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# Louis Douglas and Jonny spielt auf: performing Blackness in interwar Germany

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**LOUIS DOUGLAS AND *JONNY SPIELT AUF*:  
PERFORMING BLACKNESS IN INTERWAR GERMANY**

by

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B.A., Wesleyan University, 2009

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2018

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, “Louis Douglas and *Jonny spielt auf*: Performing Blackness in Interwar Germany,” traces the reception of traveling and expatriate Black American performers in Germany during the interwar period and the cultural productions made by Germans in response to this interaction with the New Negro Renaissance. The performances of Black Americans challenged German views of the European colonizer and the colonized Other. Blackness played an important role in altering conceptions of race and culture during one of the greatest transitions in modern Germany, framed by the extraordinarily open and heterogeneous aesthetic of the Weimar era on one end and the harsh racial stratification of the Nazi regime on the other. Black arts provided a deeply decentering experience, forcing Germans to reassess their conceptions of Black people.

Chapter One offers a theory of Black performance that explores how blackface minstrelsy became the referent for Black performance in the twentieth century. Chapter Two examines satirical magazines which introduced working and middle class Germans to Black people in the period between the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. Chapter Three reveals how the first Black American traveling revue, *The Chocolate*

*Kiddies*, altered German conceptions of Black identity through performances that highlighted the importance of the Great Migration and the performance culture of Harlem. Chapter Four introduces Louis Douglas, a Black American performer who helped to bring Josephine Baker to Europe, and created a revue designed to present Black Americans to French and German audiences. Chapter Five explores how Louis Douglas developed a persona of the modern Black dancer in Germany following Baker's return to France. Chapter Six examines Ernst Krenek's blackface "jazz opera" *Jonny spielt auf* as an exemplary German appropriation of the Black American male body showing how Krenek's opera created a transnational discourse on the modern Black American man.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	1
Chapter One .....	14
Is Blackness a Drag? .....	14
What a drag! .....	20
Guise, Attachment, and Assemblage .....	29
The New Negro Movement .....	40
Black Kultur.....	55
Conclusion .....	61
Chapter Two.....	66
German <i>Witzblätter</i> and the Paradox of Racist Anti-Colonialism.....	66
Kladderadatsch and the Ambivalence of Colonialism .....	72
Frenzied Pitch .....	79
A Flood of Black Bodies .....	93
Beyond the Borders of Europe .....	108
Chapter Three .....	113
Moving to Harlem: Teaching Germans to be Modern .....	113
From Plant Plays to Great Migration Movement .....	11;
The New Negro Comes to Germany .....	128
Analyzing Raving Delights.....	135
The Transfiguration of Jazz .....	144
The Black Wave.....	147
“Whistle me a few bars” .....	155
Intimate Attachments.....	17:
Conclusion .....	164
CHAPTER FOUR: .....	168
Louis Douglas: A Hybrid Harlequin.....	168
Up to the Revue.....	173
Connections .....	180
Enter Baker .....	186
Coming to Germany .....	199
Conclusion .....	203
CHAPTER FIVE .....	209
Louis Douglas: The Image of the Modern .....	209
“One has to admit that this character, Louis Douglas, got talent” .....	211
“The Last of the Niggers” .....	219
“The rhythm of our time is the Blues” .....	222
Cigarette Cards.....	225
“At Home All Over the World” .....	231
Out of Step.....	248
Chapter Six:.....	261

<b>Krenek and the Height of Germany’s Negro Vogue.....</b>	<b>256</b>
<b>Krenek’s Life .....</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>“Everything of value in the world is mine” .....</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>Creating a Stage for the Modern .....</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>What’s in a name? .....</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>Coming to Amerika .....</b>	<b>284</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>297</b>
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>299</b>
<b>CURRICULUM VITAE .....</b>	<b>307</b>

## INTRODUCTION

In 1925, months before Josephine Baker took Paris by storm in *la Revue nègre*, another Black American revue, *The Chocolate Kiddies*, debuted in Berlin. The revue introduced German audiences to a major American historical event—the Great Migration. These veteran Black performers brought their audience on a journey that began on the plantation of the American South, and ended in the urban North, culminating in a Harlem nightclub. *The Chocolate Kiddies* not only brought jazz to the German stage, but also took their audience on a tour through the traditions of Black performance. In the aftermath of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, German newspapers reported contact with a strange new culture they had not known existed. The worldview they presented was unlike anything Germany had seen, and articles in German newspapers attest to the great excitement generated by these performances.

On the heels of the *The Chocolate Kiddies*' tour, Black modernity continued to attract artists and audiences in the German cultural arena. Two men carried the torch, Louis Douglas and Ernst Krenek. The name of the Black Philadelphia-born actor, dancer, and choreographer was unfamiliar to the majority of Americans of his day, but Louis Douglas, the most influential Black performer in interwar Germany, was well-known among the German intelligentsia and on the popular entertainment circuit. Douglas had spent almost his entire life in Europe. Having performed throughout Europe as a child, he had assimilated the various traditions of continental Europe into his repertoire, including the resurgent popularity of the *commedia dell'arte* in England. Bringing the *commedia*

together with Black theater traditions, Douglas was able to create something new for his audiences. This ability to combine African-American modern cultural tropes with those he had grown familiar with in Europe contributed to his success on the German stage. In 1924, Douglas choreographed *la Revue nègre*, performing as Josephine Baker's partner. While *la Revue nègre* launched Baker to stardom in France, Douglas found a home in Germany, where he took up residence in 1926 and remained until his ouster in 1933.

In contrast to the transnational circuits that the cosmopolitan Douglas traveled for most of his life, the Austrian-born Ernst Krenek became the greatest proponent of Black modernity within the German-speaking world. Like others in Germany, he was first exposed to Black culture by *The Chocolate Kiddies* in early 1926. Inspired by their performance, he set out to create his own vision of Black modernity in his opera *Jonny spielt auf*. Depicting a German composer, Max, and his collaboration with a Black American musician, Jonny, the opera showed Germans how a Black American modernity might revitalize a European culture in decline. Indeed, the opera went so far as to challenge audiences to view Black Americans as culturally superior to Germans and worthy of emulation. This ultimate challenge was made abundantly clear to audiences by the opera's final scene which presented Jonny atop a globe of the world, with the men and women of Europe dancing below him, and Max in transit to America. Together, Louis Douglas and Ernst Krenek provide models for the fate of Black American modernity in interwar Germany.

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My dissertation, “Louis Douglas and *Jonny spielt auf*, Performing Blackness in Interwar Germany,” traces this popular reception of Black American performers in Germany during the interwar period. Black entertainers were a staple of German stages, bringing with them complex conceptualizations of Black American culture that affected how Germans thought of Black people. Prior to the First World War, the only exposure Germans had had to Black people was as subservient colonial subjects in Africa; the introduction of modern Black culture forced Germans to reconsider the prevailing dichotomy between colonizer and the colonized. This occurred during one of the greatest transitions of modern German history, where the social hierarchy of the German Empire was replaced by the liberal democracy of the Weimar Republic. The response from German critics, intellectuals, and musicians reveal a complex understanding of Black Americans. For many in Germany, these Black dancers, singers, and musicians actively broke through German preconceptions of “Neger.” In response, German artists, writers, composers, and film and stage directors replicated and emulated the New Negro Renaissance.

This dissertation exposes the conditions after the First World War in America and Germany that made the careers of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, Louis Douglas, and Ernst Krenek possible. At the end of the war, both Black Americans and Germans faced a previously unimaginable future. For Black Americans, their treatment by French officers, soldiers, and civilians opened up the possibility to a world without “race prejudice.” Returning to the United States after experiencing the respect of French people, Black soldiers were in a position to foster racial pride. In American cities, and New York’s

Harlem in particular, an explosion in the arts contributed to this growing sense of cultural potency, challenging American assumptions about Black Americans and their culture. During this same period, in contrast, military defeat had shaken Germany to the core. While some Germans were appalled by the new art coming out of Weimar, a new generation of German intellectuals and artists committed themselves to the potential of external cultural influences to invigorate German society.

This dissertation draws on a variety of printed sources, in particular the popular urban press of Weimar Germany, to reveal the role Black culture played in German interwar life. The opinions in the German press ranged widely. Many commentators were professional or aspirational music critics. Others hoped to discover the next big thing, and believed that Black modernity might be it. Some saw the presence of Black Americans in their country as a sure sign of their country's cultural death. Despite the diversity of opinion and differing readerships, they gave voice to a belief that Black culture, for good or for ill, had real contributions to make to contemporary German life. And despite the variety of opinions, there was one basic point upon which all agreed: that Black Americans were modern and urban.

The German press did not come to this conclusion on its own. Black Americans used the stage to teach their audiences about the unique world that Black Americans emerged from and represented. Indeed, *The Chocolate Kiddies* performance for German audiences in 1925 was part of a long American tradition of Black theater as pedagogy. At the turn of the century, Black artists began to make headway on Broadway with musical comedies such as *Clorindy, or the Origins of the Cake Walk* and *In Dahomey*. However,

it would not be until after the First World War that Black theater became part of the American mainstream. The flourishing Harlem scene gave birth to *Shuffle Along*, a musical that legitimized Black theater with its all-Black producers, writers and cast. The show had an unprecedented run that reinforced for American audiences what many within Black communities of the United States already knew, Black Americans had their own traditions and folkways. Including several performers from *Shuffle Along*, *The Chocolate Kiddies* elicited a similar response from German audiences. But it was the sights and sounds of urban modernity represented by Black performers that struck German audiences as innovative.

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This dissertation expands our understanding of the New Negro Renaissance by looking beyond the well-known centers of the African diaspora. In so doing, I expose the dynamic relationship between identity and environment that reveals how the contours of the Renaissance extended well beyond the customary locales of Harlem and Paris. My approach here is a deliberate response to Minkah Makalani's appeal to scholars of diaspora studies that they recognize the transnational formations at the heart of the African diaspora.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on archival resources from Germany, Austria, and the United States, especially newspapers, magazines, and films from the Weimar era, the dissertation reveals how the interactions between Black Americans and Germans helped to energize both Black American and German culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, 11.

Black and German cultural contact bears comparison with the role in of Black American performance in France. In “Negrophilia,” Petrine Archer-Straw shows how Black culture, influenced and shaped the creation of modernist movements in interwar Paris. Artists such as Pablo Picasso and Man Ray were major collectors of African art, and their influence on the Parisian art scene helped to make a Black aesthetic popular. They and others believed French culture should be inspired by the alleged primitive elements of Black culture, even as they actively excluded Black artists. Similarly, Jeffrey H. Jackson views World War I as a watershed moment for jazz acculturation in France.<sup>2</sup> French artists positioned Black American culture as the inverse of what they saw as an overly refined French culture. Archer-Straw and Jackson’s approaches to diaspora scholarship are useful as testimonies of European understanding and experience of Black cultures. Yet their focus implies that France was the only country open to Black American expatriates, and that there were no other models of how Europeans responded to Black Americans.

Douglas’s navigation of international stages echoes the biography of the Bahamian performer Bert Williams. Described in Louis Chude-Sokei’s *The Last Darky*, Williams became a recognized star of New York stages and film prior to the First World War. One of the last performers to wear blackface, his role as the “darky” allowed him to have crossover success with white and Black audiences. Yet as a Bahamian in the United States, what Chude-Sokei uncovers is an individual at once part of the African diaspora yet distant from the role and culture he performs on the stage. Williams navigated a

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<sup>2</sup> Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 14-20.

country that was not his home and a stage where he was performing an identity he did not claim. Williams constructed and existed at the intersection between the two, creating at once an authentic Black performance *and* representative act that altered the landscape for Black performers in the early twentieth-century.<sup>3</sup> Williams was instrumental in establishing a communal space in 1906 that was open to other black theater and musical performers. This group became, in Chude-Sokei's words, a "proto-renaissance movement" for "liberating the entire tradition of African American performance and literature by making the break from minstrelsy."<sup>4</sup> Williams' career peaked when he joined the Ziegfeld Follies, racially integrating the famous entertainment group. Chude-Sokei situates this successful act as opening the groundwork for the New Negro Renaissance—a movement that would eventually sideline Williams for the act of integrating blackface, revealing a complex history that elucidates a biography through the context of the turn of the twentieth-century. This career of navigation and the creation of a Black cultural movement prior to the First World War, reflect the similar support network that Douglas created throughout his life, permitting him not only to navigate unfamiliar countries but also to adapt his stage craft while maintaining a connection to the African diaspora.

Eric Lott's *Love and Theft* helps to reveal how German interwar emulation of Black culture evokes American experiences of Black urbanity in the nineteenth-century. Lott positions white American interest in Black culture as part of a unique to urban

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<sup>3</sup> Chude-Sokei, *The Last Darky*, 61-63.

<sup>4</sup> Chude-Sokei, *The Last Darky*, 26-27.

environments, where white observations of Black life fostered the creation of the minstrel tradition. However, Lott quickly notes that appropriation and “raw commodification” was at the heart of the exchange.<sup>5</sup> Instead of advancing the commonly held story that whites travelled to the South to develop their repertoire, Lott believes that many working class men relied on their own urban experiences of Black community and culture. Even when Black people performed for white audiences, the understanding among observers remained rooted in analogies to slavery as the true environment for Black people in America. In response, minstrelsy shows reflected southern living, even as the root material was thoroughly urban. As we will see, a similar commodification occurred in Germany, where Black performers became the basis for German fantasies of interracial desire and, importantly, as models for Germans to emulate. However, in their emulation, they no longer looked to American slavery, but to the changes brought on by the Great Migration. Seeing Black performances that centered on urban life led Ernst Krenek and others to replicate Black urbanism. It is by using Lott’s model, that we also discover how Europeans took on Black performance for their own means. Without a doubt, this form of exchange is similarly built upon new racist caricatures out of Black performance, just as the minstrel tradition was built upon.

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My first chapter offers a theory of Black performance that explores how blackface minstrelsy became the referent for Black art and culture in the twentieth-century. I argue that a deeper understanding of blackface minstrelsy in American popular culture enables

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<sup>5</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*, 40.

a more thorough exploration of race and performativity. In the last three decades, gender studies and queer theory have built upon the work of Judith Butler, particularly her work on “drag” and gender performativity. However, few studies have recognized that the same nineteenth-century cultural milieu that gave birth to drag performance also gave birth to blackface minstrelsy. Bringing blackface front and center in our understanding of performance culture can help us rethink approaches to Black performance history. Attempts to downplay or ignore the racist past have prevented a complex conceptualization of race in cultural studies. Minstrelsy was in fact a constant reference for Black performance in the modern period. As I show, this has a direct effect on how Black intellectuals in the 1920s formulated ideas about the New Negro.

My second chapter examines German discourses about Black people, centering on German responses to African colonialism before the First World War. Contemporary studies of colonialism posit a European whose understanding of race was informed principally by commodities that appealed to the citizen-as-consumer and spread a message of colonial beneficence. Yet, these were not the only narratives that Germans encountered. Satirical magazines prior to the First World War introduced working- and white collar Germans to a colonialism that was concerned with its relationship to Germany. In the decade-old German empire, satirical magazines articulated anxiety toward an increasingly modern and industrialized nation in part through images of the colonial encounter. I then show how, in the wake of the First World War, German satirical magazines changed their attitude toward the African subject. As part of the Treaty of Versailles, France occupied the German Rhineland, relying on its own colonial

African soldiers. In response to this affront, a multifaceted propaganda campaign, the “Black Shame on the Rhine,” depicted Africans as monstrous rapists prowling the countryside. In the face of a declining readership, satirical magazines joined in a racist campaign against the fictional mistreatment of Germans by Black soldiers. This racist campaign, as I demonstrate in my chapter’s conclusion, brought Germany to the attention of Black intellectuals, including A. Philip Randolph and Claude McKay, who hoped that Black people would be able to re-educate Germans with propaganda of their own.

In chapter three, I show how *The Chocolate Kiddies* fulfilled Randolph and McKay’s call for new images of Black people in Germany. Touring Germany, *The Chocolate Kiddies* presented “migration plays” that revealed the geographic and temporal progress that Black Americans had made since the end of American slavery. The production took audiences from the the stereotypical and familiar plantation to Harlem nightclubs, offering a new conception of Black identity that Germans took seriously. Review after review made one thing clear: these Black performers were nothing like African soldiers in the Rhineland. Such performances confronted German conceptions of Black identity, highlighting the importance of the Great Migration and the performance culture of Harlem. Another effect of *The Chocolate Kiddies* was its introduction of Black culture into German popular culture such as satirical magazines, news articles, and fictional short stories. For Germans who never saw a single performance, there were magazines and newspapers filled with stories of Harlem nights and jazz recordings.

Chapter four turns to Louis Douglas and his early years on European stages prior to his move to Berlin in 1926. I show how Douglas’s childhood on European stages

provided Douglas with a wellspring of resources: new forms of drama and dance, as well as the invaluable recognition that Europeans were deeply interested in Black culture. I show how the *harlequinade* became an important part of his performance, and how Douglas hybridized the *harlequinade* with Black dance forms to create something new when he danced with Josephine Baker in *la Revue nègre* in 1925. Although French audiences were dazzled by Baker's performance of the primitive, German audiences saw something uniquely appealing in Douglas—a modern innovativeness that they had already begun to associate with Black Americans, thanks to *The Chocolate Kiddies*. Douglas found a receptive audience for his “jazz harlequin,” so much so that when Baker returned to Paris, Douglas stayed in Germany.

Chapter five explores how Douglas developed his persona as a modern Black dancer in Germany during the interwar years. Douglas flourished in Germany, where he represented himself as the living expression of Black culture to German audiences. For the first time, he directed his own stage productions, depicting stories based on Black tradition and the *commedia*, again hybridizing two cultures. Yet his crowning achievement was his final film appearance in *Niemandland*, which appeared 1931, just as the Nazis were gaining electoral seats in the Reichstag. I show how *Niemandland* offers the battlefield of First World War as a site of reconciliation between soldiers from both sides of the conflict. This reconciliation, I argue, is only possible through the intervention of Douglas's character, Joe Smiles, who teaches his brothers-in-arms that the war has destroyed their humanity. Due to his race and the message of racial inclusion in

his final film, the Nazi dictatorship banished Douglas from Germany in 1933. After returning to the United States, he died in obscurity.

The dissertation concludes with an examination of how *The Chocolate Kiddies* influenced the creation of Ernst Krenek's autobiographical 1927 opera, *Jonny spielt auf*. Built on the powerful message of Black performers, Krenek's opera, like *The Chocolate Kiddies* stages the challenge of Europeans accepting the importance of Black modernity. Reproducing his own contact with Black modernism for his audience, Krenek dramatizes the way that meeting the Black American musician Jonny upends the career and life of the opera's hero, a composer named Max. Yet in his actions, Jonny teaches Max to live not with the hopes of pleasing others, but for himself alone. Despite this positive affirmation at the heart of the opera, *Jonny spielt auf* relies on white singers wearing blackface in performing the role of Jonny. I argue that the opera should not be seen merely as a recapitulation back to American blackface stereotypes, however, but as offering a new model of Blackness to modern European, as well as American, cultures. German and Austrian audiences understood this and saw Jonny as a challenge to European cultural hegemony. Yet, where Krenek's opera encouraged audiences in Germany and Austria with considerable success to view Black American culture as a means of cultural renewal, American audiences reinterpreted the opera and its use of blackface in terms of backward minstrel tropes of the nineteenth-century, and largely rejected it as a result.

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This dissertation offers Germany as a new outpost for the New Negro Renaissance. Black Americans since Reconstruction have always navigated stages to present their culture in environments of racial hatred and indifference. To be sure, Black performers in Germany performed with their audience in mind, as did Josephine Baker in France and Duke Ellington in the Cotton Club. Germans were indeed aware that they were being catered to, but that did not alter their conviction that they were viewing authentic Black American cultural practices, nor did the Black American performers think they were peddling outmoded stereotypes. For Black Americans, the stage had long been a place of transformation, where unique and vibrant practices were created before unsympathetic but ultimately receptive white audiences. Thus in the chapters ahead, I reveal the frontiers of the New Negro Renaissance that went beyond Paris, crossing the Rhine, influencing a generation of German artists and intellectuals—audiences that, however inadvertently, indifferently, or ambivalently ended up supporting the development of Black modernity.

## Chapter One

### Is Blackness a Drag?

Shit, there ain't a white man in this room that would change places with me. None of you would change places with me. And I'm rich! That's how good it is to be white. There's a white, one-legged busboy in here right now...that won't change places with my Black ass. He's going, "No, man, I don't wanna switch. I wanna ride this white thing out. See where it takes me." That's right, cause when you white, the sky's the limit. When you Black, the limit's the sky!

-Chris Rock, *Bigger and Blacker*

You know, deep down inside, I think you wish you were Black.

-*Do the Right Thing*

In his irreverent and iconoclastic style, Chris Rock's standup special *Bigger and Blacker* speaks to race, disability, and class, to suggest that a white busboy would never want to change places with a highly successful and wealthy Black male entertainer; being Black is being in the lowest class, with a true disability. Yet Blackness is not simply the worst of all possible identities. In Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, one of the most powerful scenes of the film occurs when Mookie (Lee) pulls Pino (John Turturro) aside for a private conversation. Discussing Pino's favorite entertainers, (Magic Johnson, Eddie Murphy, and Prince), Mookie suggests that perhaps Pino wishes to be Black. Pino counters that of course he does not want to be Black. Having read Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and Louis Farrakhan, Pino laughs at the farcical idea of a former African kingdom and the

incomprehensible possibilities of a future Black politic. Tellingly, Pino lists an athlete, an actor, and a musician as his favorites, all Black male celebrities.

Pressed on the issue of his own racism and how he could admire these Black men but call the Black Americans of his own neighborhood niggers, he responds, “it’s different” stammering, “Magic, Eddie, Prince are not niggers, I mean they’re not Black. I mean... Let me explain myself they’re not *really* Black. I mean they’re Black but they’re not really Black, they’re more than Black. It’s different.” Pino’s racial confusion makes clear that Pino only wants parts of Blackness: Johnson’s athleticism, Murphy’s wit, and Prince’s musicality. Each part of Pino’s desire is attached to a racialized object, a part of Blackness that is greater than the whole—the “more than Black” allowing him to ignore the real politics of Black American struggles. Indeed, unlike Mookie, Rock points to the divide as clearly as Pino—the wholeness of Blackness cannot be envied in the way that the parts are loved. Changing places is grounded in a partiality, where Blackness can be embodied through acts, gestures, and speech, without the danger of a Black totality—a “full” body.

Blackness is a drag. By this, I mean is a performance bound not only in the racial constellations of minstrelsy but importantly in the ways that gender is always a concomitant element when looking at Black bodies. Blackness is also a drag that has hindered a distinct group of people from achieving a significant amount of material equality afforded to other groups. It has made “the limit the sky.” Yet, I do not wish to talk about this obstruction as it has been politically coordinated through the chattel slavery, Jim Crow, or extrajudicial lynchings. Instead to discuss the other weight on

Black individuals, an almost literal figure fettered to the Black American experience: the blackface minstrel.

This chapter theorizes a framework for discussing a racial epistemology and ontology within the United States. By looking to the double meaning of drag as a hindrance and as a racial performance, I suggest that minstrelsy marked race—making it knowable—and indeed that the minstrel was a founding figure for twentieth-century popular culture and Black liberation struggles. Although scholarship by Houston A. Baker Jr., Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Michael North has focused on the minstrel and the masquerade, it limits understanding racial performativity to dialect or what Baker calls “soundings.”<sup>1</sup> The drag was not simply the Black mask and its voice but the accompanying clothing, hair, movements, sexuality, and space that constructed the points in which whites and blacks contended over the nature of Blackness in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>2</sup> The ways that Lee’s characters separate entertainment from the political indicate the divide between the better “more than Black” and unfathomable dream of Black political power. Black as entertainer—as the body on the stage to be admired, desired, and consumed—becomes the representation of Black people, locating the position for which Black people should situate their bodies. The drag reveals the minstrel double that does the work of Blackness.

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, xvi, 43; Gates, “The Trope of the New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” 133, 135.

<sup>2</sup> Baker explicitly suggests these but comes back to “soundings” as framing a significant part of his argument.

This chapter shows Black Americans navigate and survive white supremacist logic through invocations of blackface minstrelsy. And as a side effect the minstrel becomes the root of white perceptions of “acting Black.” At stake then is a racial-sexual disordering that places the minstrel as the contested ground of Black culture—the American culture. If the minstrel is the root of understandings of Black culture, then a theory of Black culture and intellectual thought places one of its pillars of liberation on a white creation. To put it another way, Black art is inherently political in that it must constantly challenge the minstrel. We know that the minstrel is not a real identity but rather a figment of white supremacist fantasies. But it is simultaneously a simplified representation of the Black person, a person frequently the target devalued and marked for death within white supremacy as well.<sup>3</sup> It is without a doubt the minstrel figure by whites that is always presently placed over Black bodies to mark their degeneracy and their subhuman status. Yet, from the perspective of a Black liberatory struggle, this same figure is attacked with the hope of leaving the body underneath untouched.

