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From Jim Crow to Racial Tolerance: The African-American Experience During Interwar Period Paris

Cover Page Footnote

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Abstract

During World War I, African-American soldiers came to France and discovered the relative diminishment of racial prejudices in the country. Since much of the United States still held racist Jim Crow era laws and prejudices, African-Americans had been barred from the same opportunities as their white counterparts. Because of this, many African-Americans moved to Paris during the interwar period to seek opportunities that were not available to them in the United States. This paper will explore how the less rigid and more nuanced racial ideologies found in Paris, enabled African-Americans to create strong relationships with



Parisians and find the freedom that they were unable to find in the United States. By using the stories of James Reese Europe, Ada “Bricktop” Smith, and Josephine Baker as well as articles from The New York Times and popular African-American newspapers, I will explain to the reader how African-Americans were able to find success in Paris because of both the popularity of African-American culture with Parisians and the French population’s less rigid racial system.

During World War I, African-American soldiers arrived in Paris to fight for the Allies. While in Paris, African-Americans became increasingly frustrated fighting for European freedom, since this freedom was something that they did not have at home due to the strict color lines drawn in much of the United States. After the war, many returned home and were disappointed to see that their position as a second-class citizen did not change. In 1919, violence towards African-Americans became rampant as countless riots happened in cities across the United States, continuing to remind African-Americans that they were not equally accepted into white society. W.E.B. Du Bois (1919) commented on this atrocity:

We are returning from the war! *The Crisis* and tens of thousands of black men were drafted into a great struggle. For bleeding France and what she means and has meant and will mean to us and humanity and against the threat of German race arrogance, we fought gladly and to the last drop of blood; for America and her highest ideals,

we fought in far-off hope; for the dominant southern oligarchy entrenched in Washington, we fought in bitter resignation. For the America that represents and gloats lynching, disfranchisement, caste, brutality and devilish insult- for this, in the hateful upturning and mixing of things, we were forced by the vindictive fate to fight also.

The violence and continuation of discrimination toward African-Americans led many African-Americans to leave the United States to search for greater racial tolerance abroad. The African-American newspaper *The Topeka Plaindealer* explained,

The belief of the Evening Post is that the excellent behavior, both at home and abroad, of our colored soldiers will have a beneficial effect upon the vexed race question in the future. What the Negro needs at home is not coddling but justice; justice in the courts, justice in the schools and justice in the world of business. He has proven himself a true blood American in time of war and true Americans will not forget it. (South Says Give Negroes A Chance in Schools, 1919).

Many African-American soldiers served in France during World War I and learned of the opportunities that were prevalent for African-Americans. After the war, they chose to return to Paris, instead of their homes in the United States.

One soldier, Eugene Bullard, was an example of African-Americans who seized opportunities that were not prevalent in the United States. Bullard left the United States for Paris in 1914 to fight in World War I for France. While in Paris, Bullard enrolled in aviation school, something that was unheard of for African-Americans in the United States. He, became the first African-American pilot. After his aviation training, he joined the Lafayette Flying Corps and fought for the Allies during World War I (Hodgers, 1983). When the war

ended, Bullard decided to continue living in Paris because of the unique opportunities that were present for African-Americans abroad as opposed to in the United States. Bullard continued gaining opportunities in Paris as he worked as a bandleader at Zelli's Zig Zag bar and operated the nightclubs *Le Grand Duc* and *L'Escadrille* ("Eugene Bullard, Ex-Pilot, Dead," 1961).

Another group who found distinctive opportunities in Paris during the war was the musicians in the 369th infantry, known as the *Harlem Hellfighters*. This distinctive group not only brought live jazz music to Europe, but also significantly fostered a strong relationship between the Parisians and African-Americans during the interwar period. When World War I began, Colonel William Hayward, a commander in the United States Army, approached James Reese Europe, a prominent jazz musician, to create a band with the top African-American musicians that would be used for recruitment purposes for the army. James Reese Europe expressed interest in creating the band, but explained that he would be unable to do so since the top musicians of the decade made more money playing music than they would if they were to join the army. Thus, Hayward contacted some of the wealthiest Americans in the United States during the decade and convinced them to donate to the creation of an army band. This fundraiser was widely successful; he was able to raise \$10,000 in donations, leading to the creation of an African-American jazz band for the U.S. Army.

