racism was much more prevalent and violent. This gave them the wisdom to know when and where pushing racial boundaries was possible. The efforts of Black uplift leadership led to the Harlem Renaissance, which was divided in its support of Black popular music but connected through the discrimination they all faced and their common goal of equality. The Black community in the United States was also connected through their African ancestry, and the role of religion in their lives. Keeping a connection to Africa and religion allowed them to instill racial pride in themselves and one another, which strengthened their fight for equality.

Duke Ellington's career began in his hometown of Washington DC where his family and community had instilled morals of respectability and racial pride into him. This disciplinary climate that he was raised in helped him succeed in his musical goals, and subsequently funded

his move to New York with his band. While in New York, his band was signed to the whites-only venue, the Cotton Club, where they served a multi-year residency. The Cotton Club had allowed Ellington a stage in which to experiment with his compositions and to publicize himself on radio airwaves, reaching audiences across the country. He gained fame through his "jungle music," that, on the surface, catered to white audiences that wanted to objectify the Black workers at the Club. This music was riddled with irony and uplift messages that spoke to Black listeners and would largely go unnoticed by white listeners. Ellington had also met his white manager, Irving Mills, during this time, and between the publicity of the Cotton Club and the marketing strategies employed by Mills, Ellington rose to fame. Mills helped Ellington get cast in Hollywood films with roles that showed him and other Black artists in a respectful light. Gaining national success with his music and film appearances, Ellington became a race leader with this newly gained celebrity status. Black communities looked up to him as a figure that showed both Black and white audiences that Black people were worthy of respect and that they could produce art that could stand the test of time.

Louis Armstrong grew up in poverty in New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz. Growing up without a father figure, he was raised by his mother, who he remained close to his entire life. Similar to Ellington, he had a strong community growing up who had instilled good morals and passion in him. Armstrong used these communities to influence his musicianship and to gain employment throughout his career. New Orleans was a melting pot of cultures and races which both benefitted and harmed the community. For a time, New Orleans was one of the most integrated parts of the United States, but after the inception of Jim Crow laws, the city pushed the vice establishments into a Black neighborhood where whites could interact with people of

color only if they wanted to, and named it 'Storyville' after Sidney Story, the man who proposed the idea. Storyville was created shortly before Armstrong's birth, and from an early age, he was well-aware of the discrimination against his race and was clever enough to navigate his career through accentuating racial stereotypes while also speaking out against them when it was safe to do so. Armstrong was nurtured by a local Jewish family in New Orleans, the Karnofsky family, who had encouraged him to follow his musical dreams, knowing he loved singing and seeing the bands at the local Honky Tonks. After growing up and working riverboat gigs, he made the move to Chicago where he was honored to play with his idol from New Orleans, King Oliver. While in Chicago, Armstrong also met his second wife, Lil Hardin, who encouraged Armstrong to constantly seek greater heights and stardom. Between his mother and Lil, Armstrong had strong women in his life that exemplified the importance of women to Black uplift efforts. Armstrong continued to form symbiotic relationships in his career that he treasured both personally and publicly by incorporating ideas and techniques he had learned from them in his performances.

The lives of Ellington and Armstrong exemplified the struggles of Black Americans during Jim Crow, while also using their positions to assist the greater racial uplift effort. They set the stage for future generations of Black artists to succeed in various genres and styles from rock 'n' roll to R&B, and to the present with hip-hop and rap. Ellington and Armstrong, as well as their contemporaries, showed the world that achieving success in a society that treated their race as lesser-than was still possible. Although not explicitly connected to the Harlem Renaissance, they were race leaders that Black Americans looked up to and were inspired from. Their work in the music industry and the greater racial uplift efforts have had lasting effects to the present

day. Continued research on this topic may include finding direct lines of influence from Ellington and Armstrong to modern artists, as well as showing their collaborative efforts later in their career with burgeoning acts that rose during the bebop era and beyond.

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