Black intellectuals in the wake of the First World War thought about what it would mean to create Black identity without relying on ideas created by white people. In the early twentieth-century Black political and intellectual thought bound its foundation to the performative qualities of the minstrel figure. Using racial drag as a framing theory, I uncover how the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance relied upon racist conceptions of music and dance in their formation of Black identity. Allowing Black people to claim the arts as a distinct part of a Black American politics simultaneously

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<sup>3</sup> Mizruchi, *The Science of Sacrifice*, 287.

continued to offer white people access to Blackness. As audience members to performances and consumers of music recordings, the sights and sounds of Black culture continued to be accessible to white people into the twentieth-century even as blackface phased into an irregular and obscure practice. Indeed, Black intellectuals wishing to rupture the epistemics of Blackness away from ideas and images of blackface minstrelsy coined several new terms, the most important being the New Negro. A discourse of a national and indeed transnational people emerged from the First World War, positing a new Black identity. A new Black public sphere emerged from the triumph of the Allies against the Central Powers in which Black Americans and Black colonial subjects of France were deployed across Europe.<sup>4</sup> However, the race riots of 1919 in Chicago and other American cities revealed the limits of civil equality in exchange for military service. Still, the race riots exposed the willingness of Black Americans to fight back against racial violence. Out of the triumph of 1918 and the failure of 1919, Black political magazines put forward a new terminology of Black American identity, the New Negro. However, in its naming of a new kind of self-conscious persona, Black intellectuals argued over who counted in this new cohort. In doing so, each writer positioned their conception of the New Negro against other Black Americans. In this burgeoning magazine culture, a concern for the visibility of Black people to white observers becomes an important consideration for Black readers and writers alike. Evoking W.E.B. DuBois,

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<sup>4</sup> 350,000 Black Americans and 450,000 French African colonial troops fought for the Allies against the Central Powers. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, “African American Soldiers (USA)” and “Colonial Military Participation in Europe (Africa).”

often directly, writers actively responded to his claim that between white and Black Americans “there is little or no intellectual commerce.”<sup>5</sup> The New Negro, they suggested, must not only lead Black Americans but also become visible sources for white Americans to rethink Blackness. Yet, foundational to this modernism was the Old Negro—the minstrel—that had to be distanced and disparaged. The New Negro had to counter the Old Negro by outperforming him, replacing him, and substituting himself in the place of the Old Negro—not only through tropes of dignity and respectability, but through metaphorically taking up the stage that had once belonged to the Old Negro.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as each Black publication argued for its own definition of a new modern Black identity, a slippage between disparaging Black rivals and the specter of the Old Negro collapsed into each other. The visibility of minstrel tropes and bad Blacks meant that each side in this contentious fight for representation had to figure Black intellectual rivals *as* minstrels—figures fooling Black people and, further, misrepresenting the Black race to white people.

As we will see in the following chapters, the appeal of New Negro art practices beyond the boundaries of Harlem and indeed the United States played upon the framing of this new cultural movement. Germans, in particular, saw Black America’s appeal as an emergent modern culture. Black Americans during the interwar period bound the concepts racial identity, history, nationality, and civilization in a similar constellation to

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<sup>5</sup> DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 133.

<sup>6</sup> Newbell Niles Puckett’s *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* is a contemporary sociological work that similarly tried to maneuver conversations about Black American racial extinction to “a study of acculturation.” See Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro*.

German *Kultur*. in which culture of the individual reflected their place in the world. Formulated by W.E.B. DuBois after his doctoral studies in Germany, many Black intellectuals look to this model of culture that was distinct from ideas of a mass produced culture. I conclude this chapter by framing the Harlem Renaissance through this distinct German term. German theorist Theodor Adorno saw a dialectical problem in the creation of the *Kulturindustrie*. I frame the limited citizenship of Black Americans as deeply affecting how Black intellectuals discussed the arts. Capitalism, according to Adorno, perverted culture into a model of production in a bourgeois liberal life, based on what was marketable and consumable: *Kultur* reflected the experienced of life. Although many Black artists and intellectuals suggested the New Negro was integral to America and that America was integral to the New Negro, many viewed the New Negro outside the realm of cultural producers and instead as a modern civilization with a distinct past and future expressed in the arts. I integrate this term into this chapter to move into the larger project of how Germans viewed the introduction of Black American culture into their society. To this end, the chapter concludes with an analysis of *The New Negro Anthology* through the contrast between reflective *Kultur* and mass culture.

### *I*

#### **What a drag!**

As a form of popular 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture based on impersonation, parody, and impression, and, above all, based on the institution of slavery, blackface minstrelsy is bound to that other impersonal, the drag performance. Blackface and drag's complex set of symbols, gestures, and acts and their parallel emergence on 19<sup>th</sup>-century stages in the Atlantic world reflect the concomitant significance of marking and designating raced and

gendered bodies. Indeed, where England's drag culture had developed from the Renaissance-period boy players and music hall traditions, American drag culture developed partially from minstrelsy.<sup>7</sup> The oft-white male performer-observer binds the traditions of minstrelsy and drag culture together despite the difference in presentation, and acceptability. That is, I wish to suggest their formation was contingent on the power white men had in terms of public space and a hierarchical system of personhood that placed themselves above all others as full citizens. Both minstrelsy and drag relied on the power of white men to observe race and gendered types in the creation of stage performance.

It is telling that burlesque, drag, blackface, and vaudeville, with the emergence of a Black performance culture and the exponential inclusion of women in theater in the latter-half of the nineteenth-century intersect, but the ability to speak to their mutual history has had difficulty adhering together as a shared narrative. Robert G. Allen's history of burlesque, *Horrible Prettiness* takes stock of burlesque's gender component while negating its use of minstrels in late nineteenth-century American performance culture,

Burlesque is emblematic of the way that popular entertainment becomes an arena for "acting out" cultural contradictions and even contestations and is exemplary of the complexities and ambiguities of this process. It is of particular historical import because its organizing problematic is gender.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ullman, *Sex Seen*, 49. Although, as Lawrence W. Levine reveals Shakespeare and minstrelsy have a complicated history in the United States. See Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*.

<sup>8</sup> Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 26.

Still, some research has been key in divulging the connection of blackface to drag and the connective performance of race and gender. Sharon R. Ullman's *Sex Seen* provides a key element for understanding this shift at the turn of the century,

Minstrel shows are remembered most for their caricatures of African American men, yet African American women were hardly immune. Many of the famed female impersonators of the period got their start on the minstrel-show circuit, playing black women, and their characterizations of white women drew forth interesting comparisons.

Siobhan B. Somerville's exemplary work offers a throughway of understanding the performative intersections of blackface and drag. As she argues the late nineteenth-century proved an area of contestation in American discourses of racial and sexual identity.<sup>9</sup> Yet it is not only in the problematic of gender and answering what constitutes one's gendered identity but the similar question of how race defines one's gender.

If Judith Butler, the architect of the study of gender performance, positions performativity through drag's ability to exaggerate, parody, and overemphasize the gendered body to reveal bodily acts as prescriptive, I posit that the minstrel functions in similar performative terms. To paraphrase Butler directly: race is instituted through the stylization of the body and must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding raced self.<sup>10</sup> By using the term performativity, I not only wish to rely on what

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<sup>9</sup> Somerville, *Queering the Colorline*, 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> "...gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self." Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," 519. Since Butler is coming from a philosophical tradition in her writing, "mundane" must be

Butler calls repeated bodily rituals that become naturalized and essential attachments to the body, but to the constant struggle in which one attempts to decouple and distance oneself from that body. That is, as white performers made claim to Black performance practices—what Eric Lott calls a “love and theft”—Black people had to operate and suggest different locations for performance as well as places in which they could not be observed. The need for Black-only sites came from a desire to disavow ideas of race coopted by white performers.<sup>11</sup>

Louis Chude-Sokei in particular suggests that Bert Williams, one of the most famous Black performers to perform in blackface, took the well known concept of “the specularity of the white viewer” and took its performative possibilities as “the site of all manner of racial and ethnic impersonations, and the site of all manner of sexual cross-dressing and drag.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in describing Ada Overton Walker taking over her husband’s role as William’s partner, Chude-Sokei makes this passing observation of Ada’s impersonating her husband in the traditions of minstrelsy and drag:

In a performance tradition in which gender-impersonation was paralleled by and often deployed in tandem with racial impersonation, this move to perform her husbands’ persona must stand for something in the evolution of the contemporary discourses of drag, performance, race, gender, and minstrelsy.<sup>13</sup>

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understood to refer to the “worldly” and not to the more colloquial usage that would imply “boring” or “trivial”

<sup>11</sup> Lott’s work on minstrelsy, like Ullman’s work on drag views their nineteenth-century emergence as a way for white men to create public space. Lott, *Love and Theft*.

<sup>12</sup> Chude-Sokei, *The Last ‘Darky’*, 34-36.

<sup>13</sup> Chude-Sokei, *The Last ‘Darky’*, 24.

With this in mind, let me qualify the notion of racial performativity. Butler's 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* explicitly cautions against race and gender as easily analogous terms.<sup>14</sup> Yet the sites she marks for pleasure and transgression for the "transvestite on the stage" against "the bus" denies how the racial subject upends the relations of gendered pleasure and transgression.<sup>15</sup> As much as Butler suggests that one can say "this is just an act" while watching a staged performance, it is untrue that any Black American could watch the minstrel on the stage (or the important site of the bus) and view it as "just an act."<sup>16</sup> One is not gendered alone but raced. Race plays with and upon gender. The demarcation of stage and audience, of an imagined us and them, ignores the power relations that white masculinity can claim over racial and gendered categories.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the condemnation of blackface and the celebration of drag's progressive possibilities as a clear divide troubles me. Cultures of drag have not been accused of contending against American gay or feminist communities to the extent that blackface minstrelsy as a *racial* drag has become foundational in Black political struggles.<sup>18</sup> Indeed the anger and vitriol that Spike Lee has leveled against director and actor Tyler Perry has much to do with cross-dressing as it does with playing a minstrel. Perry's role as Madea has been seen as a reinscription of the mammy-type by Spike Lee. Perry's Madea has

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<sup>14</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xvi.

<sup>15</sup> In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" Butler uses the word "transvestite" that she would later figure as "drag" in *Gender Trouble*.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the plot of Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* centers on this premise.

<sup>17</sup> Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Although the importance of the drag queen as a political figure at the Stonewall Riots has persisted, I am cognizant that for many in the LGBTQ community the celebration of "deviant" behavior, especially its visibility in pride parades abuts politics of respectability in a manner similar to the way parts of Black culture disrupt Black liberalism.

garnered significant financial gain from Black audiences even as Black critics condemn him *and* a white public ignores him. What has troubled Lee in these performances are the ways that any form of positive or progressive racial politics has been subverted in playing out old and (in his mind) outmoded stereotypes.<sup>19</sup>

The drag of minstrelsy proved deleterious to a politic of Black expression. It created a drag on Black political actions, prefiguring concepts of Black bodies, attaching to them acts and gestures. It created racial performative structures that Black Americans had to respond to, either in the affirmative or the negative, but they could never shake them loose. As drag defined that which impedes motion and used colloquially as in “what a drag!” it also structured gay, lesbian, and queer communities in referencing clothing, makeup, and gestures usually associated with a gender other than one’s own.<sup>20</sup> Minstrelsy likewise relied on clothing, makeup, and gestures to make the Black body clear; it combined the gendered body with the racial. Thus the drag on Blackness refers to the inability for Black Americans to be taken seriously as political subjects *because* of the racial drag performance of blackface minstrelsy, which had organized and arranged Black subjectivity beforehand. Further, as a preeminent force in American culture, the minstrel functioned as an uncanny double, undoing relationships and gaining access to spaces that

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<sup>19</sup> “War of Words: Tyler Perry v. Spike Lee,” NPR, last modified April 21, 2011, accessed October 20, 2013, [www.npr.org/2011/04/21/135610190/war-of-words-tyler-perry-vs-spike-lee](http://www.npr.org/2011/04/21/135610190/war-of-words-tyler-perry-vs-spike-lee)

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this “other than one’s own” is what North explores in racial masquerades in *Dialect of Modernism*. See North, *Dialect of Modernism*.

otherwise barred Black Americans.<sup>21</sup> Within the politics of Black American discourses resides this drag—of being unable to speak, to participate, to be believed.

Indeed, Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask” at once captures the individual struggle of the Black poet and the collective politics of visibility that the mask—the partial racial object—takes in the stead of the subject beneath the mask. His political poetry demonstrates the minstrel mask infused itself within Black arts and politics. The poem speaks to a hidden self beneath the mask—a sorrowful truth teller behind the “grins and lies”—even as the mask simultaneously performs visible Black subjectivity.<sup>22</sup> It responded from the double perspective of the perceived Black subject beneath the mask and from the position of the mask itself. North’s theory of racial masquerade highlights the historic importance of African masks in modernist literature, yet the pervasiveness of masks in Euro-American cultures raises the question of how unique masking is as the purview of Black identity. Or to be broader, there has to be more than the mask for understanding racialized performative acts. The existence of masking in cultures across the world suggests that the unique place of masks as an analytic tool in American culture is perhaps overemphasized.<sup>23</sup> Instead, I suggest that the Black mask has obfuscated, partitioned, and ignored the ways that other parts of Black bodies are desired. Like Pino, who wishes to be Black, the Black body is invested with specific forms of behaving that others wish to be able to claim for themselves. Carl

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<sup>21</sup> As Lott demonstrates, if Black entertainers did want access, it had to be through performing in blackface as well. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 112.

<sup>22</sup> Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask,” 71. See Harrell Jr. ed, *We Wear the Mask*

<sup>23</sup> See Edson, *Masks and Masking*; Mack, *Masks: Art of Expression*; Napier, *Masks, Transformation, and Paradox*.

Jung's usage of the persona as the necessary mask all people use to survive in the world is a helpful consideration here. Dunbar's poem marks the mask as a tool of survival that is constituted by the narrator—separate yet as much a part of the subject behind it. The power and beauty of Dunbar's poem is the relationship of the mask that at once "hides" as it grins, presenting an outer and inner world. This is the performative racial drag, the subject behind the mask as the true political subject unable to grasp onto a visible subjectivity that is taken up by the viewable mask. Nonetheless what we find in Dunbar's unmasking is the continued process of reinscribing the mask; at once, the subject under the mask "tears and sighs," while the world is presented with only the mask. Indeed, the mask, must be the legible surface for *any* reader.

As the modernist heir-apparent to Freud's Victorian psychoanalytic tradition, Jung looked to the day-to-day concept of masking in contemporary society when he used the term "persona," which he developed from Ancient Greek dramaturgical practices. The persona works, he argued, as an adaptation that allows an individual to fit a societal role but also makes society legible to the individual. Indeed, the primal identification of the father, mother, hero, trickster, and others often specified raced and gendered idea of the persona. The mammy is a helpful consideration here. The role of the mammy—the depiction of the laboring black woman, who serves a white family—presumes not only the proper approved place for Black women, but has a relationship within the white family unit. As wet nurse and caregiver, the mammy becomes the love object for the white child and can be seen as the active competitor for love with the white mother. Without a doubt the relationship between the Black woman and a white family is far

more complicated but the ease of reading the mammy within this matrix is at once a mode of survival for Black women. But also a mode of critique for how that archetype has been taken up by Black actors in Hollywood.

The persona that not only masks but allows one to move and survive in the world is helpful here. It allows the individual to call upon multiple identities depending on one's environment. For Jung, it was "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual."<sup>24</sup> It thus allows a certain distance from being the only identification of the wearer and also questions the identity of the speaker behind the mask. Where North describes the mask as a modernist tool and Gates sees it as a form of survival for Black Americans, Jung's work argues that personas are universal. Personas are created to respond to a hostile world. Further, the mask is a mode of survival that is also created within the logics of the world one lives in. It is a matter of seeing the world and how the world sees you. To a Black reader, Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask," "we" reads as a statement of solidarity. At once the mask may make life survivable, it also colludes in power structures that undo one's relation to a Black community. It simultaneously avows to white observers to the invisibility of Blackness and the performative qualities of the mask. The mask within the poem and the speaker itself represent Blackness. As North suggests the Black mask offers a freedom for modernist writers to work against traditions, by camouflaging their own voice behind someone else's mask. It is important

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<sup>24</sup> Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 190.

to suggest that again the mask is not created elsewhere but by the author and their own racial imagining.<sup>25</sup>

Blackface performers of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century had to perform a specific kind of Black act for audiences. They could not simply blacken their skin and take on an alleged vernacular; they had to perform Blackness—as it was imagined—perfectly. Indeed, the best performances would cross the racial line of white performer and Black performance so well that it endangered the performer. White audiences, feeling their space invaded by a “real” Black person, could demand proof of whiteness if the performances exceeded what was believed possible for a white performer. This forced the performer to reveal the end of the literal color line by showing his white skin underneath the shirt’s collar or cuff.<sup>26</sup> With the entrance of Black Americans into film and music culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, the use of blackface slowly disappeared over the next fifty years. With the burnt cork mask no longer the prerequisite for displacing Black performers, many substitutes made Blackness legible when color was not enough. All of them essentialized and naturalized Blackness into performative gestures.

**Guise, Attachment, and Assemblage**

As drag stylized a gendered body around essential parts—breasts, hip movement, hair, clothing, makeup, sexuality, voice—minstrelsy likewise codified the body along similar essential racial parts—again hair, clothing, sexuality, voice, and most obviously makeup *as* skin color. It is no surprise that in psychoanalysis’s focus on sexual

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<sup>25</sup> North, *Dialect of Modernism*, 3-35, 59-76.

<sup>26</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*, 76.

development that parts of the body take on an important role in desire. Indeed, Jean Laplanche's statement on partial object recalls Pino's "more than Black":

the object is not necessarily a 'total' person...partial objects include breast, penis, and numerous other elements related to bodily life...all of which have in common the fundamental characteristic of being, in fact or in fantasy, detached or detachable.<sup>27</sup>

American drag cultures have used partial objects to parody sexual desire, where the beautiful woman either expertly hides her genitalia or humorously shows a visible bulge to confuse the heterosexual paramour. In either case, the humor of drag was in the ignorance of the desiring man. The enjoyment came not only in the drag queen's performance but the shared knowledge between the queen and the audience. Similarly, white Americans have focused on detaching Black partial objects for their own sense of enjoyment, where fooling and tricking the white master took the stead of the lover. These detachments take over racial totality and pervade American popular culture. The power of blackface minstrelsy to structure Black subjectivity as more than a vestige but as a constitutive drag on Black identity—a constant pulling back, a recalling—haunts Black identity in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.

Chuck Knipp's "Shirley Q. Liquor" proves an instructive contemporary example of the bind between drag and blackface. Described in John Strausbaugh's *Black Like You*, Shirley Q. Liquor was a Black female persona created by Knipp, a white gay man, in the 1990s that received several radio spots on the American Comedy Network by 2005. In 2003 and 2004, Liquor made her stage debut in gay clubs in New York. Where drag and

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<sup>27</sup> Laplanche, *Life & Death in Psychoanalysis*, 12

blackface shows in the late nineteenth-century were not explicitly aimed at predominantly white gay men, Knipp's audience was almost exclusively white gay men. Although according to culture critic John Strausbaugh, "Knipp made no effort to fool anyone that he was either Black or female. The effect was intentionally ridiculous, suggesting a self mocking parody of both blackface and drag conventions." We should question the idea of who is being fooled with what, in the example of Shirley Q. Liquor. Fooling the audience between the authentic/real Black woman and the imitative/parody of drag may have been easily discernible. Yet, it is quite clear that the combination of blackface/drag raises the question, was the audience fooled into seeing any connection at all between a white male performer and the Black woman he was imitating? That is, there appears to be a short circuit in which the audience recognizes the performance of a Black woman when the presence of that Black woman is lacking.

Strausbaugh continues by quoting Knipp: "Some people ask me if I do blackface. I don't think that's it. I use *regular* African-American lady brown foundation and all kinds of eye shadows. And I really like the pink wig."<sup>28</sup> Although Knipp felt that his performance was not blackface but *was* drag, the concept of using "regular" foundation should be taken as a serious suggestion in the attempt to imitate Black women's cosmetic application and their buying habits. Further, the use of the foundation likewise places a Black woman's commodity as an effective "covering" not only for his stage act but in the defense of the act of blackening itself. That is, his argument of, "I am acting as any Black woman would," reveals his use of Black woman's foundation as a substitute for the burnt

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<sup>28</sup> Strausbaugh, *Black Like You*, 5. Emphasis added.

cork. Knipp's blind spot to this attempt at authenticity betrays that blackface goes beyond the actual stage performance.

Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* helps to clarify how these parts and actions precede Black people as a double or uncanny presence that serves to make a Black body legible. Indeed, her suggestion of the contradiction between the minoritizing and the universalizing view in her seminal work provides a model for understanding American racism. Let me suggest, following Sedgwick, that there is a minority of peoples in the United States known and known to themselves as Black, yet at the same time there are spectrums of acts and behaviors that code the body as Black even as that "actor" cannot claim to be Black.<sup>29</sup> Related to this is a further modification, one can use scientific taxonomies and eugenicist logics to label Black people as degenerate. Or, one could use the common or popular knowledge of racial ideas to label a body. So even as "Negroid" was a scientific term to designate the body and hierarchically race that body, the language of popular culture could likewise mark the body as Knipp's welfare (drag) queen makes clear. Therefore, as I show below, acts and gestures could be made obvious to an audience by the actor: (1) through one's identity as Black American even as the body is hidden underneath some other guise, (2) taking a believed Black act and attaching it to a white actor, or (3) reintegrating disparate parts in an assemblage, with no discernable raced body underneath.

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<sup>29</sup> "[sexuality] holds the minoritizing view that there is a distinct population of persons who 'really are' gay; at the same time, it holds the universalizing views that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of stable identities" Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 85.

*Guise.* The guise in which the Black actor is hidden or reinscribed can be seen in Max Fleischer's Betty Boop cartoons of the 1930s, which often featured Black musical guest stars. Offering the mutual promotion of Betty Boop and the musical guest, the cartoons often went beyond featuring just the music or a cameo appearance but instead animated their guests, centering their music around pivotal plot points. Louis Armstrong's "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You" (1932) and Cab Calloway's "Snow White" (1933) both open with the band leaders with their respective bands giving a live introduction to the animation. In "I'll Be Glad," while on an African safari, monkey-like cannibals kidnap Betty Boop from her friends Koko the Clown and Bimbo the Dog. While in pursuit of the kidnapped Betty, Koko and Bimbo find themselves chased by the chief of the cannibals voiced by Louis Armstrong [Images 1.1-3]. Transformed from the monkey-esque cartoon caricature into a broad-lipped head and finally into Armstrong's actual floating head hovering over his prey, he sings, "for I brought you in my home, you wouldn't leave my wife alone, I'll be glad when you're dead, you rascal you." Framed in terms of American racist assumptions about the ravenousness of Black male sexuality, Armstrong's head claims ownership and access to Betty while reveling in the anxiety of the consumption of white bodies. Further, the short relies on the violence associated with Black men by reinscribing the Black jazz musician, with the African cannibal. The cartoon then, binds two different assumptions around Black men, one as a foreign Other that consumes human flesh—in this case white women—and the local Other that seduces and preys upon white women for sex. The cartoon sees these two versions of Black men as naturally intertwined.

Unlike Armstrong's singular appearance in a Betty Boop cartoon, Cab Calloway made several appearances in the Betty Boop series, which also featured his sexual desire for Betty, while disguising his Blackness. Inducted into the National Film Registry in 1994 for its masterful use of rotoscope technology to capture Calloway's unique dancing, "Snow White" follows the familiar plot that became popular with Walt Disney's 1937 animated film. Yet the cartoon is distinct for capturing Calloway's vocal performance replacing the usually quiet or incoherent Koko the Clown and for the rotoscope technique that replicated Calloway's dancing. While incased in her crystal coffin, Koko sings "St. James Infirmary Blues," creating a funeral procession behind the sleeping Betty.<sup>30</sup> Not simply expressing sexual passion, Calloway's song recounts his value as a suitable partner for his deceased beloved, "She will search this whole wide world over, but she'll never find another sweet man like me." Where Calloway's Blackness is covered by Koko's white clown makeup and the animation itself, his Blackness comes through not only with his voice but the technique of rotoscoping, which inscribed the importance of Black dance while covering Calloway's Black skin [Images 1.4-6]. Indeed, Calloway's own persona outside of the Max Fleischer cartoons, often depicted him as a Lothario, hoodwinking Black men as he stole their girlfriends. Playing on the familiarity of Calloway's sexuality, other animated appearances depicted him as a ghost and as a troll chasing Betty. The animations easily disguised the body underneath and kept Blackness intact and readable in Calloway's characters. For Armstrong, his voice and the African

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<sup>30</sup> The processional travels through, what Nicholas Sammond calls a "ghetto underworld." Sammond, *Birth of an Industry*, 208.

cannibal that visibly represented him doubled his Blackness, connecting natural talent with a ravenous consuming Black head. In both cases, Betty Boop cartoons relied on the knowledge of the Black performer underneath the cartoon surface to depict visible representations of Black men with a white woman.

*Attachment.* As a form of attachment, Elvis Presley's usage of a Black vocal affect with his iconic hip movements played a key role in postwar American popular culture, which simultaneously moved Black culture, sometimes literally, to another venue.<sup>31</sup> To Black musicians, Elvis Presley represented the appropriation of Black culture, continuing the legacy started with minstrelsy. Public Enemy made their disdain for Presley clear in their song "Fight the Power" and the accompanying music video that accompanied the release of *Do the Right Thing*. It described Elvis as a racist and a thief of Black culture repeating the claims that critics made against minstrelsy: that it not only stole from a rich Black culture but also vulgarized the form.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, almost a century before, W.E.B. DuBois had made as much clear in *The Souls of Black Folk*, that the "caricature [of minstrelsy] has sought again to spoil the quaint beauty of the music, and has filled the air with many debased melodies which vulgar ears scarce know from the real."<sup>33</sup> Even as contemporary Black artists like Mos Def make a political stance against Elvis and his appropriation of Black culture in his song "Rock n' Roll," the figure of

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<sup>31</sup> See Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*.

<sup>32</sup> "Elvis was a hero to most/ But he never meant shit to me you see/ Straight up racist that sucker was/ Simple and plain/ Mother fuck him and John Wayne/ Cause I'm Black and I'm Proud/ I'm ready and hyped plus I'm amped/ Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps/ Sample a look back you look and find/ Nothing but rednecks for 400 years if you check." Public Enemy, "Fight the Power," *Fear of a Black Planet*.