Although the first purpose of the band was to lead recruitment parades, the 369th band left for Europe in 1919 with James Reese Europe as the bandleader, to help cheer up Allied soldiers abroad. Soon after they arrived, the band was invited to perform a concert in Paris with the top Allied bands including the British Grenadiers' Band, the band of the

Garde Républicaine and the Royal Italian Band. Although James Reese Europe's band was not as internationally recognized as the others, the audience fell in love with its unique jazz music, which juxtaposed the classical music the other national bands played. Europe explained, "We won France by playing music which was ours and not a pale imitation of others" (Europe, personal communications, n.d.). The concert was so successful that newspapers in both the United States and France commented on how exciting the jazz band was. *The Topeka Plaindealer* wrote, "When the band gave its first concert in Paris, the so called jazz features, made a great sensation, and Europe had to play in Paris for weeks" ("Europe, Jazz King, Slain by Drummer Herbert Wright," 1919). In the April 1919 *Literary Digest*, James Reese Europe recalled the moment his band became famous: "My band of course, could not compare with any of these, yet the crowd, and it was such a crowd as I never saw anywhere else in the world, deserted them for us." At the concert the jazz musicians were so popular that the bandleader of the Garde Républicaine approached Europe and insisted that he compose a jazz piece for the French band. The popularity of the 369th band on the international stage led to jazz music becoming increasingly prevalent in Europe.

As the war closed with an Allied victory, many of the original members of the band returned to the United States to continue their music careers at home. Although these musicians left, the love of jazz music in France grew, encouraging countless African-Americans to make the trip across the Atlantic to play jazz music for Parisians. In 1923, *The New York Times* published an article titled, "For US Jazz Players, Europe is the Place to be," which encouraged jazz musicians in the United States to travel to Europe for fame

and success in the music industry due to the widespread popularity of the African-American led music abroad. (Watrous, 1996)

This intense love of jazz music in Paris led many African-Americans abroad to try to fill the Parisians' request to have more jazz musicians in the city. In a 1919 article, *The Sun* exclaimed to its readers, "Jazz bands have been growing in popularity with a certain set here, and negro jazz players have been in great demand." As the Harlem Renaissance was emerging in New York City during the time period, many African-American musicians chose to move to New York to be part of the growing African-American culture. Yet on arrival, many of the musicians were unable to find work due to the large influx of musicians in the city and the small number of clubs available for African-American performers. As a result, many African-Americans left New York to find jobs in Paris. As musicians traveled to Paris from Harlem, the Harlem Renaissance's influence followed, creating a Parisian version of the renaissance abroad known as *Le Tumulte Noir* (Haskins, 1983, p. 107).

While France and its imperial possessions were hardly racial paradises, the relative racial tolerance exhibited in Paris allowed African-American jazz music to thrive across racial boundaries. In the United States, as jazz music was cited as "Negro culture," affluent white Americans often tried to mitigate its popularity. In 1921, a white woman in New York was caught listening to jazz music in her apartment and was brought to court for "disorderly conduct." Although the woman's neighbors heard her listening to jazz music, when she argued that it was classical music instead of jazz, the court sided in her favor since the music taste was "more appropriate." *The New York Tribune* covered the case and expressed how simply due to denying that she was listening to African-American music

she won the case. The article expanded, “No one put in even a word of defense of jazz. Only the devil’s advocate could do that.” (*New York Tribune*, 1923)

Because of the United States’ racial divisions, African-American musicians had trouble finding the success and popularity that they were able to find in France. In the same *New York Tribune* article, the author continued to explain the juxtaposition of jazz’s popularity in the United States and Europe:

Yet the worst of it is, we like [jazz.] Most of us are too cultured to admit it. Throughout our great land champions of culture without stint, culture to the utmost, tell us that jazz is an insidious toxin that eats into our moral and aesthetic fiber, but jazz is not without honor save in its own country. If this year you are joining the great trek to London and Paris, you may park your culture, if you [are] wise enough to arm yourself with a dozen or so of the jazziest records in captivity. Thus armed you may scale the dizzy heights of London and Paris society. (*New York Tribune*, 1921).