<sup>33</sup> DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 182.

Elvis in American culture remains a frequent reference point for Black entertainers. The rappers, The Game in “400 Bars” and Childish Gambino in “Fire,” refer to themselves as “Black Elvis” in defining their skill and prowess. Similarly, recording artists such as Wyclef Jean and Jay-Z situate their success as greater than Elvis. It thus turned out that it was not only a problem of Elvis’s appropriation but the ironic measuring stick that Elvis took in terms of expressing one’s skill, fame and stardom. Just as for Pino, the authentic, the natural, the “really Black” is lost. The difference remains hard to grasp and retain. It is not only in what Baker calls soundings that one should consider Black attachments. Well known for being the first talkie, Al Jolson’s *The Jazz Singer* (1927) provides a visual example of attachment. While preparing to take the stage, Jakie Robinowitz (Jolson) gleefully begins to apply his blackface makeup while his love, Mary Dale watches. Turning to Mary, he applies his curly wig, completing his costume [Image 1.7]. He shows his emotive potential in blackface makeup to her, yet upon seeing an image of his mother, and remembering his obligation to his Jewish family, he becomes sullen . After rehearsing “Mother of Mine, I Still Have You,” he returns to his dressing room and breaks down crying. Revealing his true emotion beneath his role as the American minstrel singer Jack Robin, Jakie removes his wig. It is in the removal of the wig, and not in the song about a mother’s love, that Jakie and not Jack reveals his emotion for family [Image 1.8]. Thus it is the texture of Jake’s hair and not the tortuous removal of burnt cork or the changing inflection of the voice that reveals his true self—his non-Black identity.

*Assemblage*. As a final consideration of drag, assemblage allows for the greatest disordering of Blackness. Two scholars in particular have considered the intersectional analysis that assemblage allows, Alexander G. Weheliye and Jasbir Puar. Weheliye states “that the differing elements articulated in an assemblage become components only in their relational connectivity with other factors.”<sup>34</sup> Like Frankenstein’s monster, a drag assemblage gives the appearance of a whole “body” from many disparate parts. And like Frankenstein’s monster, there is no original part that can lay claim to owning the rest of the body. In the formation of a raced body, we could say, where each part on its own could not reveal a complete racial structure, together they combine to make race legible. Thinking as a Marxist, Weheliye continues, “race is a mysterious thing in that the social character of racializing assemblages appears as an objective character stamped upon humans, which is presented not in the form of a sociopolitical relations between humans, but as hierarchically structured races.” The addition of Jasbir Puar work on the surveillance of those who wear a turban is instructive. In her “reading turbans as appendages and prostheses,” she sees not only the turban as an extension of the body, but “the body as an extension of the turban.”<sup>35</sup> What this means in terms of a racial drag, is the sloughing off the minstrel mask for a far greater reordering of Black body parts. As the twentieth-century America became an open field for Black entertainers and outright minstrelsy faded from the mainstream, white people were able to claim—like Pino—to the presentation of Black culture in new ways.

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<sup>34</sup> Weheliye, *Habea Viscus*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 192.

Jim Henson's Muppet Kermit is perhaps the most instructive example of assemblage in a racial drag. Both of his famous songs "Bein' Green" and "Rainbow Connection" situate Kermit in a swamp playing the banjo [Image 1.9]. *The Muppet Movie* even opens with Kermit's performance of "Rainbow Connection"—a song about social mobility—that is interrupted by the promoter (Dom DeLuise) who ludicrously starts the film's action by telling Kermit he belongs in the entertainment business. From this starting moment Kermit who "naturally" as a frog in a Southern swamp is "naturally" talented enough for Hollywood. To further ensure Kermit's career, the frog's "natural" antagonist, Doc Hopper (Charles Durning) is introduced as an enemy who aims to turn Kermit into a mascot for his French-fried frog leg restaurateur. Horrified by the proposition, Kermit begins his epic adventure to escape. Through these signifiers Kermit becomes representative of the Black migration.<sup>36</sup> Trapped between his naturalized talent as a musician and being a caricature that hurts and harms his own people, Kermit escapes banjo in hand to Hollywood, pursued by a white man in a white suit.

White supremacy values the minstrel figure over Black people as a form of representation. Where the minstrel can be enjoyed by white audiences for his foibles, the same appearance of a Black person is seen as a real problem when that voice critiques the system that subjugates Black people. As bell hooks states, there is a compromise intrinsic to Black life in America that forces many to play prescribed roles, roles with intelligible value—a drag.<sup>37</sup> Puar also notes this problem in contemporary secular liberal society. The

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<sup>36</sup> Rolf the dog later states "I've never seen a frog that green have the blues that bad."

<sup>37</sup> Hooks, *Writing Beyond Race*, 12

“ascendancy of whiteness,” Puar argues, creates a measure of benevolence allowing for behavior deemed counter to cultural and racial norms to be a part of a national identity.<sup>38</sup>

The extent to which Black culture has become American culture has not undone nor offered equal citizenship to Black Americans. Indeed, rock, rap, blues, and jazz with their indelible mark on American and global music cultures have simultaneously been positioned as beneath cultural consideration and blamed for pathological effects on urban and suburban youth populations.

I have through this chapter so far, suggested the bind between blackface minstrelsy and drag that marks the contentious development of both in the scholarship of race on one end and gender on the other. Binding the two, no doubt, is the ways that they position sexuality. Blackface, without a doubt, proves problematic in its depiction of Black sexuality, especially in its depiction of the mammy and the jezebel. Yet within drag culture, sexuality has been openly the very subject of its performance, especially in how the very idea of woman is coded by the performer. Perhaps no moment in American history marked the transitions of the racial drag than the interwar period. At once, Black Americans strove for recognition as citizens not only as a matter of fact, but because of their service in the First World War. As James Wilson notes, it is the Harlem Renaissance (what I will refer to as the New Negro Renaissance) that “depictions of blackness and whiteness, male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, highbrow and lowbrow merged and coalesced in the theater and performances of the 1920s and 1930s.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 32.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson, *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies*, 3.

Further, the emergence of Black American art practices as an American art came to the fore. The New Negro Movement repeated and constituted the minstrel as a significant component of its politics. Where I have previously looked at a wide breath of cultural forms of the twentieth-century to look at guise, attachment, and assemblage, the rest of this project focuses on the Renaissance as a period in which the guise of the minstrel mask was in flux, where the blackface of Al Jolson was at its most popular, even as Black entertainers and intellectuals sought to operate outside of the confines of the mask.

This period importantly saw the rise of Black political spaces for new narratives that varied between outright Black nationalism to the import of Black intellectualism and cultural reflection. Throughout this period, there was a need to name the minstrel as the opposite of the authentic Black individual and community. In the background, with the rise of visual culture—photographic reprints in magazines as well as the great strides in film starting with *Birth of a Nation*—depictions of Black people varied from the erratic movement and sexual impulses of Black Americans to the savage and cannibal of the Black African. As Black intellectuals fought for their own image and representations of their lives, the minstrel and similar figures of Black primitivism and savagery formulated the foundation of new Black cultural forms. In so doing, the language that they wished to reveal their new place in world, replicated the image of the minstrel, creating a boogeyman that shadowed the New Negro.

## *II*

### *The New Negro Movement*

Soon after the end of the First World War, the young Marcus Garvey arrived in New York City. Inspired by the Black politics of his youth in Jamaica and a proto-Black

Nationalism he had discovered in England, Garvey fashioned his own political movement in Harlem. He easily garnered supporters from the expatriate West Indian communities, but found it difficult to join circles of Black American intellectuals, activists and their organizations. Undeterred, by the fall of 1919, Garvey went on tour across the United States to advocate for his Pan-African organization, the United Negro Improvement Association, and the Black Star Line, a venture to create a shipping line that would cater to the African diaspora.

At the last of his planned speaking engagements in Chicago in early October 1919, Marcus Garvey expressed his anger at the prosecution launched by Edward J. Brundage, the Attorney General of Illinois. Garvey's burgeoning business interests were in violation of the Illinois Security Law. Founded on bad business practices and using the most expedient means to launch and capitalize this venture, the Black Star Line had all the hallmarks of a scam, the kind of business that violated the Illinois Security Law.<sup>40</sup> Describing the expensive cost of defending his name, Garvey was not only angered by Brundage, but also by the *Chicago Defender*, which he accused of aiding white supremacy.

When we came here as I stated last night we were skeptical as touching the attitude of the people here, the negro citizens, because in your midst there exists a newspaper called the Chicago Defender that has been trying for over two and a half months to scatter through the length and brea[d]th of this country misrepresentations of the Universal Negro Improvement Ass'n, of which I am acting President-General...I have been able to find out that there are good negroes in Chicago and very bad 'niggers.' The bad nigger is the man that is making trouble for the negro race not so much the white man.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Grant, *Negro with a Hat*, 210.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey*, 2:59.

Although remembered primarily for his organization's claim to repossess Africa from European powers in part through entrepreneurial plans such as the Black Star Line, Garvey's "Back to Africa" Movement was one of many attempts to reimagine reinterpret, and re-present Blackness to Black constituencies and white observers alike. On August 2, 1920, inside the auditorium of New York's Madison Square Garden, Garvey launched his first International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World. He declared in front of his supporters, "We are met in this historic building tonight for the purpose of enlightening the world respecting the attitude of the new Negro. We are assembled here tonight as the descendants of a suffering people and we are also assembled as a people who are determined to suffer no longer."<sup>42</sup> Many of his 25,000 supporters reiterated the idea of a new Black identity with banners adorned with the slogans, "The New Negro Has No Fear" and "the New Negro Wants Liberty, 400,000,000 Black Men Shall be Free."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, by August 13 Garvey's Convention produced its founding document for the African diaspora, "The Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World." The Declaration specified the necessity of universal equal political rights for Black peoples before the law, but went further by suggesting that the people of the African diaspora had been misrepresented. Declaring "Negro" to be the affirmative name for Black peoples, the UNIA rejected the use of the term "nigger."<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the 26<sup>th</sup> resolution of the Declaration, "protest[ed] against the publication of scandalous and

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<sup>42</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey*, 2.499.

<sup>43</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey*, 2.493

<sup>44</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey*, 2.573

inflammatory articles by an alien (i.e., white) press tending to create racial strife and the exhibition of picture films showing the Negro as a cannibal.”<sup>45</sup> By drafting a declaration, the UNIA constituted a polity whose nationhood defied the white American right to name Black Americans. Yet, concomitant to this was Garvey’s vehement challenge to specific Black American leaders and organizations, in this case the *Chicago Defender*, accusing them of complicit support of white supremacy in spite of their civil rights activism. For every New Negro, who was self-assured and prepared to uplift the race to new heights, Garvey warned there were “very bad niggers” who would only hold back the race in service of white supremacy.

Garvey and the UNIA were not alone in their platform to claim and name Black identity. The proliferation of “New Negro” political self-identifications that occurred during and after America’s involvement in the First World War speaks to the importance that Black Americans put into naming to undo the deleterious power of minstrelsy. Although attempts at renaming have a long history, the experience of serving in America’s military abroad proved a catalyst for Black Americans to name themselves within a new context.<sup>46</sup> For many, the dignity afforded Black Americans by wearing a uniform, showing valor on the battlefield, and the respect shown by French allies and defeated Germans changed how Black Americans felt about their place in their own country. More so, it directly appeared to offer an image absent and disconnected from minstrelsy. The generational divide between Black American leaders such as W.E.B.

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<sup>45</sup> Hill, *Marcus Garvey*, 2.574

<sup>46</sup> Gates “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” 132.

DuBois who initially supported Black enlistment when America entered WW I and A. Philip Randolph who viewed the war as a release valve that deflected domestic class and racial antagonism on to the international stage reflects how Black Americans, despite their differences, viewed themselves as part of an international public discourse.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the response among Black Americans to the Russian Revolution in 1917 provided an additional example to Randolph, Garvey, and the socialistic African Blood Brotherhood's Cyril Briggs that Black Americans could revolutionize their own country as well.<sup>48</sup> Against this backdrop of renaming and reclaiming an identity shaped, in part by seeing themselves on an international stage, Black Americans felt the violent backlash against such claims when race riots raged in dozens of cities nationwide in 1919. The attacks on Black people and entire Black neighborhoods during what is called the Red Summer of 1919, proved to be an important moment for radical political action. The race riots of 1919 that began in Chicago made no distinction between the range of Black political ideology, activism and organizations. The riots revealed an attack on Blackness itself and not on any particular definition, ideology or policy from Black leaders or their communities.

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<sup>47</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois*, 362; Gates, *The New Negro*, 8-9. The UNIA banners during the convention reminded onlookers that "Negroes Helped Win the War," *UNIA Papers*, 2:480. UNIA Rev. Dr. Easton, "Under the other flags of Asia and of Europe he has suffered long and patiently, and they called him to the battlefields by the millions to 'make the world safe for democracy,' and to beat the Germans back across the Rhine, and he did it, but with little results to himself." *UNIA Papers*, 2:504

<sup>48</sup> Garvey eulogized Lenin, calling him "probably the greatest man between 1917-1924." Quoted in Rupert Lewis, "The Question of Imperialism and Aspects of Garvey's Political Activities in Jamaica 1929-1930," 80.

Yet, Black resistance to the destruction of their neighborhoods and retaliation against white vigilantism heralded a different response to white supremacy than had previously been organized through accommodation or uplift.<sup>49</sup> Accommodation and uplift ideologies and strategies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to bring internal protection and progress to the Black community through organizing the Black community to take care of itself as it sought a negotiated peace with white supremacy, if only to end lynchings, rape, and other forms of physical violence. World War I ushered in a new era with new options. As George Hutchinson succinctly states,

World War I was a serious blow to the prestige of ‘white’ civilization and its discourse of rationality and progress...[The Soviet Union] represented to many writers a more truly egalitarian social and political model than the capitalism of the western so-called ‘democracies,’ and it seemed more committed to ending racism.<sup>50</sup>

The war and the riots of 1919 carved out a Black identity, a New Negro, shaped simultaneously by Black soldiers serving abroad and the Black community under siege and fighting back at home.

The proliferation of New Negro discourses marked a change in the Black public sphere, leading to an explosion of mass media. In various formats, journals and magazines catered to different Black readerships and audiences. Each journal claimed the end of white power over the Black image. In the stead of the familiar image, Black print media sought to humanize the Black experience, framing their work as representative of Black public life. Whereas the philosopher Jürgen Habermas theorized

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<sup>49</sup> See Foley, *Spectre of 1919*; McWhirter, *Red Summer*; Tuttle, *Race Riot*.

<sup>50</sup> Hutchinson, *Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, 6.

that the creation of the public sphere developed from the growth of capital-driven mass media, Michael C. Dawson has suggested that Black politics and its place within America do not function as clearly as Habermas theorizes. This is an important distinction between the white public sphere and the Black counterpublic, where very different conversations of citizenship developed. Dawson argues that an alternative public sphere developed in the United States due to the extent to which racial groups were assigned “degrees of citizenship rights, legal status, relationships to the security apparatus, places in the economy, and the amount of status to be conferred on members of each racial group.”<sup>51</sup> The impetus for naming thus did not simply arise from responding to the war. Naming was entangled and ensnared by ideas of authenticity and the natural, responding to a long history and indeed a long list of Old Negro names: Uncle Tom, Uncle Ned, Zip Coon, Jim Crow, the Black dandy, and the darky. The name “New Negro” bound itself to these minstrelsy identities, relying on the knowledge of this misrepresentation to build its own representation. And as this section demonstrates, the racial drag, where concepts of the minstrel were always close at hand, bound Black political thought to ideas of new Black performing arts.

Periodicals written by and for Black Americans proliferated in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Great Migration, the movement of 1.6 million Black Americans out of the American South into the urban centers of the Northeast, Midwest and West between 1910 and 1930, marked a changing racial landscape across the United States. Offering tools for adaptation and catering to these new populations, periodicals offered a

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<sup>51</sup> Dawson, *Black Visions*, 24-25.

vast amount of information about the latest trends in dress and etiquette, political developments at home and abroad, and spotlights on exemplars of the race. Starting with the publication of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's *Crisis* in 1910, others soon followed, including *The Half-Century Magazine* (1916-1925), *The Messenger* (1917-1928), the UNIA's *Negro World* (1918-1933), and *The Competitor* (1920-1921). Each established itself with a specific Black readership. *The Messenger* and the *Negro World* aimed at radical change in racial politics. A. Philip Randolph's *Messenger* made frequent support for and common cause with the socialist party and denounced the 1918 imprisonment of Eugene Debs. *The Negro World*, according to the British military, contributed to work stoppages and strikes throughout the British colonies.<sup>52</sup> *Half-Century* and *The Competitor* often featured Black accomplishments in school and sports with longer articles on the implications of national politics on Black communities. Unlike *The Messenger*, these articles on political relevance did not consider candidates beyond the partisan system of Republican-Democrat.

*Crisis* occupied the middle ground between these two poles. Providing calls to action against the caricatured portrayal of Black Americans in the film release of *Birth of a Nation*, the magazine supplied histories of Africa and news about America's Black colleges.<sup>53</sup> Despite their different publishing locations and audiences, all established themselves as the appropriate voice for Black America.<sup>54</sup> Even as various writers moved

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<sup>52</sup> See Elkins, "Marcus Garvey, *The Negro World*, and the British West Indies: 1919-1920."

<sup>53</sup> See Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*.

<sup>54</sup> *The Crisis* in New York; *The Half-Century Magazine*, Chicago; *The Messenger*, New York; *Negro World*, New York; *The Competitor*, Pittsburg.

between periodicals, each followed a pattern of naming a new and progressive Black community against other Black communities that they deemed regressive and harmful in advancing ideas of Black identity.

*The Crisis*, despite being one of the first Black American periodicals of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, did not mark its first issue as a special occasion. Instead, DuBois's editorial leadership began by immediately informing its readers of what was at stake. "Along the Color Line," began with an excerpt from the new "grandfather clause" in the Oklahoma State Constitution. Without analysis, the excerpt made it clear to its readers that the clause would undo Black American civil rights. Yet despite starting on such a editorial bitter note, the next article reported on the political efforts by progressive Republicans in Alabama and Black delegates in South Carolina to gain complete control of the State Republican Convention. Other magazines followed suit, opening with political concerns, allowing readers to form their own conclusions about how the issue affected Black Americans. However, by the end of the First World War there was marked change in the mission of these periodicals. Less interested in letting readers form their own opinions on political matters, the magazines began to posit a new cohort of Black intellectuals that tacitly included a readership that was more urbane, cosmopolitan, and global, having been shaped by the war and its aftermath as well as by the economic, social and political context of Black urbanity.

In an article appearing in the Black radical magazine, *The Messenger*, a year prior to Garvey's convention, W.A. Domingo, the editor for the UNIA's journal, *The Negro World*, wrote "What are We, Negroes or Colored People?" He was dissatisfied with the

terms as the meaning changed in the spatial context in which it was used, (i.e., “colored” had socio-political ramifications in the West Indies that differed from those in the United States). Domingo understood more broadly the inconsequential nature of the fight, questioning if “white people [will] stop calling Negroes ‘nigger’ because Negroes refer to themselves as colored?” But despite his dissatisfaction between the terms colored and Negro, deeming them both vague with no sense of a specific American identity, Domingo viewed Negro as preferable. Through capitalizing the word, Black Americans could take at least partial control of the discourse and instill in it a sense of pride.<sup>55</sup>

Over the next year, *The Messenger* developed and delineated the “New Negro” against the “Old Negro” through new understandings of a *class* of men. The Old Negro, incapable of seeing race as an issue of class-consciousness, relied on white patronage, voted Republican out of habit, and played a passive role in society.<sup>56</sup> Dominated and “subsidized” by white patrons, Old Negroes could not develop a working class sense of economic justice. The New Negro however, would be “composed of young men who are educated, radical and fearless.”<sup>57</sup> *The Messenger* made it abundantly clear that the World War marked the arrival of the New Negro. Not fooled by DuBois or the “Old Crowd of Negro Leaders,” the New Negro knew that citizenship and respect would not be gained through fighting in a World War, when the real struggle was the fight against the racist capitalist system. The real goal for the New Negro was to fight for revolution by allying with the Industrial Workers of the World, the Socialists, and the Non-Partisan League.

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<sup>55</sup> “What Are We, Negroes or Colored People?” *The Messenger*, May-June, 1919.

<sup>56</sup> “The New Negro—What Is He?” *The Messenger*, August 1920.

<sup>57</sup> “Who’s Who: A New Crowd—A New Negro,” *Messenger*, May-June, 1919.

The divide was clear: the New Negro would make common cause with white radicals over who they deemed Black reactionaries.<sup>58</sup> *The Messenger*, despite its radical politics, suggested various themes that would emerge across the Black political spectrum: Black alignment with a class of white Americans who shared similar aspirations or goals and a demonization of fellow Black Americans who represented the Black past.

The Chicago-based *Half-Century Magazine* represented how far this pattern, of distinguishing a good and bad group of Black people, could cross the Black political landscapes. Marketed to Black middleclass men and women, *Half-Century* featured poems, stories, jokes, recipes, and instructions in etiquette. Yet the periodical maintained a political identity in its message for its readership.<sup>59</sup> The January 1920 editorial, “Are We Ashamed of our Lineage?,” argued against the term Negro, stating, “The term Negro may apply to the cannibals of the South Seas or to the president of Haiti, but unless some explanation follows there is no way to determine which particular branch of the race is meant.”<sup>60</sup> The editors believed that “white” was also too vague a term, since only naming persons by nationality could reflect people’s history. By way of example, the magazine suggested a Norwegian could appreciate Shakespeare and still take a distinct national

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<sup>58</sup> “In the Negro schools and colleges the most typical reactionaries are Kelly, Miller, Moton and William Pickens. In the press DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Fred R. Moore, T. Thomas Fortune, Roscoe Conkling Simmons and George Harris are compromising the case of the Negro.”

<sup>59</sup> The first editorial stated, “As the Race Problem is ever with us, we shall discuss and shall entertain discussions of the same from time to time. We appreciate that we are now living in a commercial era and that the factors of paramount importance in the solution of this problem are economy, industry—the making and saving of money—and business development.” *The Half-Century Magazine*, August 1916.

<sup>60</sup> “Are We Ashamed of Our Lineage?” *The Half-Century Magazine* January 1920.

pride in Henrik Ibsen. *Half-Century* wanted a new word that did not include a word that white people had invented first. To them, a better term than New Negro was “Libranian.” The magazine believed the new term would mark the specific historical identity of Black Americans liberated from slavery.<sup>61</sup> Although meant to combine a racial identity with a national identity, “Libranian,” like, *The Messenger*, referred to a specific perception of class with which the magazine’s readership could identify. Creating a dichotomy between the deserving and undeserving, Libranians concerned themselves with racial uplift and development, dedicated to “assist[ing] their brothers reach the zenith of prosperity and racial development.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, often *Half-Century* articles vacillated between articles suggesting the positive connotation of Libranian and language casting the colored masses as degenerate. *Half-Century* warned its readers against the Old Negro swindlers, liars, and unskilled or unprofessional businessmen, and devoted its positive image of good works to its more deserving Black people, Libranians.

In distinguishing itself as an elite Black journal, *Half-Century*, in its February 1920 issue, featured a condemnation of urban Black poor, not simply to warn readers of gambling, prostitution, and alcohol, but to address a larger threat: these stereotypes were visible to white observers. Compared to the magazine’s positive images of Black Americans, the Black poor were “stumbling blocks” that had to be “dealt with.” They were, “old fossils whose life on earth should have been terminated when they first saw

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<sup>61</sup> An etymology for the name was never given in the magazine. However, a likely explanation is the Greek astrological sign for the date of the preliminary emancipation proclamation of September 22, 1862 would be Libra.

<sup>62</sup> “Signs of the Times” *The Half-Century Magazine*, April 1920.

light.” These people did not deserve to be called Librarians, but remained “Colored.” This differed from Domingo’s article in *The Messenger*, which had treated Negro and “Colored” as two terms that had to be juxtaposed to understand their usage in a larger context. For *Half-Century*, “Colored” represented another people, a shame upon the race, unlike its uplifted readership that had risen with dignity.

The no less conservative *Competitor* argued that Black Americans could compete alongside and as well as white Americans. Its June 1921 article, “Race Progress and Race Adjustment,” stated that, “The Negro has reached the point in his development where he can think, speak, and do for himself—he has produced men who express the soul of the race.” Setting up similar dichotomies as *Half-Century*, Black Americans had moved from “paganism to Christianity, poverty to affluence, darkness to light.” Attached to this message of progress was white Americans’ ignorance about Black Americans and their lives:

They don’t know the Negro so perfectly as they once thought, and if they would really know him, they must study his home life, read his books, visit his business establishments...I believe the day is already breaking upon our virtues and that press and pulpit are even now holding up our better side, that their vast audience may form a fairer estimate of our real worth as desirable citizens and neighbors.<sup>63</sup>

A year prior, in the February, 1920 issue, W.S. Scarborough stated, “One thing is certain—the white man does not know the Negro...The toadying, servile representatives of the race, the politicians, the dependent ones—all must be

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<sup>63</sup> “Race Progress and Race Adjustment,” *The Competitor* June, 1921.

passed by and the Negro people found.”<sup>64</sup> Although the language remained similar to that found in *Half-Century Magazine*, the periodical was less interested and even uncertain about naming Black Americans. Instead, it led its politics in aligning news about Black sororities, women’s political organizations, and Howard University’s baseball team with a narrative of racial progress. The second issue’s editorial stated, “We are beginning to see and hear a great deal about the so-called ‘New Negro.’” Yet, the magazine was not interested in using the new term; instead, it was convinced that the only difference between the older generation and New Negroes was that they could assert their needs without assistance, patronage or accommodation. No longer dependent on the slave master, New Negroes could now make demands based on their own labor and especially their own proven ability. The New Negro, accordingly, asked only for the opportunity to compete alongside other Americans. Yet the New Negro was not this epistemic break that arose after the First World War that Black leaders imagined. Critical of the term, the editorial viewed the attempt to name Black Americans against the “Old Negro” as a misstep. To measure Black Americans against the experiences of people used for chattel slavery undermined the possibilities for Black Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “There is no New Negro,” declared the editorial.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “What the Omen? The White Man Does Not Know the Negro. ‘Mediocrity[sic] is Jealous.’” *The Competitor*, February 1920.

<sup>65</sup> “Misnomer’ *The Competitor*, February 1920.

The name “New Negro” (or “Librarian”) represents the efforts to forge an identity independent from white constructions—constructions that had defined the 19<sup>th</sup>-century experience and imaginings of Black Americans. The New Negro attempted to inform the white world of Black people’s true identities that differed from the familiar white image of the Old Negro as the servile figure of the plantation—real or imagined. Unlike the Antebellum and post-Emancipation South where Black enslavement and servitude enhanced and required continual, close physical contact between races, the segregated urbanization of Black Americans in the early twentieth century meant that Black and white Americans saw less of each other except in print and popular culture. White Americans, in particular, were oblivious to the achievements of Black people and their communities and were more likely to confront stereotypical ideas of Black Americans as criminals, swindlers, and prostitutes. As the periodicals of the 1920s reveal, Black people made an effort to protest racist images and ideas but in doing so, they protested and denigrated other Black people as if they were those very minstrel images. The images helped to situate a new class of Black Americans that would be better than the images *and* better than other Black people. In their attempts to suggest their difference from colonized images, Black American periodicals at once benefited and profited from this difference.<sup>66</sup>

Two important developments occurred, each bound to the other. First, the New Negro was *foundationally* built on being differentiated from the representations created by white Americans in blackface minstrelsy, the Old Negro, and an embarrassment over

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<sup>66</sup> See Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*.

the visibility to white Americans of the wrong kind of Black American. Second, the New Negro would re-present Blackness allowing for white knowledge about Blackness to come from the right kind of Black people through their public productions, especially in print and performance. The Black community's work then, in trying to reclaim, reimagine and rename Blackness in America, was to figure a new body to replace that of the old minstrel. Yet in distancing themselves from the image of the minstrel, Black intellectuals aligned themselves with various causes against other Blacks to the point of aligning themselves with white power structures.<sup>67</sup>

### **Black Kultur**

Alain Locke's 1925 anthology, *The New Negro*, integrated New Negro concepts from these Interwar publications. The Old Negro trope continued to serve as a foil in Locke's work. Yet, in his work and more so than other intellectuals, Locke suggested a large, almost exclusive, Black cultural world devoid of white alignment. Featuring many who would become the most important figures of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, and Jean Toomer, the anthology at once suggested a specific history of Black art practices while showcasing the future of Black literature. In addition, articles furthered the idea of a unique Black public sphere. Albert C. Barnes' article, "Negro Art in America," states that

a distinctively Negro art in America was *natural* and *inevitable*...The contributions of the American Negro to art are representative because they come from the hearts of the masses of a people held together by like yearnings and stirred by the same causes....It is a great art because it

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<sup>67</sup> The clearest example of this would be Marcus Garvey attempts to align with the KKK. Grant, *Negro with a Hat*, 320-321.

embodies the Negroes' individual traits and reflects their suffering, aspirations and joys during a long period of acute oppression and distress.<sup>68</sup>

This idea of culture was imagined differently than that of white American practices. As Arthur A. Schomburg argued in his contribution to the anthology, "The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro."<sup>69</sup> Although not an explicit reference to minstrelsy, Schomburg's belief in the necessity of a remade Black past suggests an awareness of someone who has previously written that history and blocked the expression of a vibrant culture. Kelly Miller's "Howard: The National Negro University" offers a response to Schomburg by at once historically placing the importance of the university as a center "to refute hoary dogmas hoary with age and tradition." Further, Miller declared that the future of Black university belongs to the one who can become "the center radiating the special influence of leadership and enlightenment which a culturally organized people needs."<sup>70</sup>

For Locke and his anthology's contributors, the Black experience created a unique culture. His ideas for the New Negro that pervaded the anthology reflected not only a cultural movement, but also embodied the German concept of *Kultur*. Distinctive from culture, Locke's Black *Kultur* saw the New Negro as self-conscious—able to reflect the

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<sup>68</sup> Locke, *The New Negro*, 19

<sup>69</sup> Locke, *The New Negro*, 231.

<sup>70</sup> Locke, *The New Negro*, 312.

world around him through artistic works. Although by the 1940s, Adorno saw America as the site for the development of a global culture industry, the placement of Black American arts—and further Black people—within that global culture is unclear. As Michael Dawson argued, a theory of a uniform public sphere leaves out an understanding of subordinated people. A counterpublic, that is kept out of the world of global culture and by extension global capitalism, has a different relationship to arts practices. Subordination clearly repositions the relationship between Black people and the world, but it affirms that even at the margins--or especially from the margins--Black people can assert not only their own identity but, in doing so, can also critique the hierarchies that created and sustain their marginality.

With his focus on the arts and culture of Harlem, Locke disengaged Black American culture from political radicalism. “Through the revision of certain essays to the omission of others that conjured up racial sentiment, Locke suppressed in his 1925 collections the idea that the New Negro was radical both in tone and purpose.”<sup>71</sup> Locke, like DuBois imagined Black cultural practices as deeply connected to a unique Black history detached from America’s financial growth. Locke’s concept of culture was altruistic in its belief in continuing the new presentation of Black peoples. His anthology did not focus on the new technologies of film and radio as an expression of culture, but on presenting its readers with the unique gifts of Black artists founded in a shared racial history. He shared Dubois’s love for Germany and its intellectual tradition.<sup>72</sup> As DuBois

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<sup>71</sup> Gates, *The New Negro*, 9.

<sup>72</sup> “Admiring German culture, both men [Locke and Dubois] saw a similarity between Black America and Germany in their struggles to achieve unity and power. They deeply

conceived of *The Souls of Black Folks* with *Geist* and *Volk* in mind, Locke's anthology displayed a sense of *Kultur* as the counter to the pervasive culture industry that began to dominate American discourses.<sup>73</sup> As the anthology argued for the distinct contributions that Black Americans had made to America and its future, the anthology distanced any approach to critiquing materialism and bourgeois capitalism that had developed since DuBois's critiques of Booker T. Washington in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Whereas Black intellectuals had explicitly understood the modern Black man in terms of a political identity, the anthology's foreword explicitly aimed to conceptualize the cultural world of the New Negro. Although many Black magazines included a drama or arts section, none had suggested the full extent to which Black people contributed a unique artistic voice since DuBois's *Souls of Black Folk*. Instead, most conceived of Black artistry in relation to how well a performance had followed or exceeded that of a white performer. Yet like other publications, Locke drew on the global changes of the interwar period in the creation of new nations to suggest that Black Americans likewise needed to describe their own identity through specifically Black arts that were integral to the United States.<sup>74</sup> The New Negro—as Randolph would agree—was an integral part of America's industrial and social world as well as becoming an essential part of an urban class. As such, Locke claimed Harlem played the same national- and cultural-leading potential “as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia.” Instead of arguing

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respected the German intellectual tradition, notably the work of Herder on the transcendent power of folk culture and Fichte in his nationalistic ‘Addresses to the German Nation.’” Rampersad, *The New Negro*, xii.

<sup>73</sup> Appiah, *Lines of Descent*, 45-47.

<sup>74</sup> Locke, *The New Negro*, xxv-xxvii.

between white alignment and Black degradation, Locke's New Negro was naturally the true Black American while the Old Negro was a "shadow" made more real than the experience and life of a man.<sup>75</sup> Although the aims of the anthology differed from previous publications, America's Black intelligentsia that had earlier worked in describing the New Negro, such as James Weldon Johnson, W.A. Domingo, and W.E.B. DuBois contributed to Locke's publication. In so doing, they positioned Locke's conception as the continuation of the previously political concerns of the New Negro Movement.

Just as previous narratives of the Old and New Negro had pervaded the Black public sphere, Locke called upon the Old Negro as a myth that needed to be replaced:

The day of "aunties," "uncles" and "mammies" is equally gone. Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on, and even the "Colonel" and "George" play barnstorm roles from which they escape with relief when the public spotlight is off. The popular melodrama has about played itself out, and it is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys and settle down to a realistic facing of facts.<sup>76</sup>

He had called the Old Negro "a stock figure perpetuated as an historical fiction," one that "The Negro himself has contributed his share to this through a sort of protective social mimicry forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence."<sup>77</sup> Despite the move away from a radical politics, Locke continued the importance to which the New Negro was founded and grounded in a rhetoric of distancing the subservient Old Negro and the minstrel figure.

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<sup>75</sup> Locke, *The New Negro*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Locke, *The New Negro*, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Locke, *The New Negro*, 3

The *New Negro Anthology* solidified the importance of the artistic creation of Black Americans, if not for whole communities of Black people then at least among Locke's allies in Harlem. The anthology continued many of the claims made during the burgeoning New Negro movement of 1919-20, yet it also changed the landscape on which blacks contended for visibility. Where *Kultur* was the reflection of a distinct history in great works, culture was mass produced.<sup>78</sup> Edward Said is helpful here. In referring to one mode of culture, Said referred to it as, "A concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought." Further, when one exists within a culture, "You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights." However, Said warns that, "The trouble with this idea of culture is that it entails not only venerating one's own culture but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world."<sup>79</sup> In the wake of articulating a new culture, Black intellectuals attempted to transcend the minstrel. Truly a fictional manifestation of white supremacy, it nevertheless remained the concrete example for which Black culture responded.

Locke imagined the New Negro as unattached to popular consumption and instead proposed that the New Negro would reflect—in art—the experience and the unique consciousness of a Black subject.<sup>80</sup> He believed that Black culture would

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<sup>78</sup> Adorno, "*Kultur* and Culture," 3.

<sup>79</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii.

<sup>80</sup> This may seem counter to Adorno's thoughts on jazz, but it should be clear that Adorno's essay "On Jazz" and other critiques begin a decade after *The New Negro* and

transcend national and international borders, representing the full capabilities of Black people. Yet he did not recognize, like white American mass culture, that Black arts would be affected by a market economy.

**Conclusion**

The 20<sup>th</sup>-century political drag of being Black is contingent on the drag of the 19<sup>th</sup> century blackface minstrel. Thus, the struggle for Black agency contended with this blackface drag. The racial drag provided parallel paths for race politics: one that posited the minstrel in the center of Black politics and the other which popularized essential elements of Black existence as the totality of Black identity. Still, even more troubling than the reliance on the burnt cork were the hidden representations that spoke to Blackness without relying on blackface. Singular parts of the objectified Black body--hair, skin color, lips--as well as talent, hail to this history of the minstrel, enabling people to discursively imagine the essential racial ideal.

To perform a racial drag is to call upon the perceived constitutive parts of Black culture elucidated in blackface minstrelsy. The racial construction lay not only in the practice of putting on the burnt cork, but also in the ideas of the “song and dance” that accompanied it. Thus, in creating their own political spaces and movements, Black intellectuals had to call upon these tropes and denounce them. In this practice, Black political movements likewise positioned rival Black Americans as playing too closely with minstrel tropes to the point of figuring their rivals as minstrels themselves. The

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pertain to the consumer culture around which jazz became a profitable career. See Adorno, “On Jazz,” 470-495.

doubling of the minstrel, the minstrel itself in Black history and the targeting of rivals as minstrels, hindered political movement. Indeed, foundational to the Black American experience are the attempts to distance and destroy the image of the minstrel, which led to Black Americans colluding with white political structures against other Black Americans. According to bell hooks, no collective effort was made to destroy the “colonized image” of the blackface minstrel after Emancipation. Indeed, while Black Americans used the minstrel image for commercial gain—as in Spike Lee’s contemporary critique of Tyler Perry—the establishment of a positive Black identity in political movements relied on figuring political rivals as the same as the minstrel.<sup>81</sup> Lee, who described Tyler Perry’s work as “coonery,” established his film career as real Black art not simply in his own artistic production, but in the denigration and alignment of Perry’s work as not only lacking artistic value, but also in its alleged minstrelsy. The Lee-Perry discourse reveals the continued pattern of Black intellectuals and critics distancing themselves from not only minstrelsy as a theatrical form, but also in the performed “gestures, movements, and enactments” that defined Blackness.

To attain power not only in the arts but in political life one must contend with minstrelsy’s power over Black identity. Minstrelsy, even when Black intellectuals tried to overcome the term, is a major force in Black American arts and politics. Attempts at ontological and epistemological shifts continued to inscribe the importance of minstrelsy, dragging political forms back to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century practice. As we will see, as Black arts took on international importance, the minstrel figure became the voice for understanding

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<sup>81</sup> Hooks, *Writing Beyond Race*, 25.

and affirming that the New Negro existed. Thus racial hierarchies at once remained even as they took on a new radical potential. The oppositional use of minstrelsy by Black public intellectuals in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century sustained the virulent power of minstrel stereotypes. The construction of the New Negro relied on the minstrel as a permanent referent, maintaining racist discourses as foundational to liberatory practices and discourses. Beyond analyzing and noting the ways that white media continued to broadcast and showcase racist types informed by the minstrel, Black arts made frequent use of the minstrel to further a politics of cultural superiority.

## Chapter Two

### German *Witzblätter* and the Paradox of Racist Anti-Colonialism<sup>1</sup>

On May 4, 1904, a German university student walking the streets of Munich could be certain that he was not only a citizen of a modern industrial nation, but also a beneficiary of a colonial empire. Be it the products he bought, the education he received, or the entertainment he enjoyed, he knew his country reigned supreme over colonial subjects. Yet, if he picked up the “Special Colonial Issue” (Spezial-Nummer Kolonien) of *Simplicissimus*, the most popular satirical magazine (Witzblatt) in the German Empire, he would discover an alternative view of German colonial power. The magazine confronted the student with graphic images of colonial violence, malevolent priests, and Africans beguiling German colonialists. Each page built on the last, suggesting that something was horribly awry in German colonies.

Unlike other representations of Africans in textbooks and on commercial packaging, *Simplicissimus*'s images were different. The magazine expressed anti-colonialism through vivid images, wordplay, and literary allusions. Against the image of the smiling colonial subject, the magazine revealed the violence Germans exerted to discipline the unruly African. In spite of its anti-colonial message, the magazine's artists used the familiar racist stereotypes and caricatures that rationalized and supported colonialism. Artists drew African men with gangly limbs, hunched shoulders, and big lips

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<sup>1</sup> Starting with this chapter, all translations, unless noted, are by the author. In addition, translations will appear within the body of this work and the original text will appear in the footnotes.

while African women appeared with gigantic breasts and backsides. Still, while they complied with European racism, satirical magazines also played a critical role in public discourses on colonialism from the founding of the colonial empire in 1884 to its dissolution during the First World War. In their critiques of the German state, satirical magazines disordered the logic of imperial progress, racial hierarchies, and the purported humanitarian mission of colonialism. They revealed that German colonialism was as aggressive and brutal as the methods used by other European colonial powers.

*Simplicissimus's* Colonial Issue was surprisingly prescient. A month after it was published the special issue, Germany began its first colonial war in 1904. After decades of enduring increasingly repressive conditions, the Herero and Nama in German South-West Africa (Deutsch-Südwestafrika, present-day Namibia) took up arms against German settlers. Under the command of General Lothar von Trotha, the German military led a campaign of forced removal and the destruction of farmland, enslaving and murdering thousands over the next three years.<sup>2</sup>

Although *Simplicissimus* could not have known the full extent to which the German military would respond to a colonial uprising, the magazine's prophetic vision of colonial violence fit within the tradition of German satire. *Kladderadatsch*, the preeminent satirical magazine before *Simplicissimus*, had likewise developed critiques of Germany since the failed Revolution of 1848. Indeed, *Kladderadatsch* ridiculed Prussian traditions and criticized Otto von Bismarck. On the eve of the West Africa Conference in

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, *The German Colonial Empire*, 51-65; Bley, *South-West Africa Under German Rule*, 143-169; Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 602-615.

Berlin, the magazine voiced its anxieties about the colonial project. In a full-page illustration, *Kladderadatsch* suggested that contact with Africans would debase the superior European stock. Yet by the end of the century *Kladderadatsch*'s readership found themselves living comfortably in the Germany forged by Bismarck, leading the magazine to ostensibly make peace with the German state and retreat from criticizing the government. Instead, the magazine turned to mocking the aspirations of the working class.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, the *Witzblätter*'s satirical illustrations provide historically contiguous critiques of German colonialism. Responding to current events shortly after they happened, the magazines counter the familiar narratives of citizens assured of their racial superiority and the benevolence of colonialism. I am particularly interested in three specific touchstones in German colonial history: *Kladderadatsch*'s response to the creation of the German colonial empire in 1884; *Simplicissimus*'s criticisms of colonialism before and during the colonial war in German Southwest Africa of the early twentieth century; and how both magazines changed their image of the colonial African in the aftermath of the First World War.

Founded in 1896, *Simplicissimus* took up *Kladderadatsch*'s mandate of critically examining German culture and politics, becoming the most widely read satirical magazine in Germany by century's end.<sup>4</sup> It developed a strong preference for vibrant

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<sup>3</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society*, 29.

<sup>4</sup> In 1900, *Simplicissimus* had a circulation of 85,000 compared to *Kladderadatsch*'s 50,000.

illustrations in rich colors that contrasted heavily with *Kladderadatsch*'s literary tone of.<sup>5</sup> Through constant promotion, *Simplicissimus*'s editor, Ludwig Thoma, gave the Munich-based magazine a national reputation. The timing could not have been more perfect: the magazine's emergence coincided with the return of the political rights of the Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD), which Bismarck had crippled from 1878 to 1890.<sup>6</sup> In the socialists, the satirical magazine found an audience ready and willing to criticize the German Empire's policies and developing traditions. Finally receiving a seat at the table after a decade of political interference, the SPD actively represented a threat to the hierarchical structure of German society that Bismarck had built. In accord with SPD's politics, *Simplicissimus*'s anti-colonialism appealed to the political party that challenged the status quo of German politics, law, and family. When socialists in Chemnitz, Dresden, and Frankfurt organized *Simplicissimus* reading nights, they expanded their influence and that of the magazine by putting it into the hands of common people.<sup>7</sup> By 1900, the magazine developed a wider and more general readership than *Kladderadatsch*, and became especially popular with students.

Deprived of its colonial possessions under the Treaty of Versailles, the war ruptured the staid image of the suffering African. The shock that Germans felt at the end

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<sup>5</sup> Still, *Simplicissimus* published works by some of the most influential writers from German-speaking Europe: Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Richard Dehmel. Allen, *Satire and Society*, 35, 201.

<sup>6</sup> The socialists and the SPD were seen as threats to German stability. The Anti-Socialist Law passed by the Reichstag in 1878 was meant to hamper their activity. Bismarck was the law's main proponent, which did much to endear him to those who feared revolution in Germany, including the readers of *Kladderadatsch*. See Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party*.

<sup>7</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society*, 46.

of the war brought with it a sense of a racialized national failure. Not only because of the loss of the war to France, but also because France used colonial African troops (*Troupes coloniales* or *Armée coloniale*) as part of the postwar occupation of the Rhineland.<sup>8</sup> Germans responded to France's "racist" provocation through the propaganda campaign, "the Black Shame on the Rhine" (der schwarze Schmach am Rhein), which associated the occupation of the Rhineland by French colonial soldiers with the racialized humiliating loss of German global power. Germans across the political spectrum, including the SPD, perceived African men as uncontrollable sexually aggressive creatures preying on an emasculated and humiliated Germany.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas the satirical magazines had once viewed Africans as objects of sympathy, they now protested the alleged atrocities committed by African soldiers. By aligning themselves with most mainstream representations of racial humiliation, the magazines attempted to remain relevant as readership declined with the rise of photojournalism. The period after the First World War, then, represented a volte-face. If the treatment of African subjects in the colonial period represented the empire's overarching brutality, the cartoons of uniformed and armed African soldiers attacking the countryside revealed Germany's postwar racist anxieties. Having already developed a

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<sup>8</sup> For France, the use of colonial African troops relieved French soldiers from these duties and was also seen as a way of counting colonial soldiers as part of the victorious republic. Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 281-282.

<sup>9</sup> "Discriminated against and targeted as a racially primitive and alien threat in the 'heart of Europe', they [French colonial soldiers] were represented in the German media as being governed by dangerous, uncontrollable sexual instincts and desires." Iris Wigger, "Black Shame'-The Campaign against 'Racial Degeneration' and Female Degradation in Interwar Europe," *Race and Class*, Vol. 51 (3) 35.

visual discourse against colonialism that relied on explicit racist conceptions of Africans, these images trafficked in suggesting that the former colonial subjects were now the masters of France's newest "colony," Germany. Indeed, the postwar cartoons reveal how the dismantling of German colonial power in Africa after the First World War did not distance African subjects from either Germany or the German mind; instead, the war literally brought the colonial subject into the "decolonized" empire, bringing the imagined colonial figure from the frontier to the home front of a colonized Germany.

The scholarship on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* helps us understand satire's place in a colonial empire, especially Chinua Achebe's critique of the novel's "triumphant beastiality[sic]." Late nineteenth-century satirical magazines, much like *Heart of Darkness*, "project[ed] the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked."<sup>10</sup> Much like Achebe's view of *Heart of Darkness*, satirical magazines remained within the logic of white supremacy by critiquing the colonial project through the narrative of the caricatured simple and animalistic African.

This critical voice has been finely interrogated within English literature, with Joseph Conrad's oeuvre, and *Heart of Darkness* in particular, being the exemplar of synthesizing latent racist knowledge to attack racist structures. As Chinua Achebe has rightly argued, the "beastiality" of Conrad's image of the African only works within an already existing colonial racism. Indeed, satire cannot succeed, cannot be read, without a knowing audience—an audience invested in the critique of the familiar. Like the student

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<sup>10</sup> Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,'" 2.

who picked up the Special Colonial Issue, the German public came to view themselves in a globalizing racial hierarchy that placed them at the pinnacle with the other white, Christian, bourgeois people of Europe. Yet as we will see, despite the alleged promises of colonialism for the German public, there were those who viewed colonialism, at best, as a waste of resources that should be used at home and, at worse, as a reflection of the state's treatment of German citizens. The analysis of these images then focuses not only on what is seen in the images, but also on how these figures voice the concerns of a German readership. Each illustration reveals the voice of German concerns disguised as the voice of Africans. Where Achebe revealed the literary uses of animalistic Africans, I reveal how satirical magazines visualized Africans in service of anti-colonialism. In so doing, the paradox of racist anti-colonialism in Germany offers an opportunity for us to expand our knowledge of European attitudes towards imperialism.

### ***Kladderadatsch and the Ambivalence of Colonialism***

Born out of the political revolution of 1848 in Germany, the Berlin-based *Kladderadatsch* became the most popular satirical magazine through the latter half of the nineteenth-century. The magazine featured what historian Ann Taylor Allen describes as the Berliner “dry, cynical, and laconic” sense of humor.<sup>11</sup> Still, *Kladderadatsch* reflected the trends of the day, changing their targets of satire to mirror the mood of the German middleclass.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the drive toward German unification in the 1860s, the magazine kept its focus firmly liberal, not only making fun of Prussian elites and

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<sup>11</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society*, 30.

depicting socialists as class agitators.<sup>13</sup> The magazine supported Bismarck through the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and German unification in 1871.<sup>14</sup> Yet the magazine's response to West Africa Conference in 1884 reveals the swing of the pendulum in *Kladderadatsch's* opinion of Bismarck's leadership.

The conference to partition most of Africa between European powers, the November 16, 1884 issue of *Kladderadatsch*, appearing a day after its opening, capitalized on German concerns over the acquisition of African colonies. The full page illustration, "The Cultural Progress of the Congo" (*Culturfortschritte am Congo*), was divided into six vignettes depicting colonial African subjects participating in various bourgeois activities: vacationing on a beach, noisily performing in a Harmony Club, laughing over the pages of *Kladderadatsch*, engaging in a romantic courtship, pickpocketing each other outside a train station, and reading an advertising column [Image 2.1]. In each activity, the Africans misuse common European commodities and, in their mishandling, reveal their ineptitude at their attempts toward civility.

Devoid of a direct attack on Bismarck's policies, the illustration portrayed much more than racist stereotypes and caricatures. The racist vignettes juxtapose the idyllic bourgeois German lifestyle with the colonial subjects' effort to mimic German cultural norms.

By collapsing the colonizer into the colonized, the illustration critiqued the growth of Germany's colonial ambitions. In these essentialist images of Africans, *Kladderadatsch*

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<sup>13</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society*, 21-22.

argued against the colonial project for the simple reason that the primitive African it depicted was incapable of understanding an advanced European civilization. The idea of European progress frames the stalled maturation of Africans as a waste of European resources. Presented with the tools, domestic products, the hallmarks of educational advancement, and bourgeois leisure activities, like the Harmony Club, Africans appear unrefined and ignorant of cultured behavior. The satirical magazine argues that the colonial project's pretense bringing progress to primitive Africans was laughable to the point of being not only ridiculous, but also wasteful economically, culturally and politically. No matter how much Africans wanted or tried to emulate bourgeois society, they would fail. Colonial efforts to facilitate African acculturation, to the magazine, was sheer farce and entirely worthy of satire.