Throughout the 1920s, African-American musicians constantly traveled back and forth from Harlem to Paris, creating a unique musical bond between the two cities during the decade. Many African-American musicians used Paris for inspiration to write new music. This allowed many of the Parisian patrons to hear previews of music that was not yet released in the United States. In a 1921 article from a Kentucky newspaper, *The Public Ledger*, the author explained the interesting phenomenon of African-American jazz musicians writing in Paris:

It is an upside down world. We are sending ‘English tweeds’ to Australia and Paris is sending jazz ones to New York! Truly! Within the last two weeks, the products

of this latest French Industry has begun to arrive here; and they are the real thing. One of the latest songs from their boulevards is 'Paris qui Jazz,' which any member of the A.E.F. will tell you means 'Paris which jazzes.' And at least a half dozen others have begun to be heard about the environs of Broadway. (*The Public Ledger*, 1921)

Just as African-American musicians in the United States were receiving music from Paris, musicians were constantly arriving to Paris from New York, contributing to the continuous flow of new sheet music between the two cities (Bricktop, 1983, p. 120). Popular African-American cabaret singer and nightclub owner, Ada "Bricktop" Smith recalled this exchange in her memoir, *Bricktop*,

[Jazz] was all the rage in Paris in those middle twenties. A new sound in American music had both been because of the Harlem Renaissance, and all the great bands, like Duke Ellington's, that had gotten a chance for some exposure [in Paris]. (Bricktop, 1983, p. 120)

Although Paris was physically removed from the cultural success of the Harlem Renaissance, African-Americans in Paris directly contributed to its achievements. Paris provided a second city for African-Americans to find inspiration to both write and perform jazz music.

In 1923, third-class travel was created which allowed middle-class Americans the ability to travel to Europe. As travel to Paris became much more accessible to Americans, large influxes of white, middle -class Americans journeyed to Paris, causing U.S. race discrimination to follow with them. Many of the white American tourists would frequent Montmartre and Montparnasse, creating an "Americanized colony" of expatriates. Visitors

of these neighborhoods were known for not intermingling with the Parisians and for bringing their racist ideologies abroad. *The Negro Star* commented upon this unique racial problem due to the increase of American tourists in Paris.

American race prejudice is running into official songs in Paris as a result of the objection of white American tourists to dining in French restaurants where all are admitted without regard to color. The Americans declare that they will have things over here as they have them at home. They want to keep the American Negro in Paris in his place. ("They Aim in One Direction," 1923)

This issue became increasingly controversial throughout the decade as more American tourists came to the city. *The Negro Star* noted,

These latter... explained that they did not care what the French Negro did, they seldom saw or came in contact with one of them, but they would not stand for American Negroes, such as were kept in their 'place' at home, being admitted to an equality with them... The white Americans say that these Negro Americans are dancing with white women and everything else, in direct contradiction to the American spirit of 'you stay in your place. ("They Aim in One Direction," 1923).

In 1924, to help mitigate the American tourists' disdain of African-Americans abroad, the N.A.A.C.P. sent a large collection of African-American-authored books to the American Library in Paris. They felt that introducing these books to the popular tourist library in the city would help promote equality among all Americans in Paris regardless of their race. *The Broad Ax* newspaper from Salt Lake City, Utah covered the story:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 69 Fifth Avenue, New York, has sent a collection of books by colored authors about the

Negro to the American library in Paris which hopes by means of articles in its publication in French and other European magazines to present something of Negro culture and the Negro problem in their true light... The library is expected to be of service to members of scientific societies and tourists travelling in Europe.

(“MAACP Sends Books on Negro to American Library in Paris, 1924)

Although the N.A.A.C.P. tried to promote equality abroad, American tourists still continued to attempt to maintain their American-style racial discrimination in Paris.

Instead of ignoring white American tourists’ hatred of African-Americans, Parisians protected their African-American guests from some of the most extreme racial problems that popped up in the city. In 1923, *Time* magazine published “Foreign News: Jim Crow Tendency” which commented on the continuation of U.S. tourists discriminating against African-Americans. The article explained that at the New York Bar in Paris, the bar owner had been forcibly ejecting African-Americans from the club in order to appeal to the white Americans who came to the establishment. In response, the Chamber of Deputies had to question whether someone could be thrown out of an establishment due to race (an issue that was not prevalent prior to the Americans arriving) (Time Inc., 1923). In 1924, *The New York Times* published an article titled “Paris Restaurants Now Draw Color Line to Please Americans; Negro Deputy Protests.” The Parisians made clear that,

Now in France there is no color line. Generally speaking, white, black, brown and yellow get the same treatment or anyway are entitled to it ... Americans will never succeed in installing in France some of their customs which accord neither with the historic traditions, generosity of liberty and justice of our country. (James, 1924)

Despite warnings by the people of France that discrimination would not be accepted in Paris, American tourists continued to bring their racist ideologies abroad. In 1924, a club in an American neighborhood in Paris tried to throw out a group of interracial patrons who were dancing with each other. The club was brought to court for discriminating against the African-American patrons and was shut down. The court issued a statement stating, “discrimination against people of color will not be tolerated in France. Those who cannot observe this fact may leave France at all speed. France does not want the dollars of those who cannot respect her laws and customs” (Shack, 2001 p. 68). The Parisians were very stern that they would not allow Americans to come abroad and compromise the rights of African-Americans in the city.

Despite some French attempts to alleviate racial tensions between African-Americans and white Americans, racial discrimination still played a role in the lives of the African-Americans in the city. Paul Roberson, an American black musician in Paris, sought to divorce his wife for a white woman. Although this should not have been an issue, since interracial marriages were prevalent among African-Americans and Parisians, the racial animosity of his home country still played a role in his daily life. While in Paris, Cole Porter, his producer CB Cochran, and cabaret owner, Ada “Bricktop” Smith had to convince Roberson that if he left his wife for a white woman, his musical career would plummet, since he would be seen as controversial both by tourists in Paris and at home. Thus after long considerations he realized that he would not be able to divorce his wife to enter an interracial marriage (Shack, 2001 p. 128).

Benjamin Seldon, an African-American living in Paris, had a similar situation. In a 1926 letter from A. Clayton Powell to Benjamin Seldon, Powell advised him similarly against interracial marriage. In his letter he explained to his friend,

I think a man should marry the women of his choice regardless of color or racial identity, but I felt it my duty to say to the white men who are backing us and the Colored Committee that you had selected a French girl for a wife All except one felt that neither race would have taken kindly to you and your little partner because of racial prejudice in America. (Powell, Personal Communications, 1926)

Although it is uncertain how Seldon responded to this disapproval toward his engagement, it is evident that although interracial relationships were not uncommon within Paris, racial prejudices at home still played a role in the decisions made in African-Americans lives abroad.

Despite the influence of American racial ideologies in the city, many interracial couples chose to ignore American tourists and continued to take part in interracial marriages. Often these marriages took place between Parisian woman and African-American men. These relationships helped to intertwine cultures and created a strong bond between Parisians and African-Americans, while angering white American tourists who had negative viewpoints on the intermingling of the two races (Shack, 2004, p. 64). In a 1923 article from London's *The Times*, a British author observed the relationship between the two groups:

In excuse for the conduct on the part of visitors which is a breach of the amenities of French life, it should be pointed out that Americans have been specifically annoyed at finding negro emigrants of an undesirable class from the United States

flaunting about Paris restaurants in company with white women. ("No 'Colour' Line In France," 1923)