The family on a beach excursion in the upper right corner sets the tone for the other images that follow: The father wears a grass skirt and European boots, smokes and carries a case of cigars, and walks with a teakettle hanging from his side.<sup>15</sup> His wife wears the appropriate swimming attire, yet is adorned with a horse shoe necklace, while the son appears in swim shorts and a graduate's mortarboard. This image plays against the normal image of the smiling African that began to adorn commercial goods in the nineteenth-century.<sup>16</sup> Reversing the commercialized racism of having the African *on* the

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<sup>15</sup> The cigars may have been a reference to the colonial adventurer, and failed tobbaconist Adolf Lüderitz. Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 207-208.

<sup>16</sup> From Anne McClintock's groundbreaking work *Imperial Leather* to David Ciarlo's *Advertising Empire*, illustrated advertisements have proven fertile ground for revealing how citizens understood their place in global empires. For the citizens of empire, scholars argue, the colorful packaging revealed the racial difference between them, the white consumer, and the image of the African on the commodity. The marketed figure of the

package of cigars, the father-figure in the illustration becomes the consumer, enjoying the gift of colonialism meant for the German at home.

Similarly, the romantic courtship vignette provides a similar scene: an African man in top hat and coat tails—and not much else—courts a woman in similar mismatched attire. Wearing a bonnet, a corset, and a bustle over a kitchen apron, the woman accepts a cactus from her lover as if it were a bouquet of flowers, while she walks her pet crocodile. Through the beach excursion, the reader confronted colonial subjects in leisure instead of labor. In their play and importantly in their maladaptation to cultural norms, the jovial Africans gave expression to the fears of social leveling. In extending the already existent fear concerning the portent of societal breakdown as a byproduct of colonialism, the magazine countered many of the hopes proffered by those who wished for Germany to expand its colonial empire like England and France had done with enviable success.

The German scholar Susanne Zantop has shown that prior to the formation of the colonial empire, a matrix of colonial (mis)understandings emerged in Germany. These “colonial fantasies” developed a knowledge of the colonial subject based on travelogues, novels, and other ephemera. For German readers, they helped to make “the strange familiar, and the familiar ‘familial.’”<sup>17</sup> Early narratives framed German colonialism as a utopian, collaborative arrangement between settler and colonial subject, while sustaining

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smiling Black colonial subject on chocolates, cigars, and other goods placed the African native as an image in service to the desires of the white consumer. See McClintock, *Imperial Leather; Ciarlo, Advertising Empire*.

<sup>17</sup> Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, 2.

a racial hierarchy in which the white settler served as the role model that would lead the colonial subject to voluntarily assimilate into European civilization and Christendom.<sup>18</sup>

However, *Kladderadatsch*'s illustration suggests a contradiction between this utopian contact and the immutable primitivism of African subjects. The notion of acculturation, based on cultural hierarchy, also assumes that the colonized has the capacity to absorb new cultural norms and behaviors, but doing so destroys the hierarchy on which colonialism is based. The satirical magazines show the collaborative process as a disappointment, in part due to these types of inherent contradictions of race. The intervention of the settler in Africa fails to sustain a hierarchy of the settler over the colonial subject; instead, the African attempts to become fully Europeanized, or at least tries to do so, if only in caricature. The satirical magazines place the German reader within the advanced colony, only to find Africans using—and importantly misusing—domestic goods. In so doing, the illustration laughs not only at the African maladaptation but to the hopes of German colonialism.

In a July issue of *Kladderadatsch*—months prior to the West Africa Conference—the magazine illustrated its praise for the way Bismarck had kept Germany out of the colonial game [Image 2.2]. “The South Sea is the Mediterranean of the Future” showed Bismarck sitting comfortably on top of the globe, reading a book called “Social Reforms.” Underneath appear the personifications of European powers’ fight for control over India, struggling under the weight of the world. “That is fine with me,” Bismarck

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<sup>18</sup> Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, 24.

retorts, “as long as the others are busy down there, one can have peace up here.”<sup>19</sup>

Smoking a traditional tobacco pipe labelled “Pax” (Latin for “peace”) with his book of social reforms, Bismarck stands out against the squabbling European powers. Under his distinguished leadership, Germans lived in a country focused on domestic progress instead of colonial land grabs. The only indication of German colonial power was a single harbor, Angra Pequena, on the coast of present-day Namibia. Operated by Adolf Lüderitz, the harbor would become the port of entry to Germany South-West Africa in 1885. But at the time of the cartoon, it was one of many private ventures that did not distract Bismarck from Germany’s domestic priorities. Compared to the tacit praise of Bismarck in the July illustration, the vignettes depicting African acculturation argued against the aspirations of those who saw colonialism as beneficial to the nation. Together, the two illustrations reveal the magazine’s rejection of Germany joining the European competition for colonial empires.

If racial ideologies and accompanying literature sought to establish the European as conqueror and colonizer, the vignettes exposed the end result of that conquest: colonial subjects posing as Europeans.<sup>20</sup> Instead of asserting the European atop a racial hierarchy within the colonial universe, the illustrations located the colonial subject as a false equal to the European. Indeed, the Christian development of the African was offered as one of colonialism’s central goals. Yet the vignettes play with this notion by placing the Africans within typical bourgeois life; humorously, not only were they vacationing and

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<sup>19</sup> “Mir kann es ganz recht sein, wenn die anderen dort unten Beschäftigung finden. Man hat dann endlich Ruhe hier oben.” *Kladderadatsch* nr 32, 13. Juli 1884, 128.

<sup>20</sup> Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, 6.

getting married like Europeans, but they were also getting pickpocketed and reading *Kladderadatsch* themselves. The illustrations draw this conclusion: if colonizers achieved their goals, acculturated Africans could be vacationing like Europeans, getting pickpocketed like Europeans, and, reading *Kladderadatsch*.

It is in this early cartoon that *Kladderadatsch* constructs African “triumphant beastiality” to satirically protest the colonial project. Yet, the cartoon and *Heart of Darkness* operate differently in their respective historical contexts. Whereas Conrad’s novel fictionalizes the brutality of King Leopold’s Congo Free State and its mutilation and murder of African people at the turn of the century, *Kladderadatsch*’s context suggests that an economic exchange is impossible and is indeed unequal. The cartoon jokes with the notion that Europeans could impart any of their goods upon Africans. To the magazine, in the offer of European culture, there exists an unraveling of cultural values when attempting to create an African civilization in the European model. The illustration reveals the importance of presenting Africa as the negative image of Europe. Placing the African within bourgeois society, indeed by accessorizing Africans in European commodities, *Kladderadatsch*—like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*—defined Africa as “the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization.”<sup>21</sup> Images of Africans’ failed attempts at civilization makes them perfect foils for Europeans and European civilization. While we see the images of Germany’s racist imagining of African people, we also see European progress reach its racial limits. In the minds of *Kladderadatsch* and

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<sup>21</sup> Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness,’” 2.

their readers, as the Other there is a boundary Africans cannot cross to the civilized Europeans.

However, in the end, the concerns of the satirical magazine were of little concern for Bismarck and the machinations of European colonial policy. By the end of the Berlin conference the next year, Germany claimed South-West Africa, Togoland, and Cameroon, and would soon take over the German East Africa Company (parts of Burundi, Rwanda, and mainland Tanzania) from the German explorer and colonialist Carl Peters. Still, the vignettes in the illustration established a precedent for satirical magazines. Images of Africans would continue to be used unerringly, to depict German colonialism as a foolish endeavor for what it hoped to bring to Africa.

### **Frenzied Pitch**

By the turn of the century several concomitant events fostered a different image of anti-colonialism. First, in 1890, the socialists returned to political power after over a decade in exile and political obstruction by Bismarck. Second, a new satirical magazine, *Simplicissimus* surpassed *Kladderadatsch* in circulation by 1900. Finally, German colonial administrations grew to better accommodate missionaries and private industries through a thorough reformation of the colonial bureaucratic structures. Relatedly, the growth of a working administrative system allowed for the development of Germany's only African settler colony in South-West Africa, where 3,650 Europeans settled by the beginning of the twentieth-century.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa*, 71.

As *Heart of Darkness* reaches its fevered (or what Achebe would call “frenzied”) pitch within a narrative of Belgian colonial brutality, satirical magazines likewise reached their height of criticism during Germany’s colonial wars. Marlowe’s trip up the river as a geographical journey into a brutality that ends in the discovery of Kurtz—the white European among the noisy bodies of the Other—is a helpful analogy to the *chronological* journey the satirical magazines took with the colonial administration’s growth.

Following the development of a functional administration and the growth of a settler colony, the fantasy of colonial harmony and cooperation between colonial subject and colonizer strained against the reality of German colonialism. The conflict between native people and settlers began in 1897, when a cattle plague led the Herero to seek relief in Christian mission stations. This was seen as providential by German settlers and led to the Herero “adapting” to their role as laborers on private farms and public works.<sup>23</sup> By 1903, Theodor Leutwein, the governor of South-West Africa, believed he had tamed the Herero without a war. Indeed, he believed his treatment of the Herero chief, Samuel Meherero, as an African ruler instead of a subject of the German empire represented the model of how to treat colonial subjects. Yet, behind Leutwein’s delusion, the experiences for African subjects were quite different. The floggings, murders, and rapes of African subjects by German settlers were commonplace and went unpunished.<sup>24</sup>

In January, 1904, following months of small skirmishes between the Herero and German settlers, Samuel Meherero led a rebellion to oust the German settlers from South-

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<sup>23</sup> Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 607.

<sup>24</sup> Zimmerer and Zeller. *Genocide in German South-West Africa*, 177; Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa*, 73-75.

West Africa. Leutwein's initial plan for restoring order called for compromise. Aware that the white settlers had instigated the Herero to rebellion, he knew that the continued growth of the colony was dependent on their labor, their cattle, and their land. Berlin sent General Lothar von Trotha to seek an unconditional surrender, believing Leutwein too diplomatic in the treatment of the Herero.<sup>25</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm II chose von Trotha due to the Kaiser's preference for the prestigious Imperial German Army over the less dignified German colonial troops. Von Trotha arrived on June 11, and against Leutwein's advice, modeled his military campaign on an occupation that privileged white settlers over the inhabitants. It was a war against the Herero with catastrophic consequences.<sup>26</sup> Within the German Reichstag, many voiced concerns, especially the SPD and Catholic Center Party.<sup>27</sup>

Allied strongly with the German working class and adjacent to the politics of the SPD, *Simplicissimus* exposed the brutality of the colonial project as one face of the broader violence of the empire. For the satirical magazine, revealing the extreme measures that the German military took against Black people reflected the violence that had been unleashed against Germany's working class in Germany.<sup>28</sup> Released prior to

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<sup>25</sup> Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 610.

<sup>26</sup> Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 610.

<sup>27</sup> Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa*, 36. The Center Party was frequently critical of colonial rule. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 14-15.

<sup>28</sup> Richard H. Evans notes that in Germany, urban workers did not make many distinctions between foreign colonial empires and their own. Many within the working class took notice of how poorly Germans treated native African people. As Evans shows, many believed that despite Black inferiority, other colonial empires treated Black people better than Germany. As socialists, these workers were inclined to look at the state and capitalist ventures as enemy of the people. In so doing, they were more inclined to notice

von Trotha's arrival, "The Special Colonial Issue" thoroughly criticized the European presence in Africa.<sup>29</sup> For the magazine, the violence meted out against Africans was no anomaly but an essential part of German policies.

The cover cartoon was fairly innocuous compared to what lay inside. Titled "The Goal of Civilization" (*Das Ziel der Zivilisation*), the cover showed three Africans cresting a hill, approaching a pile of golden boulders [Image 2.3]. "Quickly, bury the gold again before the Europeans bring us their culture," one of them warns.<sup>30</sup> Yet making light of the constant attempt of Europeans to exploit African resources, the cartoon suggested the exchange of culture for gold was not worth it. Similarly in a message to *Kladderadatsch* a quarter-century earlier, the cover showed Africans disinterested and disdainful of the civilizing mission. Yet, where *Kladderadatsch* suggested that Africans were too primitive to become cultured, *Simplicissimus* offered acculturation as a process that came at a price. The promise of European civilization is presented as a detestable side effect of the colonial project. The African characters are determined and disinterested in "helping" in the colonial project, hiding the resource that beckon Europeans into Africa. If Africans could hide the real reason for colonialism—the appropriation of resources—perhaps they would be left alone.

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the mistreatment of colonial subject as part of their misgivings toward the German Empire. Evans, *Proletarian and Politics*, 175-176.

<sup>29</sup> Spezial Nummer Kolonien, *Simplicissimus* 9, Nr 6, May 3, 1904, 51-66.

<sup>30</sup> "Vergraben wir rasch das Gold wieder, sonst bringen uns die Europäer ihre kultur." Spezial Nummer Kolonien, *Simplicissimus*, 51.

The cover's sarcastic Africans set the tone for the rest of the issue. To the point, this sarcastic tone alluded back to the promise of uplift from Article 6 of the General Act of the West Africa Conference:

All the Powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in the aforesaid territories bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native tribes and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being... They [European colonial powers] shall, without distinction of creed or nation, protect and favour all religious, scientific, or charitable institutions, and undertakings created and organized for the above ends, or which aim at instructing the natives and bring home to them the blessings of civilization... Freedom of conscience and religious toleration are expressly guaranteed to the natives, no less than to subjects and to foreigners.<sup>31</sup>

While this mandate purported to offer protection to the native peoples of Africa, the promise of improvement proved an important source of ridicule. The magazine upends the promise of Western civilization to expose the truth behind the cause and the effects of colonialism. It views the reality of colonialism as a contradiction to the purported colonial fantasy and humanitarian mission. The illustration speaks to the promise of the harmonious coexistence and the exchange between the homeland and colonial frontier, where Germany gains economically while the Africans are improved in their “moral and material well-being.” The Africans, looking to maintain the upper hand against the colonial scheme, hide the real “goal” of the civilizing mission, denying their gift of humane improvement. *Simplicissimus*'s colonial issue asks how those values and “blessings of civilization” are applied to colonial subjects, and importantly reveals how the application of the colonial value rebounds back home.

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<sup>31</sup> Harlow and Carter. *Archives of Empire*, 2:31.

As we will see, *Simplicissimus*'s reading of colonialism is quite different from *Kladderadatsch*. Where the older satirical magazine voiced an ambivalence toward colonial expansion, *Simplicissimus* made clear its sympathy for Africans over German settlers, missionaries, and the military. And unlike *Kladderadatsch*, which built its racism around the permanent difference of race, class, and culture, *Simplicissimus* reinforced the helplessness of Africans in the face of imperial might. In so doing, the satirical magazine bolstered the similarities of African subjects and the German working class and poor. The magazine thus used the image of suffering Africans to protest colonialism as part of a larger system of control that the empire meted out to subject and citizen alike.

If the cover image offered a dry and ironic tone to the colonial mission, the first illustration within the magazine, "Force of Habit" (*Die Macht der Gewohnheit*), gave graphic representation to the subjugation of African and German women [Image 2.4]. In six panels, it betrayed the sense that the repeated coercive, violent practice of colonialism abroad would return to the German home.<sup>32</sup> The comic tells the story of a German colonial adventurer, luxuriating in a non-descript African setting. He sits, whip-in-hand, with an African woman laying amorously on his lap. Returning to Germany and his expecting wife, he sees her painting their stove pipe black. With a sudden realization, he recognizes that he can once again "recapture" the colonial fantasy. Taking the brush and paint, he colors his wife black and immediately proceeds to beat her.

The cartoon locates the desire to discipline and sexualize along racial lines, where the adventurer continues the fantasy of sexual domination while taming the wild once he

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<sup>32</sup> Spezial Nummer Kolonien, *Simplicissimus*, 52.

returns to the domestic sphere. It is helpful to think back to the commercialized racism that looks to smiling African subjects on commercial packaging. Since satirical magazines relied on and marketed to the German working class, their readers would be familiar with the commodities that propagated images of the smiling primitive on their packaging. At once the image is permitted to traverse the empire on the packaged good, while the actual colonial subject is placed comfortably far away. *Simplicissimus* takes the concept of the safe and enjoyable domestic product as a harmless marker of civilization and brings the omitted colonial violence into the home of the reader. It is in “Force of Habit” that the other figure of colonialism, the colonial adventurer, “brings home” the coercive element that is concealed in the commodity. Yet his appearance in the home conflicts with the harmonious relationship the citizen has with the colony. Instead of the promised benefits of colonialism brought to the home front, he revives the violence and sexual predation at the heart of the colonial project within his own home.

Many readers would have been familiar with the scandal that Carl Peters, the founder of East Africa had cause in 1892 when it was revealed that he had married an African woman following local customs—hence a non-Christian marriage. What further scandalized Peters’ actions was his alleged murder of his wife and her lover. The concern raised in Germany over Peters’ behavior focused on whether the hero of German colonialism had “gone native.”<sup>33</sup> Echoing this concern on its effects on German institutions, the cartoons argued that colonialism breeds violence that could come back to the empire.

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<sup>33</sup> Baranowski, *Nazi Empire* 32-33.

The colonial issue suggested a connection between colonialism and the alleged benefits of missionary work in two separate illustrations. Two separate illustrations suggested that Christian missionaries were complicit in Germany's violent interventions in Africa. "Modern Apostle" (*Moderne Apostel*) dramatically illustrated the violence of colonialism with images of German soldiers firing into the backs of fleeing Africans [Image 2.5].<sup>34</sup> Towering over the soldiers, the Christian missionaries smile over the battle field giving their blessing to the conquest. The text underneath the graphic image appropriates a Biblical passage from Matthew 28:19: "Go into the world and teach all nations."<sup>35</sup> The image questioned how the message of Christian benevolence could accompany such brutal violence. Although not mentioned by name, the cartoon was most likely aimed at the largest colonial missionary organization, the Rhenish Missionary Society, which had been a mainstay of African colonialism work since the 1880s. In Germany the society had gained a reputation for creating visually captivating tracts that used photography to publicize their good works in Africa.<sup>36</sup> In comparison to the image of Christianized Africans that the society used to raise funds, *Simplicissimus* foregrounded missionary work as not only negligent in its Christian uplift but active in the military's killing of wayward African pagans.

The two panels of "Poor Relief" (*Armenfürsorge*) take a far less violent approach to scrutinizing colonial missionary work by criticizing the misplaced efforts of

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<sup>34</sup> Spezial Nummer Kolonien, *Simplicissimus*, 58.

<sup>35</sup> "Gehet hin in alle Welt und lehret alle Völker." Spezial Nummer Kolonien, *Simplicissimus*, 58.

<sup>36</sup> Silvester, Hayes, Hartmann, "This ideal conquest", 12.

humanitarian aid instead [Image 2.6]. In the top panel, a threadbare German family picks through the trash stating, “If only once, we would be warmly clothed and well fed!” The bottom panel shows sweating African children and women in thick sweaters, while female missionaries smile over the children. As if in reply to the German family, the Africans complain, “If only the damned whites with their woolens left us alone!”<sup>37</sup>

Similar to the cover of the special issue, the illustration positions Africans as discontent receivers of German goodwill, while Germans themselves are left without any form of welfare. The diptych builds asymmetrical sympathy for the plight of Africans and Germans. The experience of Africans was, at best, a nuisance, but for the poor German family, the lack of support is a matter of life and death. Moreover, it pairs with the masculine missionary violence of the previous page. Whereas the male missionaries accompany the terrorizing of male African warriors, “Poor Relief” exposes the feminine counterpart, where the kinder side of missionary intervention is no less hypocritical in its attempts to “help” African women and children. By showing colonial intervention leading to an imbalance of resources, the cartoon hints at the necessity of social welfare for the German poor, instead of a system of neglect that foists unnecessary good on Africans. To be sure, the level of suffering varies from starving citizens to sweating Africans, but the message of an overextended colonial project over the needs of German citizens remains its central message.

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<sup>37</sup> “Wenn wir doch nur einmal warm gekleidet und satt wären!”/ “Wenn die verfluchten Weißen uns bei der hitze nur mit ihrem Wollzeug in Ruhe ließen.” Spezial Nummer Kolonien, *Simplicissimus*, 54.

The illustration “Colonial Powers” (*Kolonialmächte*) made sure to inform its readers that Germany was not alone in its exploitation of Africans [Image 2.7].<sup>38</sup> It revealed Africa as a continent run rampant with European powers abusing their African subjects. Reveling in the stereotypes of colonial powers, the comic images exposed how perceived national characteristics affected colonial rule. Be they German, English, French, or Belgian colonies, each was responsible for disturbing activities in Africa. The first image depicts the German colony under the rigid control of the Prussian military. A line of giraffes, with number designations goose step in front of a military officer, while in the foreground another German officer attempts to muzzle a crocodile. Next, the English colony holds an African man in a vice and forcibly pours whisky into his mouth as money is pressed out of him, all with a priest supervising the financial withdrawal. In the French colonial project, soldiers kiss and dance with African women, while a malnourished African child stares unattended beneath them. Finally, the Belgian colony shows King Leopold II eating the head of an African man while the rest of the body sits on a spit.<sup>39</sup>

If the previous images had not specified which European power was most responsible for a foolish engagement in African colonialism, this cartoon made the charge clear: all of them were equally so. As Richard J. Evans notes, many within the German working class condemned all European colonial interventions. To be sure, Evans suggests, many in the working class viewed Black people as lazy and, somewhat

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<sup>38</sup> Spezial Nummer Kolonien, *Simplicissimus*, 55.

<sup>39</sup> See, Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*.

paradoxically, responsible for undercutting the wages of German sailors. Yet despite the working class's racism it, "did not alter the basic fact of the workers' disapproval of colonialism."<sup>40</sup> To the working class readers, the ridiculous nature of the German colony to the brutal cannibalism of Belgium, each image suggested that the means and intent of European powers may be different but nevertheless they were all engaged in disturbing and reprehensible behavior.

In her study of German satirical magazines, Allen focuses on the politics of Europe, only signaling that the images of colonial subjects were "sympathetic."<sup>41</sup> However, these images go beyond simply being sensitive to the plight of African colonial subject. In each image, *Simplicissimus* suggests an antagonism between Germany (as well as other European powers) and African colonies. Furthermore, several of the images are not only graphic but also explicitly point to German violence, false religious sentiment, and sexual brutality. The satirical magazine's sympathy for Black lives was a pointed critique of German rule and a larger concern for German citizens, as "Poor Relief" points to. Satirical magazines offered a different point of contact with colonial subjects than the packaging of cigars or chocolates. Instead of static grinning faces, the satirical magazines offered the Black body as a lens through which citizens could interact with the African colonies. Without a doubt, in both cases, the interaction was a passive one, where the viewer is told of the role of the African in the colonial scheme. Yet

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<sup>40</sup> Evans, *Proletarians and Politics*, 175-176.

<sup>41</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society*, 210.

*Simplicissimus* went one step further by directing that message along political lines that appealed to the working class.

A cover from earlier the same year, “The African Danger” featured Herero warriors invading an industrial German city [Image 2.8]. In the background, German police are overcome by the overwhelming number of warriors entering the city from one side, while German laborers burst out of the city on the other. Stuck in the middle the police attack the Herero while they try to barricade the German laborers back into the city. In the foreground, two Germans are confined in stocks. While a helpful African with scissors approaches to liberate them, one German turns to the other and sarcastically states, “It is high time the government goes full force against the Herero, otherwise those black beasts will finally come to Germany and end *our* slavery.”<sup>42</sup> Depicting the proletariat liberation from wage slavery, the cover placed the site of resistance to oppressive German rule on the African colonial frontier. Once more, in the complaint of the imprisoned Germans, the cover suggested that the treatment of Africans and of the German working class were in a similar struggle. The juxtaposition of the successful attack on the German city further offers an ironic take on a workers’ revolution. Relying on the notion of Black racial inferiority, the African victory over Germany is not only laughable but also includes a criticism of a lax working class that is waiting for revolution to happen to them.

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<sup>42</sup> “Es ist höchste Zeit, daß die Regierung mit aller Macht gegen die Hereros vorgeht, sonst kommen die Schwarzen Bestien schließlich noch nach Deutschland und heben die Sklaverei auf,” *Simplicissimus* 9, Nr 4, April 19, 1904, 31. Emphasis added.

In the aftermath of the death of Jakob Morenga, *Simplicissimus* commemorated his death on October 14, 1907 [Image 2.9]. The cover was a clever reference not only to the coordinated attack by German and British forces to kill Morenga the month before but the popularity of Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*. The cover depicts King Edward VII as Herod with Germania—the female personification—as Salome.<sup>43</sup> Edward presents Germania with the head of Morenga, the stand-in for the prophet Jokanaan. The King then commands to Germania, “Now dance for me, Salome.”<sup>44</sup> Referencing the erotic climax of Strauss's opera, the cover reveals a complex critique of international relations and colonialism. With the direct quote from *Salome*, “Tanz für mich, Salome,” the reader familiar with the plot of the opera would be aware that the opera concludes with Salome declaring her love to and kissing Jokanaan's severed head:

If you had looked at me, you'd have  
 fallen in love! I'm thirsting to drink your beauty.  
 I hunger to taste your flesh. No wine nor fruit  
 could banish all my fevered longing... What shall  
 I do now, Jokanaan? All the rivers, all the surging  
 waters cannot quench the fire of my desire and  
 longing... Oh! But why did you not look at  
 me? If you'd but once looked at me you would  
 have fallen in love. I know for sure you would  
 have fallen in love. The glorious secret of love is  
 greater than is the secret of death.

Ah! Now I have kissed your mouth at last,  
 Jokanaan. Ah! Ah now, I have at last kissed your  
 mouth. There was a bitter lingering taste upon  
 your lips. Could it be blood I taste? No! For  
 perhaps it's the taste of love... They tell me that  
 the taste of love is bitter... But what of that?

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<sup>43</sup> Amanda Holden, “Salome,” 889.