Throughout the decade, African-Americans were able to find opportunities that would likely not have existed in the United States. One of these success stories belonged to Ada “Bricktop” Smith, who became one of the most prominent and successful Americans in Paris during the decade. In 1924, Bricktop chose to open her own nightclub, *Le Grand Duc* to help foster the African-American talent that was arriving to Paris. Bricktop explained that, “opening up a new club wasn’t a big thing, really, except that I was new at it. Setting up in Paris at the time was easy. All I needed was a place. The furniture was already there” (Bricktop, 1983, p. 110). *Le Grand Duc* became a fixture for African-American musicians, with many musicians frequenting it the morning after their night gigs to exchange ideas and to unwind after work (Shack, 2001, p. 29).

Le Grand Duc became so popular that it became one of the top social spots in Paris for both Americans and Parisians, and was written about in popular French newspapers in both French and English. Bricktop was stunned by the recognition since clubs were not often written about in newspapers and it helped spread her name internationally (Bricktop, 1983, p. 94). African-American paper, *The New York Amsterdam*, wrote about her successes, “Bricktop is well known in the amusement centers of Europe ... where she sang and danced. She has entertained most of the crowned heads and titled folk, and taught dance steps to the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York” (“Bricktop Gave Party to Friends,” 1929). As her popularity rose, her friends encouraged her to change the name of her club from *Le Grande Duc* to *Chez Bricktop* so the club would always be associated with her since the French government kept trying to shut down nightclubs. She was told

that if she kept her name in the title, patrons would be able to find the club more easily if it needed to move venues to stay in business. Indeed, because of her popularity with Parisians and African-Americans, she was able to move her venue without losing any business. Her smart business skills led *The Chicago Defender* to call Bricktop “the proprietress of the smartest night club in Patee” (“Bricktop’s Happy Home,” 1927).

As her popularity grew, and prominent white Americans such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Cole Porter and Dwight Fiske included her as one of their closest friends, racial prejudice against Bricktop diminished. These relationships were so strong that Bricktop recalled, “I forgot racial prejudice existed.” Bricktop enjoyed her racial freedom and often talked to newspapers and magazines about her opportunities to be successful in Paris, despite being African-American. Bricktop was so open about her interracial relationships that in an interview for *Women’s Wear Daily* she told them, “I slept with both white men and black men ... I could dispel that myth about Negro men being the only ones who knew how to make love” (Bricktop, 1983, p. 131). Despite American tourists trying to promote racial discrimination in the city, African-Americans, such as Bricktop, from continued to express themselves in Paris.

Prominent members of the American expatriate community also began to frequent *Chez Bricktop*, giving Bricktop a powerful name in Paris. This power became useful when F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, were arrested for drunkenly swimming in a fountain. Fitzgerald pleaded with the police officer that he was a friend of Bricktop, and that he should not be arrested because of this prominent connection. Although the officer did not believe that someone who would bathe drunk in a fountain would know Bricktop, he gave in to curiosity to see if Bricktop would identify Fitzgerald as a friend. When

Bricktop verified their friendship, Fitzgerald was let go without any penalty. Bricktop was astonished that because of her name recognition she was able to help her friend escape legal troubles (Bricktop, 1983, p. 96).

In addition to her close friendship with F. Scott Fitzgerald, one of Bricktop's closest confidants in Paris was the songwriter Cole Porter. The first time Bricktop saw Porter she was singing one of his songs in Paris. Porter was notorious for leaving a club when a performer sang one of his songs, since he was particular about how it should be sung and never seemed to feel as though the singers were performing it correctly. Yet Bricktop caught Cole Porter's attention, and he stayed for the entire performance and congratulated her at the end (Bricktop, 1983, p.101). As their relationship expanded throughout the decade, Cole Porter became a popular performer at Chez Bricktop with his infamous double entendre lyrics (Bricktop, 1983, p. 123). One of the most popular of Cole Porter's songs was written for his musical *Paris* in 1928 "Let's Do It" was known for its infamous lines such as "And that's why birds do it, bees do it, even educated fleas do it, let's do it, let's fall in love." In addition to bringing jazz music to the fore, Chez Bricktop welcomed sexualizing lyrics and continued to push boundaries to keep her club modern and popular among Parisians and Americans alike.