<sup>44</sup> “Tanz für mich, Salome.” “Germania mit dem Haupt des Morenga,” *Simplicissimus* 12, No. 29, October 14, 1907, 447.

What of that? For I have kissed your mouth at  
last Jokanaan. Yes, now I have kissed, kissed your  
mouth.<sup>45</sup>

Thus the magazine's cover, without presenting the final erotic scene, continues to see Germany's desire for colonial power as a violent, sexual, and grotesque obsession against native peoples coordinated with other European powers.

The satirical magazines' relation to colonialism stood in contrast to the commercialized images of Black people on domestic packaging. Where those images stood as static representations of the breadth of empire, satirical magazine images reflected vibrant, dynamic stories of German current events. Commercial goods communicated to Europeans the immutability of the racial hierarchy through static images, devoid of narrative and rarely connected to daily life or international events. In contrast, satirical magazines gave race a dynamic presence for German citizens that connected humor with current events. Looking at the image on the chocolate or cigar package gave a top-down view of race. The logos with the smiling African and the grass hut gave race the appearance of permanence, existing outside the realm of an ever-evolving human history. Consumer goods, then, maintained the colonialist gaze at a distance, where the details of a brutal regime could not be seen.

The satirical magazines in particular placed discourses on Black people away from commodity racism which saw them as part of a "consumer spectacle" and instead placed them at the center of German citizens' concerns.<sup>46</sup> This upended the relationship

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Strauss, liner notes, *Salome*.

<sup>46</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 33.

between the European consumer and the image of the African as a symbol of imperial progress. Now, the colonial subject appeared as an irreconcilable creature that had no place within the German sphere or as a reference to German oppression. Through the satirical magazines, race and colonialism informed citizens' understanding of themselves by penetrating their knowledge of current events. Although its readership was not as great as the illustrated weeklies like *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, Allen suggests that the satirical press shaped the political awareness of a wide segment of the public. For many, the *Witzblätter* "provided a vocabulary of protest" that articulated the experiences of German politics.<sup>47</sup> In providing a discourse for its readership, the satirical magazines allowed for an analysis of German colonialism that reflected not only a response to colonial conditions but also allegorized colonial events into relevance for its readers.

### **A Flood of Black Bodies**

The prewar era had been marked with an understanding of Black inferiority, where satire placed Africans as the victims for the needs of a colonial empire. The appearance of Black soldiers on European battlefields changed how the *Witzblätter* imagined Black peoples, reversing claims of relation between the citizen and the colonial subject. During the First World War, France mobilized over half a million men for military service from their colonies in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia with smaller contingents from Senegal, Madagascar, and Indochina.<sup>48</sup> For French officials, the use of colonial subjects in the war was at once a necessity of manpower for the war effort and

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<sup>47</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society*, 226.

<sup>48</sup> Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 2.

simultaneously an opportunity to live up to the ideological values of republicanism that France espoused. By 1915, rumors of French colonial soldiers claiming German body parts as trophies, wearing necklaces of human ears, and other atrocities spread throughout Germany.<sup>49</sup> To Germans, the use of colonial subjects was an unfair practice that also endangered the sanctity of Europe as a white continent. These concerns were deeply cathected between the anxieties of losing the war to France and importantly to colonial Africans.

By the beginning of the First World War, *Kladderadatsch* created art that challenged *Simplicissimus* in its dramatic style and reflected this new attitude toward African colonial subjects. The cover of *Kladderadatsch*'s July 1916 issue, titled "The Civilizing of Europe" (*Die Zivilisierung Europas*), depicts French and British colonial soldiers with "African" nose-rings and Scottish kilts along with their white officer rushing to defeat their German enemies in the trenches [Image 2.10]. In the foreground, a shirtless French Colonial African soldier wearing the pants of a North African Zouave uniform with lips cartoonishly red and wearing a necklace of sharp teeth and a human skull is shown running out of the frame toward the reader as he eyes a bullet coming straight toward his head. The text under the image translated a story of multiracial harmony and bravery from the British *Daily Express*:

One of the Negro soldiers gave in French a fiery speech to the white troops and called on them, with their colored brethren, to save France from the German barbarians. This speech was received with great enthusiasm,

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<sup>49</sup> Van Galen Last, *Black Shame*, 162.

to which the white and colored English and French rushed toward the enemy.<sup>50</sup>

In comparison to the ways that satirical magazines had disordered Germany's own colonial fantasy, this illustration rebounds the fantasy as a nightmare. The colonial subject is in concert with the hopes of the colonizer, allied in the purpose of the empire. But it is *France* that is the nation capable of purposefully wielding its colonial power. Once more, the colonial subject asserts his right to violence against an empire, not against the invasive colonial military but rather against the German nation. Indeed, running out of the frame, the soldier is about to assault the *reader*, a German citizen. The unseen soldier—certainly a German just outside the frame—saves the reader at the last minute as his bullet approaches the African. These are not the Herero that will liberate the proletariat, nor the colonial subject experiencing the retributive violence of colonial settlers, but a violent force that threatens citizens and state alike.

The title, “The Civilizing of Europe,” had an ironic effect of positioning a multiracial army as the civilizing force in Europe. Juxtaposing the British news with the cartoon initially meant to show solidarity in defeating the “barbarian,” the image reflects that the proper barbarian was—undoubtedly—the African. For France, and less so for Britain, the inclusion of colonial soldiers in the war against Germany was meant not only to reflect colonial attitudes, but also to realize republican principles of egalitarianism and

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<sup>50</sup> “Einer von den Negersoldaten hielt in Französischer Sprache eine feurige Anrede an weiße Truppen und forderte sie auf mit ihrem farbigen Brüdern zusammen Frankreich vor den Deutschen Barbaren zu retten. Diese Ansprache wurde mit grossem Enthusiasmus aufgenommen, worauf sich die weissen und farbigen England und Franzosen auf den Feind stürzten.” *Kladderadatsch* 69, Nr 30, July 23, 1916, 427.

humanitarian universalism.<sup>51</sup> This signaled to the magazine's German reader that support for European civilization truly rested on Germany winning the war.

*Kladderadatsch's* response to France's multiracial army—which, after 1917, included Black Americans, who served in French uniform—was a harbinger of the racial fears and anxieties that would continue after the First World War. As part of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany relinquished its colonies to the victorious allies, who continued the practice of ruling over their new territories. Yet another stipulation of the treaty was the occupation of the German Rhineland. During the first few years, France relied on its colonial African soldiers to maintain the occupation. Where France viewed the involvement of Black soldiers as living up to the values of republicanism, Germans across the political spectrum were furious over the perceived purposeful racial humiliation in using Africans to subjugate German citizens. The scandal developed into a propaganda campaign by various burgeoning political organizations called *die schwarze Schmach am Rhein* (the Black Shame on the Rhine). Its purpose was to reflect the unreasonable and *French* racial prejudice toward Germans. If successful, the campaign would gain international attention, notably from Britain and the United States. By drawing international interest, Germany hoped to alter the peace terms to their favor.<sup>52</sup>

The Black Shame took full advantage of the anxiety of racial subjugation that had started with the World War. As Iris Wigger states,

The fantastical image of a German woman raped by a 'Black Horror' was used as an allegory for a disarmed, figuratively raped (and thus emasculated) German people, bound by its enemies and the Treaty of

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<sup>51</sup> Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 270-272.

<sup>52</sup> Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 275.

Versailles...the purity of both German womanhood and the German nation were identical.<sup>53</sup>

Germans saw their very culture violated by Black men.<sup>54</sup> Having Black men, allegedly, roaming throughout Germany meant that the very land that gave meaning to German racial identity, history, and nationality was under attack. By claiming that France did more than occupy land, German propagandists argued—and earnestly felt—that the occupation was uprooting German identity itself.

The most inflammatory image of the Black Shame was Karl Goetz's cast bronze medal *Die Wacht am Rhein/Die Schwarze Schande*. Goetz had previously created a propaganda medal placing the Lusitania at the center of American-British connivance against Germany. Where the Lusitania coin pointed to the connivance of the Cunard cruise line in smuggling weapons across the Atlantic, Goetz's coin of the Black Shame was deeply provocative in its depiction of Black monstrosity and the sexual and racial victimization of the German nation. On the obverse side of the medal, the colonial soldier's profile is big lipped, with a large earring, and a jutting jaw. Above the head the inscription reads "Die Wacht am Rhein!!" (The Watch on the Rhein) and underneath, "Liberte, Égalité, Fraternité." Like the cover of "The Civilizing of Europe," the obverse side of the medal ironized the conception of shared humanity between the European and the African. Appearing grotesque and inhuman, the image struck viewers that this monster was not like them. Yet the other side is the most startling: a naked woman tied to a giant penis with an oversized French helmet resting on top. Inscribed over the image,

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<sup>53</sup> Wigger, "Black Shame", 38.

<sup>54</sup> Grant, "Visual Culture and the Occupation of the Rhineland," 41, 44.

“Die Schwarze Schande.” The medal went through several versions, one that barely concealed the phallus, one where a tree replaced the penis and the testicles were turned into roots and a singular branch was added. Another transformed the phallus into an obelisk with the text “to the scorn of the German woman.” In each version, the eye of providence—a reference to French enlightenment, the scholar Vera Ingrid Grant suggests—looks down on the woman.<sup>55</sup> At the base of the obelisk, a baby writhes unattended. The baby represented the *Rheinlandbastarde* (Rhineland bastards), children born from interracial relationships between German women and Black men. As the medallion attests, Germans responded with overwhelming disgust to miscegenation in the German homeland.

In each version, the image communicates Germany’s degradation. First, the naked woman as the literal target of Black men’s sexual violence serves as the personification of the nation. Tied to the phallus—belonging to the African soldier on the obverse side—she has been conquered by the imposing and virile soldier. Beyond the naked German woman humiliatingly chained to the phallus, the phallus is rooted in the ground; not only as the penis, but as tree and obelisk, the phallus suggests that Blackness now grows inside Germany. As testicles, as tree roots, and as the child, the root of the phallus presents the foundation of life as now nurturing Blackness in its very soil.

*Kladderadatsch* and *Simplicissimus* joined in the discourse of humiliation that defined the Black Shame propaganda. The focus on culture continued the familiar claims of the colonial era, where cultural incompatibility was the language to protest colonialism

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<sup>55</sup> Grant, “Visual Culture and the Occupation of the Rhineland,” 43-45.

and distance the citizen from a relationship with the colonial project. Yet this new focus on culture reflected that the breaking of the geographic barrier between the colonial subject and the citizen not only eliminated the image of sympathy but replaced it with the African as the polluter/pollution of the nation state. Through their images, satirical magazines told their readers of the threat to their culture by the colonial subject. References bemoaned the uncivilized nature of France for its use of African soldiers. Germany, the magazines suggested, was the last bastion of European civilization and culture.

Importantly, each magazine reflected their readership in their response to the change from the authoritarian German Empire to the liberal Weimar Republic. For the middle-class readers of *Kladderadatsch*, this meant a direct desire for the era that had crumbled away in defeat and outright hostility toward the Weimar Republic. Like its readers, the magazine viewed Germany as an innocent victim, surrounded by malicious forces while viewing the republic infiltrated by petty politicians and a greedy working class looking for handouts in the face of the nation's destruction. In the aftermath of the First World War, the political right viewed the Social Democrats and the newly formed Communist Party (KPD) as "two sides of the same coin" despite their own distrust of each other.<sup>56</sup> *Simplicissimus* was in a far more tenuous position. Where *Kladderadatsch's* readers were overwhelming suspicious of the republic and the SPD that helped to found it, *Simplicissimus* was quite aware that its readership was divided in its opinion of the new democracy. The satirical magazines throughout the 1920s presented the French

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<sup>56</sup> Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 57.

occupation as aggressive and racially humiliating in their cover art and cartoons. For both sets of readers, the Black Shame provided an advantageous target that could keep audiences reading. Each responded to its target demographic through means that reflected their values in a time of great uncertainty.

On the cover of the 1923-24 New Year's edition of *Kladderadatsch*, Father Time looks aghast at the French colonial African soldier standing on the German border [Image 2.11]. "Hey, is this perhaps the night on the Rhine?" he asks.<sup>57</sup> For readers, the word play of "the night on the Rhine" evoked the anti-French nationalist poem "The Watch on the Rhine."<sup>58</sup> The connection is more obvious in German, where "night" and "watch" ("Nacht" and "Wacht") rhyme directly. Father Time, who traditionally entrusts the responsibilities of time to the cherubic figure of the New Year, finds instead a Black intruder in the national space of Germany. The Black soldier, silent, fat-lipped, impassive, and solid stands stoically contrasting against the thin, elderly frame of Father Time. Readers would immediately understand the implications of the soldier's appearance and the wordplay: Germany's guardianship over the Rhine had fallen like the night, as dark as the soldier's skin. No longer a powerful European empire but a disarmed republic, Germany had lost the vital region of the Rhineland not only to French

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<sup>57</sup> An der Deutschen Grenze: "Manu, das ist wohl hier die Nacht am Rhein?" *Kladderadatsch* Dec/Jan 1923-4.

<sup>58</sup> Written by Max Schneckenburg during the Rhine Crisis of 1840, the poem "die Wacht am Rhein" claimed the Rhineland would remain part of the German Confederation and refused possible French annexation. For Germans, the poem continued to play an important role in nationalist and anti-French sentiment through the Franco-Prussian War into World War I. In film, "die Wacht am Rhein" would appear in both 1930 and 1979 versions of *All Quiet on the Western Front* as well as in *Casablanca*. In each film, the song functioned to rouse soldiers to nationalist action against their French counterparts.

occupation, but also to its racial inferior, the African. And despite the negligible number of Black soldiers occupying Germany by the time of the New Year's issue, the magazine projected Germany's sense of shock at the continued "Black occupation."

As the poem "The Watch on the Rhine" had been used since the 1840s to claim the Rhineland as rightly belonging to Germany against French incursion, the reference to the emerging night would remind readers of the loss of the war and Germany's own African colonies. Thus Father Time's question held many meanings. First, it referenced the perceived end of German self-rule under the occupation established by the Treaty of Versailles. No longer in control of its national destiny, and the economically vital Rhineland, Germany was in a state of decline. Second, the African soldier made the night on the Rhine a racial darkening of the country. His appearance in the nation symbolized the end of German self-determination, especially after the victorious Allies seized Germany's colonial empire. Now confronting Father Time, the colonial subject assumed the role of occupier and master, reversing the hierarchical structure of European colonial racism. Third, in referencing the well-known poem, the cover suggests a cultural decline in the presence of a triumphant France over Germany that follows from the loss of national integrity and racial usurpation. The *Kladderadatsch* cover further illustrates that the dismantling of German colonial power in Africa after the First World War did not distance Black people from Germany nor the German mind. Instead, the war brought Black people into the country, bringing the imagined colonial figure from the frontier to the home front.

*Simplicissimus* used irony to show how Germany posed no threat in the postwar era. On the cover of the March 12, 1920 issue of *Simplicissimus*, under the title “Endangered France” (*Das bedrohte Frankreich*), a French officer holds a pistol to an elderly farmer, declaring the farmer’s shovel a weapon: “Dig with your hands instead!”<sup>59</sup> In the background a Black soldier holds confiscated shovels, leaving the German farmer with nothing to cultivate the land [Image 2.12]. “The Life of European Slaves” (*Europäisches Sklavenleben*) went a step further, depicting African soldiers driving European men with whips, declaring, “On the sweat of their brow, we will eat their bread!”<sup>60</sup> With the white French officer absent, the abuses of African soldiers became excessive in their violence and penchant for exploiting Germans [Image 2.13]. As cartoons continued to thematize the violence of Black soldiers, the absence of the French officer suggested that unsupervised, African soldiers would take the lead in destroying what remained of Germany. Both of these issues of *Simplicissimus* juxtaposed the frailty of German farmers in the presence of strong Black men. In their conception of the German nation, France had already visited every humiliation upon the country, and there was nothing left to take. In comparison to *Kladderadatsch*, which focused on the idea of a bygone era, *Simplicissimus* tacitly acknowledged the situation of a weakened country and used their covers to argue that enough damage had already been done. If France continued in its treatment of German farmers, there would soon be nothing left. On their

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<sup>59</sup> “Die Waffe h[i]er—Sie können auch mit den händen graben!” “Das bedrohte Frankreich,” *Simplicissimus* 25, Nr. 7, March 12, 1920, 97.

<sup>60</sup> “Im Schweiß ihres Angesichts wollen wir ihr brot essen.” “Europäisches Sklavenleben,” *Simplicissimus* 25, Nr 49, March 2, 1921, 649.

own, the African soldiers had driven the German population to near starvation. With the disappearance of the white superior officer, readers saw African soldiers inflicting their barbarity upon the German population.

The further decline of colonial soldiers in Germany between 1921-1922 coincided with the covers of both *Simplicissimus* and *Kladderdatsch* becoming more grotesque and violent. Connecting blackness with the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, *Simplicissimus*'s "Sanctions" (*Sanktionen*) alludes to Charon carrying the dead across the river Styx to the land of the dead [Image 2.14]. The figure of a jet-black Charon with plump red lips carries a genderless white-bandaged, bloodied passenger across the Styx with the caption, "The spread of venereal disease is not forbidden by the Versailles Treaty - so it is allowed."<sup>61</sup> Purity, the cartoon suggests, would be tainted through sexual contact and that degeneration would lead to the death of German society. The Versailles Treaty, which had already caused enmity between Germans and the victorious Allies, was indicted for failing to restrict the length of time Black soldiers could remain in Germany. The magazine faulted the treaty for its silence on how the use of Black soldiers facilitated sexual violence. In keeping silent, the treaty and the Allies were welcoming the onslaught of Black Shame upon the people of Germany. In showing the aftereffect of the sexual assault of white women, the image shows the consequences of relationships between African soldiers and German women—a relationship that results in the white woman/German nation wrapped in gauze as she is led into the land of the dead.

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<sup>61</sup> "Die Verbreitung erotischer Seuchen ist im Versailler Vertrag nicht verboten -- also ist sie erlaubt." "Sanktionen" *Simplicissimus*, 27, Nr 14, July 5, 1922, 197.

The images of Black sexual aggression toward German women allegorized the emasculation and penetration of the state. Furthermore, the propagandists behind Black Shame propaganda likewise framed women's bodies as contested objects between national unity and German dishonor. Klaus Theweleit suggests that Germany's defeat greatly structured the fears of German masculine identity. Women in war stories could "vacillate between intense interest and cool indifference, aggressiveness and veneration, hatred, anxiety, alienation, and desire."<sup>62</sup> Karl Goetz's medallion is a powerful reminder of this sentiment. Where the image of the woman tied to the phallus would cause anger at the sexual aggression assumed to be part of the occupation, the image also suggested the attack on the nation had already occurred. The biracial child indicates that action against the invader is too late. Coupled with indecisive feelings toward women was a concern with the imagery of floods as Theweleit tells us, "They [the soldiers] want to stand with both feet and every root firmly anchored in the soil. They want whatever floods may come to rebound against them; they want to stop, and dam up, those floods."<sup>63</sup> The theme of flooding played an important evocative role in the cartoon "How Often?" (*Wie oft noch?*).<sup>64</sup> The image told of the constant and apparently unending attempts by foreign countries to invade German lands throughout history, starting with Roman General Varus during the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest to King Louis XIV during the Nine Years' War, and ends with Poincare in World War I [Image 2.15]. The Black Shame, which depicted the country overrun with Black men and their perceived threat to white women,

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<sup>62</sup> Thewleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 1*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> Thewleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 1*, 230.

<sup>64</sup> "Wie oft noch," *Kladderadatsch* 76, Nr. 19, May 13, 1923, 315.

nourished male anxieties. Imagined sexual conquests and the further devouring of the land and material goods made this racist propaganda foundational to interwar concepts of Black people. The officers that satirical magazines once ridiculed were now in agreement over the experiences of war and postwar humiliation.

The use of “shame” (*schmach/schande*) in the naming of the propaganda is an important consideration. “*Schmach*,” Dick van Galen Last and Ralf Futeslaar state, “translates as both shame and slander, containing every possible nuance of humiliation, offence, shame and insult.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, shame has a particular affective power. Eve Sedgwick has argued that shame creates a “painful individuation” and “uncontrollable relationality.”<sup>66</sup> One is at once discomfited in one’s own skin, while painfully aware that this sensation come from someone else’s activity. The accompanying egotism in shame is a powerful tool in identifying with the Other. “Please leave so *I* feel better,” is the injunction one asks when one is ashamed. Shame, understandably, has a place in satire. Both are pointed and projected attacks at the world, often critical of the ordering of the world.

By exploiting race as part of the occupation, many Germans hoped to garner sympathy from the other Allied powers that would divide Britain and America from France.<sup>67</sup> The propaganda campaign not only expressed that Black people had no place on German soil but also portrayed the racialized occupation as unreasonable, a form of

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<sup>65</sup> Van Galen Last, *Black Shame*, 146.

<sup>66</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 37.

<sup>67</sup> Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 275.

victimizing Germans unfairly as losers of the war.<sup>68</sup> This contrasted greatly with the brutality of the First World War with its mass destruction by means of the most advanced weapons, yet the Black Shame purported that real brutality was committed by primitive Africans and not by the very practice of a global war. Additionally, the Black Shame rendered the deeply violent endeavor of colonialism invisible. Indeed, the colonial subject, the propaganda claimed, was the suffering the German citizen. The violence that Germans claimed to suffer was somehow worse than what Germany had done as an active participant during the war *and* as colonial power.

The satirical magazines in the postwar era attest to this altered state of affairs. These images were not humorous, nor were they meant to elicit a recognition of oneself with the colonial subject in their mutual oppression, but rather to unify Germany with a new sense of nationalism. After the war, satirical magazines reveal a paradigm shift, where the colonial African subject was now the oppressor and the German citizen, the oppressed. Where “The Civilizing of Europe” offered the story of primitive people saving Europe as an ironic visual narrative for its readers, the postwar era treated the realization of armed colonial peoples as an ironic nightmare. As it were, Germans were now the colonial subjects of France, with the Black soldier as slave driver.

Remaining full of puns, ironic statements and images, and political parodies, the satirical magazines distanced themselves from their prewar humor of sexual and racial border crossings. They fostered a misunderstanding of Black people for the public as an influential part of popular culture. Satirical magazines made their disgust clear that the

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<sup>68</sup> Nelson, “The ‘Black Horror on the Rhine,’” 618.

extensive use of non-white soldiers by France endangered European civilization. If, as Zantop states, the colonialist stories were used for “their purely imaginary, wish-fulfilling nature, and their unconscious subtext, which links sexual desire for the other with desire for power and control,” Black Shame propaganda revealed the continued reliance on representing Black bodies, unifying Germans across the political spectrum.<sup>69</sup> Their cartoons replicated the idea of colonial African troops as monstrous consumers of the German nation, its culture, and its women.

In this masking, colonialism is at once revealed and simultaneously concealed. The forced labor, the sexual violence, and the destruction and degradation are exposed fully without humor, without the African trickster hiding the gold. Yet the body that was once the subjugated African, was now the German. The images in the *Witzblätter* are replete with the subjugated European and the African master. This is not to suggest military occupations are not violent interventions of state power, but to reveal how the Black Shame on the Rhine looks to the occupation by a force inclusive of Black men as a form of colonial rule. The satirical cartoons appearing in the new age of the Weimar Republic should not be seen as a complete rupture with colonialism but as a continued discourse of colonialism deployed toward a new but not dissimilar end: colonialism is a disastrous affront to humanity. As such the discourse relied on the absurd perception of Germany being turned into a colony. The presentation of Black men as monsters prepared to emasculate German men and rape German women did not simply result from a fear based on a mixture of racial fantasy and the reality of occupation; rather, it was a way of

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<sup>69</sup> Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, 3.

dealing with a fractured sense of identity. Germany was the defeated soldier lying dead on the battlefield—a valiant figure of the past cut down, never to rise again. The German woman too was displaced, at once unprotected, alone, and threatened by Black men. To German readers and foreign observers abroad, the mutilation of German identity between racialized oppression and death proved a powerful label for the discourse on the humiliation and suffering of the German nation. The propaganda would become a major component of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the racialized national community of Nazi ideology.<sup>70</sup> Its racist discourses of humiliation and defeat would solidify the notions that unlike France, Germany had not, and would not, be tainted by racial mixing nor the influence of a racial inferior on the nation state.

### **Beyond the Borders of Europe**

From the founding of the colonial empire into the Rhineland Occupation after the First World War, German satirical magazines gave expression to concerns, anxieties, and fears related to the colonial project. Throughout each important moment in German experiences of colonialism, the satirical magazines reflected the concerns of their readers, informing them not only about the current events of their country but also about race. The satirical magazines held a consistent view that Black people were primitives who, at best, could be sympathized with for their treatment by colonial forces. Yet this sympathy only went so far; the World War and the occupation led to a reexamination of the colonial subject that turned the once helpless subject of colonialism into an unstoppable force that

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<sup>70</sup> Wigger, “Black Shame,” 35.

could ravage the country. No longer an imperial or colonial power, the satirical magazines recognized Germany as a country alienated from the rest of the European world. In so doing, the satirical magazines looked to a defeated Germany as not only a defeated country, but a country subjugated by French rule with Black slave drivers.

The Black Shame propaganda never got the attention it wanted, and it did not bring about the change in reparations that some had hoped. However, the campaign did bring France's treatment of Germans to the attention of the African Diaspora in the United States. They placed themselves within the political conversation, but not through a general focus on Germany's racist claims arguing that the French were actively antagonizing racial hatred. A. Philip Randolph, the Black American activist and organizer, voiced his concerns about the ways that only Black soldiers were accused of sexual violence. He pointed to the racism that Germans appeared only troubled when the crime was committed by Black troops, revealing how a concern for white women and sexual violence was subsumed into the language of race. Randolph was livid at the double standard that devalued sexual violence at Black girls and women, compared to the egregious irredeemable crime of assaulting white women: "We are not excusing the crime. But a crime committed by Black French troops is no worse, no more reprehensible than a crime committed by white German barons or white American soldiers."<sup>71</sup> Relating the alleged sexual violence in Germany to the crimes committed by white American soldiers in Haiti, Randolph brought attention to this double standard of interracial sexual violence. The propaganda and the concern for white women emanated from the specific

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<sup>71</sup> A. Philip Randolph, *The Messenger*, Vol. II, No. VII, August 1920, 65.

belief in the predatory nature of Black men and the persistent racism that doubled the crime of rape into a concern about racial purity. For Randolph, the campaign to paint Germany as a victim of French aggression did more to continue to inflame racism towards Black people.

However, unlike Randolph's indictment of the Black Shame campaign, the Jamaican poet and intellectual Claude McKay was disturbed more by France's decision to use African soldiers at all, unaware that the Senegalese-born French deputy Blaise Diagne had actively fought for the recognition and use of African soldiers during the war and occupation.<sup>72</sup> When McKay visited Germany in 1923 after a tour of the Soviet Union, he was deeply frustrated that France would occupy Germany with African soldiers. To him, the occupation was a means of humiliating Germany and Black people alike. He believed that the problem was the placement of Black people in Germany by the French, not the exaggerated claims of sexual violence. Aware of Black Shame and concerned about the spread of racial resentment and the controlling factor of white supremacy in constructing Black peoples as primitive, he suggested an alliance could be built between Germans and the African diaspora. In *Crisis*, he called for Black Americans to be at the forefront of responding to European propaganda that constructed Black images and identity. "Colored Americans should seize the opportunity to promote finer inter-racial understanding," he declared. For if Black Americans were not at the forefront of this effort, "every American official abroad, every smug tourist, is a

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<sup>72</sup> Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 275-276, 279-282.

protagonist of dollar culture and a propagandist against the Negro.”<sup>73</sup> He blamed France’s antagonism toward Germany as furthering racial resentment between Black people and Germans. In combating this deleterious relationship between Germans and Africans, McKay argued that a new cultural force must argue for a positive identity of Black culture in Germany.

Claude McKay’s call for positive representation was answered by the emergence of cohorts of Black entertainers who would represent and stage the Black experience across Germany, just as the propaganda around Black Shame began to ebb. Asserting their identity in Germany in a way that had not been fully represented within the German public sphere before, from 1925 to 1933 Black Americans became a part of the German landscape and made Germany a location of an international circuit of positive Black identity.

The New Negro Renaissance, founded on self-representation as a political and artistic act, was understandably an ideology that would be more concerned with France’s actions as a victor of the World War than with Germany as victim. To McKay in particular, the use of colonial soldiers undermined the possibilities of Germans learning of the vast possibilities of Black identity. Unequivocally for both Randolph and McKay, the Black Shame was Germans acting out their basest racist feelings, and it could only be alleviated by the end of French provocation. This was deeply ironic as Blaise Diagne, the first Black African elected to the French government, had hoped that military service,

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<sup>73</sup> Claude McKay, “Soviet Russia and the Negro,” *Crisis*, Vol. 27, No. 2, December 1923, 62-64.

including in the occupation, would further bond France's colonial subjects into the republican project. But for Black intellectuals in New York, what was clearer was Germany's evolving racist resentment.

## Chapter Three

### Moving to Harlem: Teaching Germans to be Modern

When *The Chocolate Kiddies*, the Black American revue, arrived in Berlin in May 1925, the revue's trombonist and vocalist Herbert Flemming was surprised to discover that its premier at the theater, the Admiralpalast, had sold out months in advance. Audiences, especially musicians, approached the Black performers with fascination and curiosity after their shows, hoping to learn about the new performing arts created by Black Americans. Years later in an interview with Phyllis Humphrey for *Downbeat* magazine, he recalled "German musicians came to us and eagerly asked us to teach them how to play Swing." However, the same curiosity that prompted some Germans to learn about Black entertainment in Berlin led to a different response in the Rhineland. As Flemming recalled later,

New Year's night, 1926, the band played at Frankford-on-the-Main[sic], and the antagonism of the provincials was very noticeable. We were told that French Occupational troops had left this territory hardly a year before, and that the bitterness of the native Germans toward their World War enemies had subsided very little... That particular evening, I wanted a glass of beer after the show and walked down the street with Mace[o] Edwards, trumpeter with the orchestra, to a small tavern. Just after we had ordered our drink, a German next to me questioned me in French but, thinking it was a trap, I replied in English that I did not understand what he was saying. He was very argumentative and insisted that I was a liar when I told him I was an American, saying that all Negroes were from African colonies and that all inhabitants of the United States were white. Finally the proprietor ejected the man and we drank our beer in peace.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Herb Flemming, "Germans Thought Negroes Carried Knives and Couldn't Play Horns!" *Downbeat*, October 1938, 4.

The argument between Flemming and the bar patron is instructive in the history of Black Americans in Germany: Knowing about the occupying forces that had only recently left the Rhineland, Flemming's response to the bar patron reflects his knowledge that he may be seen as a threat. Despite Flemming's implication to Humphrey that he knew French, his feigned ignorance in front of the angry patron became his first defense against the possible trap being set. Yet another problem arose when he answered in English and claimed his American identity: the patron's belief that there is only a white America. This ignorance about Black Americans reinforced the original tension of the bar patron's question. The patron, conceiving of Black people as only colonial subjects, could not accept Flemming's identity. Although Flemming's strategy of speaking English to reinforce his identity failed, it elided the original patron's probing question in exchange for a conversation about America and race.

Harlem scholar Shane Vogel has shown that although some Black artists were reluctant to expose Black art to white audiences, a number of the New Negro Renaissance's cultural workers used the theater to openly "critique the racial and sexual normativity of uplift ideology and to imagine alternative narratives of sexual and racial selfhood."<sup>2</sup> This chapter focuses on the interstices between the fascination and anxiety of the German "discovery" of Black America. The German response to Black American culture oscillated between an earnest curiosity that led many Germans either to disavow white European cultural dominance in favor of a racialized notion of American culture or to reinscribe dancing Black bodies within nineteenth-century notions of biological racism

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<sup>2</sup> Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance*. 3.

and colonial projections. To be sure, these responses could occur simultaneously. As we will see, critics saw the familiar grinning joviality of blackface minstrels and modern Black culture within the same performance. Nonetheless, the New Negro Renaissance contested the notion of a proper geographical and hierarchal place for Black people, be it the American South as sharecroppers or the nondescript imagined African colony.

Ostensibly, touring companies like *The Chocolate Kiddies* appeared to hold none of the political ideological critiques of other Renaissance intellectuals and performers, yet *The Chocolate Kiddies*' performance blurred the boundaries between an implicit and explicit political identity for Black Americans. The appearance of the New Negro Renaissance in German cities, and indeed in the occupied regions of western Germany, forced Germans to reassess their stereotypes of Black culture. Exposed to a Black presence outside of the recent history of colonialism and occupation, the attitude of German audiences and critics reveal the challenge that Black Americans provoked to German concepts of racial identity. Indeed, the end of Flemming's account shows that the bar proprietor preferred the Black patron to the unruly bar patron, which furthers a narrative of the acceptability and potential for Black Americans in Germany. Between 1925 and 1933, Black American performers provided a model for Black identity in Germany that differed from the primitivist popular imaginary of Black colonial subjects. As pioneers of the African Diaspora into the interior of Europe, Black American performers became so renowned that by 1927, and perhaps, more importantly in 1931, they became the center of German narratives of modernity. These narratives created a discourse quite different from the Black Shame propaganda. Where that campaign

attempted to define Black bodies as ruinous not only to white women and the state, but also to German culture as well, Weimar-era interest in Black Americans and their arts practices challenged the perceived limits of Black people's place in Germany.

In this chapter, I argue that *The Chocolate Kiddies'* one-year tour of Germany brought a modernist challenge to German notions of race during the Weimar era. I use the word "modernist" to draw attention to the ways that Black performers attempted to transform ideas about Black people beyond African primitives and Black American minstrels. This modernism built upon the creation of both events that presented Black America as a new cultural force as well as counter-narratives to German popular imaginings of Black people.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, this was exactly how Black Americans wanted Germans to see them. In this form of modernism, we see the confrontation that Flemming tried to navigate with the German bar patron as an argument over a modern understanding of race. Flemming's narrative was a confrontation with racial difference—between the African and the Black American—that was almost violently suppressed by the bar patron. Ironically, Flemming's confrontation mirrored much of *The Chocolate Kiddies'* stage revue, where the performers presented themselves as distinct from both white people and Africans. Whereas previous scholars have argued that touring Black revues played on the racist stereotypes of Black Americans in Germany, I argue that *The Chocolate Kiddies* continued traditions of presenting new narratives of Black American life that developed over the past quarter century in New York, starting with *Clorindy, or*

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Gay has similarly shown that modernism was "a new way of seeing." Gay, *Modernism*, 75.

*the Origin of the Cakewalk* in 1898.<sup>4</sup> Following a strategy developed from cultural producers in the United States' New Negro Renaissance, Black performers considered their art a challenge to American notions of the Old Negro.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, in creating these concepts of difference, problematic relationships developed between the narratives about Black Americans, white Americans, Germans, and Africans. As we will see, the modernist challenge that brought German audiences to see the staged New Negro arts could only be formulated through many of Germany's preconceived notions of race.

Performance scholar Marvin Carlson is especially helpful in understanding the power of the stage and the histories that affect performance. He suggests that the stage is "subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts."<sup>6</sup> As such, any performance refers not only to a history outside the performance, say the history of American chattel slavery, but also to past performances—including blackface minstrelsy—as well. Like other Black performances since the end of the World War, *The Chocolate Kiddies* were quite aware that their image as performers was built upon and dependent on the blackface minstrel tradition. Like the Black American magazines and journals *Crisis* and *Messenger* published after the First

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<sup>4</sup> Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 169-170. German scholar Leroy Hopkins has claimed that Louis Douglas, the subject of the next chapter, was a figure of conciliation for Germans. His performances, Hopkins argues, did not make Germans consider Black urban modernity, but instead represented "a primitive life force, far superior to the overly cerebral European culture. Leroy Hopkins, "Louis Douglas and the Weimar Reception of Harlemania" in *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange*, 50-69.

<sup>5</sup> This model follows Terry Smith's definitions of modernity, one that "is activist, boldly interventionist: it moves quickly from the classifying gaze to an insistence on the obliteration of the past—the removal of its physical presence, its appearance, even, when pressed, its memory." Smith, *Making the Modern*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 2.

World War, *The Chocolate Kiddies* directly addressed German audiences to argue for the value of Black American culture. They thus had to steer their audiences away from Black minstrel stereotypes and offer a more complex image of Black identity, just as Flemming had to attempt to convince the German bar patron of his American identity.<sup>7</sup> *The Chocolate Kiddies* fought to create the images of modernity that displaced the image of the plantation in the hopes of creating a new norm: the New Negro.

New Negro modernism would have been impossible without racial drag. As a strategy for excavating how performance practices associated with Black Americans became broadly accessible, racial drag considers how particular gestures—outside of blackface—represent certain parts of Black identity. As we look at stage entertainers, for example, how do their movements not only mask racial differences (e.g., between Black Americans and white Europeans) but also amplify them (e.g., between Black Africans and Black Americans)? Without a doubt, Black performance traditions forced Germans to recognize Black people as being capable of cultural reflection and, in the same practices, created the difference between Black Americans and Africans. As Black entertainers, their American movements through segregated and integrated, southern and northern, urban and rural performance spaces raise questions about how their claims of authentic culture became accessible to German audiences and encouraged Germans to rethink notions of Black identity.

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<sup>7</sup> For histories of Black performers in Europe prior to the First World War see Lee, *Sissieretta Jones*; Brown, *Babylon Girls*.

The concepts of guise and attachment described in the first chapter become important for understanding Black American modernity in German. Flemming's story is instructive in his use of a guise. Flemming engaged a guise the moment that he understood the possible threat from the bar patron and responded intentionally in English. In performing the guise, Flemming made a political choice that provided a form of protection from harm that simultaneously damaged his integrity. The guise allows for a fantasized racialized identity to be performed over the *real* identity.<sup>8</sup> Although not on a literal stage, Flemming had to perform a Black identity that hid his full capabilities as an individual. Unable to respond in French as a survival method, he hid a part of himself and attempted to use the English language to imbue himself with an Americanness that speaking French would have erased. Flemming's moment with the bar patron was an extension of how Black performers used the stage in Germany. Black American dance and music had been popular since before the First World War and the *Chocolate Kiddies* took advantage of this popularity. Following in the model of the 1921 Black American Broadway musical *Shuffle Along*, *The Chocolate Kiddies* let their performance speak to the realities of postwar Black American culture. Using the stage to entertain and educate overrode older narratives and simultaneously limited the identity of the performers. However, the stage performance was good enough to convince German audiences to change their older prejudices toward Black identity.

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<sup>8</sup> A real identity is of course a complex claim to make. In the first chapter I spoke of Dunbar's mask as an identity as real as the speaker underneath the mask. Here, it is helpful to think of "real" in terms of how Flemming in his own narrative frames his strategy to speak in English rather than French.

As stated in the first chapter, the difference that Black Americans created between themselves and the minstrel formed an essential component of Black modernity. It was in this difference that Black modernism became entangled in its own commodification. Black intellectuals, like A. Philip Randolph, Marcus Garvey, and Alain Locke, sought to imagine and construct a model of the New Negro that distanced itself from minstrelsy and, relatedly, reflected a world apart from the antebellum South—a world connected to American urbanism, modernization and cosmopolitanism. Indeed, Black Americans' identity construction continues to be bound by the antebellum South as a reference point for redefining Blackness. Focusing on the conundrum of modernity and the minstrel past illuminates this same conundrum that presented itself when Black performers came to Germany, especially on the stage, where *The Chocolate Kiddies* based their presentation of modern Black America on exposing and explaining the geographical and chronological distance Black Americans had traveled from the antebellum past into the twentieth-century.

The pleasure and the critical appraisal of Black art forms—jazz, tap dance, and their visual culture—challenged and altered Germany: a nation that had experienced major ruptures in its understanding of culture, race, and its status as a European power. Unlike the discourses in the satirical magazines that had seen Africans as bodies that could critique power, as discussed in Chapter Two, Black Americans were instead the model of modernity. Divided in two major sections, this chapter first examines how *The Chocolate Kiddies* created a performance built around the movement play and how German critics interpreted their performance. I then reveal how the discourse of Black

cosmopolitanism expanded to a conversation among Germans about race. We must understand the discourses that cemented the idea of Black American urbanism; how Germans received received Black modernity; and how Germans replicated—in the words of Langston Hughes—their own “Negro Vogue.”<sup>9</sup> This approach reveals how some Germans responded to *The Chocolate Kiddies* with praise, while others saw a threat to the perceived sanctity—and importantly purity—of German culture.

Yet, like Al Jolson’s “hair” in *The Jazz Singer*, which became an important element of differentiating the emotive character of Jack Robin from the emotional turmoil of Jakie Rabinowitz, Flemming’s reliance on a trickster-like performance raises the question of *what* was attached to German culture? Was it Black American culture or the culture of blackface minstrelsy? Did Germans see a performance that argued for Black American modernism or new Black primitivism in an urban jungle? As we will see, Germans recognized Black modernity as a form of modernity, and constructed that modernity as a leap out of primitivism. In seeing Black performers and claiming a connection to them, Germans blurred the distinctions between the New Negro Renaissance and their racist ideas of the primitive.

### **From Plant Plays to Great Migration Movement**

The progenitors of New Negro theater, *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cake Walk* (1898) and its successor *In Dahomey: A Negro Musical* (1903), revolutionized American musical theater as the first productions written and directed by as well as starring Black

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<sup>9</sup> Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 228-229, 249.

Americans Prior to *Clorindy*, Broadway conventions demanded that Black characters be portrayed by white actors in blackface. *Clorindy* created a new sensation in musical theater that looked to Black vernacular dance routines to, in the words of dance scholar Jacqui Malone, “set a new standard on Broadway. Never before had audiences seen such power and energy on the musical stage.”<sup>10</sup> Although consisting only of music and dances and reliant on many stereotypes of Black people, *Clorindy* affirmed that Black performers could succeed on Broadway.<sup>11</sup> The success of these early productions, created by the proto-Renaissance Black intellectuals, Will Marion Cook, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Bert Williams, and George and Ada Walker, laid the groundwork for the success of the next generation of Black productions.<sup>12</sup> Once the doors were open to Black performance, productions continued to reveal new aspects of Black culture for the rest of the early-twentieth century. Yet, it would be after the First World War that Black performance would truly be recognized as a must see event for white and Black New Yorkers. *Shuffle Along*, created by Cook’s protégés Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle became the most popular musical of the New Negro Renaissance. *Shuffle Along*’s loose plot follows the mayoral race of three candidates, the corrupt Steve Jenkins and Sam Peck and the moral Harry Walton in the fictional “Jim Town,” an all-Black town in the South. While Jenkins and Peck run on promises of political favors and ending Prohibition, Walton runs an honest campaign that he hopes will win him the hand of Jessie Williams. Walton wins the

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<sup>10</sup> Malone, *Steppin’*, 71.

<sup>11</sup> Woll, *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls*, 1-10.

<sup>12</sup> Chude-Sokie, *The Last Darky*, 26-27.

election and Jessie's hand in marriage through a series of comic reversals caused by Jenkins and Peck double crossing each other.<sup>13</sup>

Opening on May 23, 1921 at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Street Theatre in Manhattan, it ran for 504 performances before embarking on a nationwide tour in 1922 and enjoying success among white and Black audiences alike. While appealing to white nostalgia for minstrel tropes, the success of the musical hinged upon creating "progressively minded musical characters" capable of romantic love and maintaining their moral integrity.<sup>14</sup>

Musicologist Eileen Southern argues that *Shuffle Along* brought Black expressivity onto Broadway through jazz and Black folk dances. Similarly, Malone argues that the Black folk steps used as the basis for the show's modern chorus line created contemporary steps that were far from the static movement of the (white) Ziegfeld Follies.<sup>15</sup> All of these were noticeable innovations, especially as the last well-received production since *In Dahomey* by Black entertainers was the successful *Bandanna Land* (1907-1909) by Bert Williams and George Walker and the brief *Darktown Follies* in 1913.<sup>16</sup> Much of Black theater performance in the 1920s owed a debt to *Shuffle Along* for exposing a broader and larger audience of white and Black Americans to the popularity of Black produced and Black starring theater productions.

*The Chocolate Kiddies* tour, coming almost four years to the day after *Shuffle Along* premiered on Broadway, is especially indebted to the emergence of racial

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<sup>13</sup> Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant*, 249-263.

<sup>14</sup> Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant*, 240.

<sup>15</sup> Malone, *Steppin'*, 76-77.

<sup>16</sup> Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant*, 241.

crossover theater productions that reveled in Black music and dance forms. Whereas *Shuffle Along* brought Black affect to the American stage, *The Chocolate Kiddies* transformed the familiar “plant plays” of the previous century for German audiences.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes called “Tom Shows,” after the popular anti-slavery novel and plays based on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “plant plays” were frequently performed in the North and South by Black performers. They were the urban counterpart to the outdoor tent shows that often travelled the South. Although the plant plays had once been a place for Black performers to use the minstrel form to tell their own stories of the antebellum South, they became for the *Kiddies* a starting point for a geographic and historic narrative: a story of the Renaissance built upon showing the great distance that Black people had travelled—literally and culturally—from the nineteenth-century antebellum South to the twentieth-century urban North.

It was through these “movement plays” that Germans began to attach Black modernity to their own performance traditions. Viewing Black arts as a form of cosmopolitanism, audiences and critics reassessed the possibilities of Black bodies. Yet we must be aware of theater scholar Jayna Brown’s poignant statement that “the staged plantation was a prime site of return.”<sup>18</sup> Brown argues that the repeated appearance of the plantation in twentieth-century popular culture suggests that it remained a popular marker of where Black people came from and where they *still* belonged in the popular mind. Plant plays provided the familiar staging of the plantation that emulated many of the

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<sup>17</sup> Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 75.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 26.

minstrel tropes familiar to German audiences. Although a constant of Black revues of the turn-of-the-century, plant plays proved a training ground for early generations of jazz performers, allowing Black artists to develop and improvise their burgeoning craft.<sup>19</sup> For Garvin Bushell, reed player for *The Chocolate Kiddies*, it was normal for shows to use symbols of the plantation, yet not normalized to the extent that Black performers did not understand its significance: “Black shows on Broadway often began with a plantation scene...It was part of our heritage that they saw was viable, and people would pay money to see it.”<sup>20</sup> Importantly, Bushell notes that while white audiences saw the plantation scene as part of their heritage, Black performers rejected this assumption. Carlson suggests, “We are able to ‘read’ new works...only because we recognize within them elements that have been recycled from other structures of experience that we have experienced earlier.”<sup>21</sup> Black performers’ ability to take structures with racist foundations, like the plant play and the once popular minstrel form, and treat them as building blocks for new work allowed them to tell a story that centered on Black people telling their own story that rebuffed the minstrel.

After the war and the loss of its colonies, Germany was outside of the sphere of the African diaspora; for this reason, seeing these movement plays was especially striking compared to the history of colonialism most familiar to them. As we will see later in this chapter, Germans began to create narratives of contact with Black American culture that

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<sup>19</sup> Jelly Roll Morton, in particular, had his start in the tent shows that frequently featured plant plays. Malone, *Steppin’ on the Blues*, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Bushell, *Jazz from the Beginning*, 55

<sup>21</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 4.

placed both within the realm of Black urbanity. Blurring the lines between the historic and fantastic, German writers furthered their knowledge of Black American modernism. Through jokes, travelogues, and short stories in magazines, intellectuals told their readers that Black culture was worth knowing and that it was becoming a part of Germany. Peter Jelavich has argued that

In the Weimar era the [German] revues demonstrated their cosmopolitan allures not by touting Berlin, but rather by presenting an array of foreign numbers...postwar revues could no longer turn to Berlin itself for positive thematic images of modernity. They had to look abroad for such icons, and more often than not they turned to the United States. What Berlin claimed to be before the war, New York seemed to be thereafter; a hectic and mighty metropolis, a global center of production, finance, commerce, and consumerism.<sup>22</sup>

In telling these narratives, Germans placed themselves within the New Negro Renaissance. These stories suggested that Germans were not simply audience to Black performance but also part of the popular movement that had such an effect on the cultures of New York and Paris. This discourse of close contact reveals the German belief that, by claiming a connection to Black America, the writer could likewise claim a similar status as modern. Although not as extreme as white American and European performers' outright appropriation of Black music in the latter half of the twentieth century, the usage of Black arts as a form for expressing modernism speaks to the popularity of Black culture that the *Chocolate Kiddies* initiated in 1925. Be it learning Black dance forms and music or claiming to the urban space of Harlem, Germans saw themselves as crossing over into a modernity shaped and defined by Black Americans. Although none of the

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<sup>22</sup> Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 169.

artists, writers, or critics would have ever claimed that they were becoming Black, they did see Black people modeling something new that had never been seen in Germany before.

More critically, when creating their own version of Black culture, Germans figured themselves outside of a racial hierarchy. To many Germans who toyed with ideas of jazz and Black dance, their lowered position in the world after the war implied that their contact with Black culture was independent of their race. By partaking in what they saw as Black America, German writers began to suggest that the hierarchy that privileged their white European identities above Black people—be they Black colonial subject or Black Americans—could and should be altered. German attachment to Black American performance did not place the two as equals, but the performative value of Blackness became integral to German identity. Attachment provided Germans with the opportunity to place themselves within narratives of the African Diaspora. By looking to parts of the African Diaspora, be it the music, the accompanying dance, or more diffuse “parts” of Black identity, Germans felt a direct intimacy with Black people and their culture. This intimacy then created the fantasy that racial, and often sexual, crossings were not only permitted, but also encouraged. To this end, Black American racial and sexual identities were objectified for German consumption. How Germans promoted elements of these performances is a central concern for understanding German’s postwar modernity and the central role the New Negro played in shaping it.

**The New Negro Comes to Germany**

The New York City talent agent Arthur Lyons and the Russian impresario Leonide “Leon” Leonidoff produced *The Chocolate Kiddies*.<sup>23</sup> Lyons, manager for the Sam Wooding’s Band, brought Leonidoff to see the jazz band at Club Alabam. Wooding, born in 1895, was a veteran of the First World War and a top talent of New York’s jazz scene by 1925. He had worked in cabarets in Atlantic City and Newark, New Jersey before the war, and had played in some of the most recognized clubs and cabarets of the Harlem jazz scene, including the Nest, Club Alabam, and Barron Wilkin’s Exclusive Club. Impressed by what he heard, Leonidoff suggested to Lyons that Wooding’s band would do well in Germany, and Lyons subsequently informed Wooding and his band that they would be heading to Germany with an all-Black performance revue. Along with Wooding’s band, the revue included singers Lottie Gee, Margaret Sims, Arthur “Strut” Payne, and Adelaide Hall, acrobatic team Bobby and Baby Goins, dancing team Teddy Drayton and Rufus Greenlee, a chorus line of ten women, and a dance team called “The Three Eddies.” The Revue consisted of veteran performers who had navigated the various stages of Harlem, including the Colonial, Plantation, and the 63<sup>rd</sup> Street Theater. Lottie Gee and Adelaide Hall had been leads in the premier of *Shuffle Along*, and Charles Davis had been one of the show’s choreographers.<sup>24</sup>

Harlem clubs were an important training ground for Black talent to improve their performances and learn to work within the racist positioning of the white gaze. Clubs like

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the career of Leonidoff see Mel Atkey, *Broadway North: The Dream of Canadian Musical Theater*.