As African-American jazz music continued to grow due to the opening of nightclubs such as *Chez Bricktop*, the music became slightly controversial in Paris as some Parisians felt that the new music was diminishing their classic French music. Despite thinking this, many Parisians believed that since jazz music was from the United States, it represented modernity, which was necessary for the country to strive for post World War I (Archer-Straw, 2000, p. 109). Many Parisians looked to music to help cheer them up and

as an outlet for their emotions related war. Malcolm Cowley, in his memoir *A Second Flowering*, recalled the beginnings of jazz music in Paris: “Jazz carried with it a content message of change, excitement, violent escape, with an undertone of sadness, but a promise of enjoyment somewhere around the corner next week...”(Cowley, 1951, p. 29). By using jazz music to help combat post-war emotions, Parisians were able to relate to one another in a more positive way.

As American culture, such as jazz music, spread throughout Paris, it sparked a great debate among Europeans, about whether they should embrace the American way or reject it to promote their own nationalist ideals (Iriye, 1993, p.109). Some Parisians tried to delegitimize jazz music to try and convert the French population back to their classical routes. As jazz music became controversial, as it was anti-nationalist, Parisians continued to listen to African-American music and strayed from their classical French musicians. Instead of fighting to keep classical music prevalent in French culture, Some Parisian musicians tried to adapt to the new jazz culture. Many had difficulty doing so because clubs were looking to hire black musicians due to the increased demand for authentic African-American performers. *The Savannah Tribune* noted that the French musicians “would gladly cast aside their violins and flutes with which they won first prize as virtuosos at the National Conservatory, and do the jazzing themselves with banjo, motor-car horn or any other instrument of moral torture to their artistic temperament. But their efforts are scorned by restaurant and dancing managers who tell them, ‘call again when you have changed the color of your skin’” (“Only Negro Jazz Pleases Paris French Musicians in Despair offer to Use Motor Horns,” 1922). This increased demand for African-American performers made

jazz music increasingly controversial since French musicians were losing their jobs to African-American jazz musicians.

When nationalist members of the French government complained that they were losing their national identity to an American one, there was a push in the early 1920s to remove American jazz musicians from France. Since jazz music was becoming increasingly popular in the country, French musicians were unable to find employment due to all music venues catering to the popularity of the African-American music. In May of 1924, the Parisian police attempted to remove jazz music from the country. *The New York Times* explained that:

Between twenty and thirty American and English jazz band musicians, working in the most fashionable and expensive night clubs of Paris and the French seaside and health resorts, received notice today that they must quit French soil within five days. Others are expecting a similar order tomorrow” (France Orders Our Jazz Players Expelled,” 1924).

Over time, French police attempted to clear the city of American music, starting with the popular American neighborhood of Montparnasse. In a 1927 newspaper article, the writer reflected upon the lack of jazz music in the neighborhood:

Pianos have actually been padlocked in carrying out the order, and the orchestra in the cafes, the Rotonde and the Dome, internationally known as a Montparnasse rendezvous, will be silent from now on. The popular impromptu musicals at the café Dingo and Select, dear to the hearts of American residents, will also have to be foregone (“Montparnasse Jazz is Stilled By Police,” 1927).

During the government's anti-jazz push, the jazz music program that had been playing from the Eiffel Tower since 1921 was replaced with government-sponsored classical programs. In March 1923, *The New York Times* broke the story that,

Promptly at the stroke of 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon, while the Eiffel Tower was in the midst of a program of classical music, the meddler, who is officially known as 'Zero Wireless Telephone Poet' broke in with a characterless interruption, 'Classical music is no good' said the voice speaking in English, 'let me give you some real music. ("American Radio Joker Bothers Eiffel Tower," 1923).

Attempts to end the popularity of African-American jazz during the decade failed, and jazz music remained a favorite among the Parisians. The desire for African-American performers by Parisians created a strong bond between the two groups throughout the decade. The bond between African-Americans and Parisians became so strong that despite attempts from the national government to remove the Americanized music to keep the country's national identity, the population ignored their government and kept listening to jazz music. In a 1922 article in *The New York Times*, "Warns Jazz Crazy will Ruin France," the author explained the conflict between the Parisians and their government:

"Nothing so far appears to have been able to abate the adoration of the jazz craze-not even the almost official condemnation and contempt on the occasion of the Cannes conference, when the Premier austere decided that diplomatic discussions must never again be carried on within hearing distance of the strains of colored musicians noisy instruments" ("Warns Jazz Craze will Ruin France," 1922).

Despite the French government's attempt to end the Americanization of Paris, the Parisian public continued to listen to African-American music and to leave their French classical music behind (Costilgoila, 1984, p. 168).

Through the influence of jazz, Parisians developed a strong love of black culture that they referred to as "négrophilie" (Shack, 2001, p. 64). Throughout the decade, black culture penetrated Parisian culture through music, art and dance revues, such as the 1925 revue, *La Revue Nègre* starring Josephine Baker. *La Revue Nègre* was successful and received positive reviews around the world including in *The New Yorker*, which stated, "Josephine Baker has arrived at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in *La Revue Nègre* and the result has been unanimous. Paris has never drawn a color line" (Flanner, 1972, p. 3). The show became an inspiration for African-American performers who saw that they were so popular with the Parisian population that African-Americans were able to support an entire show based upon their culture. Although there was an abundance of positive reviews for the show, some Parisians felt as though it was not "savage enough" and wanted the show to reflect their tribal and sexual stereotype of members of the French West African colonies (Boittin, 2010, p.4). To help promote herself and her show, Josephine Baker used these African stereotypes to help gain popularity with Parisians. Many of her performances featured her dancing widely to tribal music while wearing little clothing (Archer-Straw, 2000, p. 117).

Due to the popularization in Paris of black culture, African-American performers found a success that would not have been possible in the United States. In 1930 the African-American newspaper, *The Topeka Plaindealer* published an article titled, "Is Europe Heaven for Sepia Theatrical Stats? Sensational Reception of Colored Stage Stars in

Capitals Dwarfs Miniature Success Achieved in United States!!” In the article, the author described how African-American stars were able to gain popularity abroad due to the interest in African-American culture. The author cites Josephine Baker for her ability to break racial boundaries by becoming such a high-profile performer in Paris, something that would have been difficult to achieve in the United States. The author wrote,

Her rotating shoulders and hips before jazz-mad audiences have crowned her the queen of craziest and hottest rhythm ever seen in Sunny Spain or romantic Italy. She is still the toast of the continent and it has been said that she was the drawing card to the old world. Tall and slender, a teasing tantalizing brown, she has swept the men completely off their feet. Her string of admirers is composed of all classes, from waiters and bus boys to dukes and counts. Over here in America the name of Josephine Baker was entirely unknown. (1930)

The article concluded that the popularity of African-American performers abroad was due to opportunities in countries with an interest in African-American culture, even though Josephine Baker alluded more to African stereotypes than to African-American culture.

Due to the strong racial divide in the United States, African-Americans were unable to receive respect and significant opportunities. Because of this, many African-Americans went to Paris during the interwar period to find a haven to promote themselves. Once these individuals were able to break free from American cultural constraints, they gained widespread popularity abroad. Through jazz music, African-Americans created a strong connection with Parisians who fell in love with their music. This can be juxtaposed to the white resentment of jazz music in the United States, where although some white Americans

enjoyed jazz music, it was “uncultured” to say so. However, jazz’s popularity existed internationally in nightclubs such as *Chez Bricktop*, and through performances like *La Revue Nègre*. Although the United States was not ready for African-American cultural acceptance, the openness of the Parisian population to African-Americans, gave them chances to promote their cultural art forms while finding popularity for their culture.

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