<sup>24</sup> Art Napoleon, “Sam Wooding,” *Storyville* Feb/March 1967, Issue 9, 5.

Barron's catered exclusively to white and passing light-skinned patrons. Venues like Barron's and the famous Cotton Club created "a white relationship to the colorline that imagines itself, against the explicit barbarism of southern Jim Crow, in terms of urbane sophistication, benevolent patronage, and flirtatious transgression." This attempt to distance the realities of Southern oppression depended on turning scenes of violence—the plantation—into a setting of enjoyment and joviality.<sup>25</sup> However, like the actual plantation, which was built on a brutal racial hierarchy, the performance venues were similarly constructed around a racial hierarchy between the performing Black entertainers and the white audience. For members of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, this sense of performing for the enjoyment of white patrons in Germany at once continued the notion of the plantation as a site removed from the violence of slavery and transformed the stage into a site of spectacular, modern possibilities in song and dance.

*The Chocolate Kiddies* departed aboard the *S.S. Arabic* on May 6 and arrived in Hamburg on May 17, 1925. They began their tour at the Admiralpalast on May 25 and remained in residence there until July before continuing to tour through Germany and Eastern Europe through the rest of 1925 and most of 1926. The show was a full sensory experience, consisting of almost fifty performers and their entourage.<sup>26</sup> The program was divided into four sections reflecting the temporal and geographic movement of Black American life and culture: "Plantation at sundown," "Harlem in New York—negro life," Sam Wooding's Specialty Concert, and "Harlem cabaret." "Plantation at sundown" began

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<sup>25</sup> Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret*, 80-81.

<sup>26</sup> Bernhard H. Behncke, "Sam Wooding," *Storyville* Issue 60, Aug/Sept, 1975, 214.

with Arthur “Strut” Payne singing “Old Black Joe,” “Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho,” and “Swanee River.” He was followed by a full company dance number, Bobby and Babe Goins’ acrobatics, the Three Eddies, and an “eccentric dance” by George Staton. Even the decision to include “negro life” as the subtitle for the section that followed “Plantation at Sundown” suggests the end of one era and the dawning of a new one.<sup>27</sup> By starting with the plantation already in its twilight, *The Chocolate Kiddies* used the revue to suggest that the show would not linger in the past of American slavery or Jim Crow sharecropping. The second section, “Harlem in New York—negro life,” shifted to the modern urban America, transporting audiences geographically as well as ideologically away from the plantation into the modern North and the urban setting of the Renaissance. This section consisted of eight different performances featuring the new music and dance of the 1920s, including the premier of the Charleston for German audiences by Adelaide Hall and the dance duo Greenlee and Drayton. These performances eased audiences into contemporary Black American popular culture.

Following a sketch of a Southern Black family’s first excursion into New York, the audience was primed for the third section, Sam Wooding’s short jazz concert. Hearing jazz helped to situate for Germans the modernism of the new geography of Black Americans. The concert suggested a break in the fourth wall by bringing the audience into a Harlem club-like setting. Rather than simply watching performers respond to music, the audience was no longer in the Admiralpalast in Berlin, but were culturally transported to a club like the Nest or Club Alabam in Harlem. The conclusion of the

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<sup>27</sup> Berhard H. Behncke, “Sam Wooding,” *Storyville* Issue 60, Aug/Sept, 1975, 217.

program, “Harlem Cabaret” included songs by Adelaide Hall and Evelyn Dove, an Apache Dance by the Goins, and a finale with the entire company.<sup>28</sup> No longer servile agrarian workers on the plantation and even with skits that remained jovial and humorous, the production created for Germans a Black American urban narrative and identity [Image 3.1].

*The Chocolate Kiddies* were not the first Black revue to use the idea of geographic movement to situate a political message of cosmopolitan belonging. The earliest occurrence was Will Cook’s *Negro Nuances* (1924). John Howland argues that the structure of a “musico-geographic” revue provides audiences “‘primitive/jungle’ themes, from ‘country’ topics and black folk music of the old South, to a ‘city’ theme that celebrated the contemporary cultural riches of Harlem.”<sup>29</sup> Progressing through a musical and geographic structure allowed performers to claim not only their present place in the world, but also the past that had been inscribed and circumscribed so thoroughly by others. Whereas *Shuffle Along* had stayed in the fictional country town of Jimtown—an advancement from the white-owned plantation—*The Chocolate Kiddies* moved all the way to Harlem. Appearing on German stages for the first time, the Black performers, who had once performed (or reflected) a benign antebellum South on American stages, now appeared modern and cosmopolitan. Although white American audiences lived in close proximity to Black Americans in New York City, placing Black people back into the South in revues allowed audience members to feel that the racial hierarchy existed not

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<sup>28</sup> Bernhard H. Behncke, “Sam Wooding,” *Storyville* Issue 60, Aug/Sept, 1975, 217-218.

<sup>29</sup> John Howland, *Ellington Uptown*, 115.

only within legal means but geographically as well. To many white American voyeurs of black performance, despite the cosmopolitan quality of Harlem clubs, the idea of Black agrarianism remained authentic as white America yearned to return to pre-Civil War race relations, defined by slavery and Black subjugation. Yet for German audiences, the Black performers and the urban setting were linked more exclusively to urban modernity.

Jelavich's rationale for an interest in the exotic is helpful here. For German audiences, Black Americans were never going to stay in Germany, and thus seeing them as urban New Yorkers did not alter their feeling of distance between them. The production, with its American scenes both North and South, expressed not only their racial difference and foreignness but a country.

*The Chocolate Kiddies* represented Black people's temporal and geographic distance between the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries and, simultaneously, celebrated the distance between the Old Negro plant play and the New Negro Renaissance. The revue's playbill for their month-long residence at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg is especially instructive in showing how they chronicled Black Americans' movement from the South to the North. Even before the revue began, the playbill created an introductory narrative to prepare the audience for the unfamiliar scenes of cosmopolitan Harlem streets and clubs. Describing the geographic transition at the heart of the performance, the booklet stated that the show "Begins on a Plantation of the South, where the black farmers sang and danced their peaceful songs, where they prayed at the sunrise, laughing

in the sunshine, went out into the world northward into the city of millions: New York.”<sup>30</sup>

In directing audiences on this northern journey away from the southern world typically associated with Black Americans, the program prepared audiences for a show not of the romantic South, but of a mobile people out in the world.

At the end of their premier performance, the audience sat in silence. The performers were not certain whether or not they had succeeded in reaching the German audience. Wooding recalled,

When we finished, everything was still for about two seconds...then, like a clap of thunder the audience started banging their feet and shouting, “Bis, noch’mal, Hoch, Bravo![] Well Sir, the conglomeration of sound was so great that the word ‘Bis’ – a way of showing approval in German – sounded like ‘beast’ to us.<sup>31</sup>

This heightened moment of anticipation also became a moment of heightened fear recalling the traumas of war and the trauma of American racism. The mishearing of “bis” (play it again) for “biest” (beast) became, for a brief moment, a continuation of the violence Black Americans faced when viewed as other than human. The thrill of performing and hearing an audience’s thunderous response was muted and equally constructed through the experience of being Black and a stranger. This moment reveals the performers’ ubiquitous fear of racial violence. Much like Flemming’s confrontation with the bar patron, the multi-reed instrumentalist, Garvin Bushell, tells of a similar incident after the Berlin premier when a drunk German approached the band. Speaking to the audience members that stayed to talk to the musicians, the drunk German yelled

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<sup>30</sup> Program copy in Bernhard H. Behncke “Sam Wooding,” *Storyville* Issue 60, Aug/Sept, 1975, 218.

<sup>31</sup> Art Napoleon, “A Pioneer Looks Back: Sam Wooding by 1967,” *Storyville* 8, 37.

“I’m a German to my heart. I don’t understand why the government allows these black people to come to our country. During the war they cut off our noses and ears...I have not forgotten what they did to us, and I won’t stand for it. They [the government] should run them out of Germany.” He turned to Rufus Greenlee and grabbed him by the coat. Greenlee just clipped him on the chin and down he went. Now, this man was so drunk that he could barely stand up. But after Greenlee knocked him down, he got up, shook himself off, and walked right out of the crowd down Friederichstrasse. That punch straightened him right out.<sup>32</sup>

Although Bushell tells the story amusingly, it also reflects the ways that Germans conflated the presence of Black Americans and French colonial African soldiers in Germany, and attempted to stir up resentment against both by perpetuating false beliefs of atrocities committed by African soldiers during the war. Although Flemming believed that only Germans in the west held animus toward Black entertainers, Bushell’s story suggests that for many in Germany, the thought of the war and occupation was still an important reference in viewing Black American performers. Mirroring the verbal attack after the Berlin performance, many German critics conflated notions of the wartime assault with a cultural assault by labelling *The Chocolate Kiddies* as uncultured trash. One reviewer said the show revealed “the brutality of our lifeless times.” Another critic addressed God directly in his review, stating “Thanks to you that I’m not like them...The instruments crow like hens, bellow like bulls, neigh like mares in heat. One has to choose whether to go with Bach, Beethoven and Wagner, or with Sam Wooding.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bushell, *Jazz from the Beginning*, 57-58. Garvin Bushell had studied German for five years and one of his grandfathers claimed German ancestry.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Bernhard H. Behncke “Sam Wooding and the Chocolate Kiddies at the Thalia-Theater in Hamburg 28<sup>th</sup> July 1925 to 24<sup>th</sup> August 1925,” *Storyville* 60, Aug/Sept, 1975, 218.

*Analyzing Raving Delights*

Although some critics disparaged the revue, especially its music, other critics saw a performance loved by audiences. To these critics, the show was worthy of study. One critic who saw the Hamburg production stated that the music was received with “a degree of enthusiasm that is seldom aroused by domestic artistic efforts. The audience raves, is overwhelmed, beside itself, in what for Hamburgers is a simply shocking manner. This raving delight needs to be analyzed.”<sup>34</sup> Another critic, Elisabeth “Li” Zielesch provided such an analysis for the *Berliner Volks-Zeitung* after seeing a preview of *The Chocolate Kiddies*. She noted the revue’s historical and geographical journey in the ways that the movement play was meant to articulate.

The dancing and singing finds the Negro at an important part of life, and in this they make their example incredible. “We have our own art, our dances and songs have nothing in common with the dances and music of the wild or semi-wild in Africa,” the performer assured us. In fact, these people have no more relationship than a German or English to Africa. Surrounded by the American civilization, closely connected with it, they have created and preserved their own art.<sup>35</sup>

Zielesch’s review locates *The Chocolate Kiddies*’ identity explicitly within Black America and distinguishes it from the cultural and historical context of the white German audience as well as any people of Africa. The message Zielesch gets from the performers is clear: a Black American aesthetic needs to be distinguished from any other identity, be it white or Black. Importantly, Zielesch asserts that Black Americans have “created and

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Bernhard H. Behncke “Sam Wooding and the Chocolate Kiddies at the Thalia-Theater in Hamburg 28<sup>th</sup> July 1925 to 24<sup>th</sup> August 1925,” *Storyville* 60, Aug/Sept, 1975, 218.

<sup>35</sup> Li Zielesch. “Die “Schokoladenkinder” in Zivil.” *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, May 24, 1925, 3.

preserved their own art.” Zielesch also used her review to explain the sudden appearance of Black American culture. She takes seriously their claim to speak for a new Black identity. Where satirical magazines before and after the First World War had considered Black people incapable of having culture, Zielesch accepts that Black Americans developed a unique culture different from that of white America yet closely informed by it:

In America, they have their own choral societies, their own theater, not only in the Negro district, such as Harlem in New York, where the performances are mostly frequented by whites, and where for months they play the same piece. With their Negro plays and especially with their step dances that they constantly vary through original ideas...<sup>36</sup>

By differentiating between Black performers’ rote performance for white audiences and improvisational expressions of creativity within a familiar and comfortable community of peers, Zielesch acknowledged that Black culture was more than just performance put on for white spectators. Instead, she describes another scene, a different performance space that is removed from the gaze of the white American majority. In explaining this dichotomy between white and Black, Zielesch introduces the idea that true Black culture is not one in which white audiences partake. What white audiences experience instead is only a shadow of the real thing. In her telling of Black culture, Black people perform music and dance that belong only to them. To be sure, in Zielesch’s estimation, there is scene of primitive and animalistic performance that Black entertainers keep to themselves, leaving the more refined performance for white audiences.

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<sup>36</sup> Li Zielesch. “Die “Schokoladenkinder” in Zivil.” *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, May 24, 1925, 3.

For Zielesch, *The Chocolate Kiddies* created “an operetta of American Negro life with his longings, his childlike piety, his own art, his tragedy and his famous comedy. The operetta music is interspersed with the old across-the-ocean popular folk and plantation songs of the Negro.”<sup>37</sup> For the German audiences who were familiar with traveling Black performances that capitalized on the minstrel tradition prior to the First World War, *The Chocolate Kiddies* assertively challenged the familiar tropes through their performance. In performing for Germans, an audience learning about Black modernism for the first time, the old symbols of the plantation remain a strong mark of distinction. Yet this back and forth between the familiar minstrel and the urban New Negro in *The Chocolate Kiddies* performances highlights a great deal of political uncertainty around the notion of Black culture independent of white America.

Relying on the plantation trope remains a paradox for the performers: it eases audiences into the presentation of Black performance yet gives the plantation the feeling of firm foundation upon which performers can build a story out of the stereotypes familiar to audiences. Zielesch provides a detailed look at the opening of the revue and the attempt to work out the paradox of the plantation in performance. The first scene “Plantation at Sundown,” opened with Arthur Payne appearing with the child actor, Thelma Drayton, sitting on his knee and singing Stephen Foster’s “Old Black Joe.” This song laments the loss of youth and friends and the promise of life after death:

Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay,  
Gone are my friends from the cotton fields away,

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<sup>37</sup> Li Zielesch. “Die “Schokoladenkinder” in Zivil.” *Berliner Volks Zeitung*, May 24, 1925, 3.

Gone from the earth to a better land I know,  
I hear their gentle voices calling Old Black Joe.<sup>38</sup>

However, when Payne reaches the last verse, which begins, “Where are the hearts once so happy and so free?/The children so dear that I held upon my knee,” Drayton interrupts, responding to Payne, “How do you do!” before she jumps up and begins to dance. This early moment in the production is a complex one. At first the production seems squarely situated in a minstrel tradition: Foster’s romanticized song of the antebellum South and Drayton’s pickaninny appearance connects *The Chocolate Kiddies* to the plant play. Yet ultimately the traditions collide. First, opening the production with “Old Black Joe,” a song about a fading past that underscores the section’s title, “The Plantation at sundown,” implies the end of an era of Black geographic placement. Second, Drayton’s interruption of Foster’s song ruptures the contemplative moment of the romanticized South. In choosing to open the program with Drayton and Payne performing Foster and then interrupting that performance, *The Chocolate Kiddies* simultaneously paid homage to the imagined past through classic minstrel characters and brought that past to a halt. The interruption is generational: the child interrupts, if not rejects her elder’s reminiscing, and replaces it with the present in the form of contemporary music and dance. Although the expectation may have been that the revue would rehash the trend of staging the plantation that existed in Harlem clubs, the show began by demanding something new from Black culture. By placing Payne’s song, in which “Joe” is being called to join his friends who

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<sup>38</sup> Traditional

have passed on, the performance confirms the twilight of the plantation not only for the character but also within the history of stage performance.

For Zielesch, this early moment in the production exposes German readers to Black American *cultural* history.

Among the many young people, the long legged, almond-colored feet, and the agile Negro children is also an older gentleman, a bass singer who has thought a lot about the problems of race in the New World. This, Mr. [Arthur] Payne sings within the piece some of those touching spiritual Negro songs that tell about the original rhythm and syncopation, as the modern Jazz has come from it, full of deep interiority, the hope of the Negro for a better afterlife.<sup>39</sup>

Although she mistakenly identifies “Old Black Joe” as an actual Black spiritual, Zielesch’s observation about Black interiority and modernity suggests cultural growth from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. This line in her review also reiterates her previous assertions about white exclusion from Black culture. The Black interiority that creates such music is not accessible to all. More so, by making jazz an outcome of the spiritual, Zielesch establishes the fact that Black culture is not new: it can be traced through Black folkways.

However, despite her apparent understanding that the white audience has limited ownership over Black arts, Zielesch revives stereotypes associated with the fantasized plantation. Looking at Margaret Sims, not as a performer but as a sexualized object

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<sup>39</sup> Unter dem vielen Jungvolk, den hochbeinigen, füßen Mändeln und den gelenkigen Negerjungens ist auch ein älterer herr, ein Bassist, der über die Probleme seiner Rasse in der neuen Welt viel nachgedacht hat. Dieser, Mr Payne, wird innerhalb des Stückes einige jener rührenden geistlichen Negerlieder singen, die in dem originellen Rhythmus und der Synkopierung, wie der modern Jaz sie übernommen hat, voll tiefer Innerlichkeit die hoffnung der Neger auf ein besseres Jenseits erzählen.

founded within the plantation, Zielesch digresses from the way that *The Chocolate Kiddies* sexualized the female performers to her own fantasy about Black women.

Zielesch's description moves from Sims's clothes, to her body, to an unsettling account of the sexual violence of American slavery:

Although she has the veiled heat of the Negro glance, she also has the broad nose and beautiful white teeth of the black race and the tall slender legs, but what prevails in her blood is that white ancestor, due to the lawlessness of Antebellum slavery, he seized the beautiful Negress for his own use.<sup>40</sup>

Crediting whiteness for her best attributes, Zielesch focuses on Sims's body and its connection to American slavery. She captures the moment when Sims is converted from a performer on the stage to the locus of Zielesch's fantasy of her ancestor's rape and her own desire for Sims's body. In the fantasy, Sims's body on the stage—her glance, broad nose, white teeth, and slender legs—is only partially visible compared to the *more* visible white ancestor in her blood. Zielesch sees Sims's physical beauty as typical of Black women, while the white slave master is realized as the active agent that makes her truly beautiful. Instead of reviewing Sims' performance on the stage, Zielesch marks Sims's body as the site for readers to understand Black women through the rape of their female ancestors.<sup>41</sup> The single-sentence narrative not only places rape as a constitutive part of the Black experience of American chattel slavery that robs Black women of their bodily

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<sup>40</sup> “Sie hat zwar das verschleierte Glühen des Negerblicks, sie hat auch die breite Nase und die schönen weißen Zähne der schwarzen Rasse und die hohen schlanken Beine, aber sonst herrscht in ihr das Blut jenes weißen Urahn, der sich die Gefetzlostigkeiten der Zeiten der Leibeigenschaft zunutze gemacht hat, um sich einer seiner schönen Negerklavinnen zu bemächtigen.” Li Zielesch. “Die “Schokoladenkinder” in Zivil.” *Berliner Volks Zeitung*, May 24, 1925, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Abdur-Rahman, *Against the Closet*, 25.

autonomy and sexuality, but also repeats this crime by recapitulating this narrative for the reader. Hortense Spillers has spoken of this unique “marking” that places Black women’s bodies as “a defenseless target for rape and veneration, and the body, in its material and abstract phase, a resource for metaphor.”<sup>42</sup> Zielesch’s rape fantasy is not a site of resistance, or an effort to examine the resilience of Black culture in the face of a system that crushed human individualism. Instead for Zielesch, Sims’s body becomes the carrier of whiteness—her true beauty—and Zielesch’s own desire for her.

Zielesch’s denial of Black women’s autonomy reflects the dangers of using the plant play to launch into a Black performance revue. The staged plantation as a prime site of return, as Jayna Brown reminds us, favors the fantasy realm in which Black women remain the targets of coercive sex. This is even more glaring because Zielesch’s description of Sims’ body and ancestry is the only in-depth description of any of the performers. Even as Zielesch appears to understand the revue’s efforts to alter ideas about Black people around Harlem, she nonetheless continues to examine Sims’s body not as exemplifying a unique individual beauty or talent but rather as the locus of a history of sexual violence. Worse, Zielesch’s gaze elides the true trauma created by sexual violence and coercive labor’s integral role in American chattel slavery by elevating Sims’s white ancestor as the superior element in her blood. This suggestion undercuts the message of unique Black creativity. Sims’s physical appearance distorts Zielesch’s ability to focus on her work as a stage performer. Leaving out any description of her performance, Zielesch

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<sup>42</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Culture and Counteremory: The “American” Connection. (Summer, 1987), 66.

describes the invisible narrative underneath the performance: a narrative reliant on white blood and the rape of a slave.

Even as plant plays formed the basis for moving German audiences to Harlem, *The Chocolate Kiddies* could not control how tethered audiences would be to the romanticized South. Zielesch's article is filled with the racist distortions that *The Chocolate Kiddies* program invoked in their work even as they tried to undermine them. Zielesch's antebellum nostalgia undercuts the revue's attempt to position the plant play as the opening argument that Northern Black people differed demonstrably and culturally from their Southern past. Her rape fantasy demonstrates the continuing potency of a romanticized notion of the plantation, which remained even though white people were removed from the stage. For Zielesch, Black women more so than Black men—whom she describes as betraying “the blood of their ancestors from Africa”—are the carriers of a white American identity. The depiction of Sims's body as the carrier of whiteness looks to her identity as it is formed not through the program *The Chocolate Kiddies* created but rather through Zielesch's extratextual knowledge of the origins of Black identity in America in chattel slavery. Zielesch's image of Sims should trouble us enough to think about how even within the performance of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, sexual violence against Black women is justified for its alleged role in Black beauty. Zielesch celebrates the vulnerability that Spillers sees Black women exposed to throughout American history. Black women suffered under slavery, yet for her, the historic violation

of Black women *adds* to their entertainment value, making the stage a new and repeated site for the denial of Black women's personhood.<sup>43</sup>

Zielesch's review shows her oscillating understanding of the Black performers. For her, their identity is formed between Africa, the larger idea of the West, and America to such an extent that she seems unclear how to categorize the performers. The review connects Africa, America, and Europe back together, reconstituting the Atlantic slave trade. The divide along gender lines places Sims and the other Black women as inheritors of an exotic beauty bestowed upon them by whiteness, whereas the men of the troupe owe their appearance to their African ancestors. Zielesch, like many white people across the Atlantic, viewed Black beauty through its relationship to white ancestry, placing higher value on light skin over darker skin. In her focus on Sims, then, we see a continued inscription of this model of beauty, a focus that ignores the talents presented on the stage for a fantasy of how that beauty was created.

Despite their view of miscegenation and sexual violence, German ideas still constructed Black people as teachers of modernity. Indeed, if part of Black American identity was the plantation as a site of origin, be it in the labor of slavery or in the rape of Black women that undermined—and continues to undermine—white purity, then nothing was more modern and representative of Black Americanness than jazz.

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<sup>43</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 7.

**The Transfiguration of Jazz**

In his reminiscences of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, Garvin Bushell considered Sam Wooding an incredibly savvy showman who paid close attention to perfecting the stage craft for German audiences. “One of the band’s specialty numbers was ‘O Katharina,’ a German tune. They loved it in Berlin. Sam had arranged it before we went over, and we rehearsed it on the boat...he made his own arrangements, copied them and all.”<sup>44</sup> For German audiences, the reinvention of “O Katharina” was a highlight of the show. Wooding’s arrangement made creative use of a traditional song to show the possibilities of jazz music. Bushell’s admiration for Wooding is telling. As band leader, Wooding was responsible for making the music as enthralling as the performers’ movements on stage. Accompanying the production from the orchestra pit until their performance, the band’s ability to match the music with the actions on stage had to be impeccable. Like the use of the plant plays, his hybridization of “O Katharina” further eased audiences into the performance of *The Chocolate Kiddies*. If the plant play positioned German audiences in the South only to transport them to the North, “O Katharina” was its counterpart in positioning Germany as a place capable of taking its own traditions and modernizing them.

This transfiguration—taking the traditional and making it modern, while still preserving its spirit—was a point that Wooding made clear in an article he published in a special edition of the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*. Published at the end of their tour in 1926, Wooding’s article, “Der Verklärung des Jazz” (“The Transfiguration of Jazz”),

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<sup>44</sup> Bushell, *Jazz from the Beginning*, 56-57.

outlines the importance of jazz music and its relevance to German audiences. In describing the character of jazz, Wooding rejected Paul Whiteman's symphonic orchestrations—music meant more for the concert hall than the cabaret—and declared that being disciplined in jazz's complex rhythms was not enough. Indeed, he stated jazz “is not a music from mechanical rhythms and the brain, as has often been the general opinion of jazz. It is fundamental, it is the music of our blood.”<sup>45</sup> Although readers may have been aware of Sam Wooding's race, his writing in *Berliner Tageblatt*, which featured no note of his identity, seemed to make the claim of a universal “our,” one that transcended race because of its foundation (*elementar*) in the individual performer. In differentiating himself from Whiteman in technical expertise, musicological study, and discipline, Wooding offered jazz as universally available. To make his point more boldly, he stated, “rhythmic discipline should remain fundamental but should not be the basis itself!” He also declared, “In the middle of the hammering rhythm of the beat blooms the timeless exotic flowers of the soul.”<sup>46</sup> Emerging from the soul, jazz, he suggests, has a unique quality because of its relation to an interiority that is more expressive than a studious regiment can create. Wooding further argued that jazz could be used, much like the performance of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, to retell stories from a new perspective.

The primitive mammy songs, the brown baby's lullaby, we take them back and apply counterpoint to the traditional forms... We have from our religious choirs here a tradition of strict style, which is based on the same

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<sup>45</sup> “Sie ist elementar, ist die Musik unseres Blutes.” Sam Wooding, “Die Verklärung des Jazz,” *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels Zeitung*, July 31, 1926.

<sup>46</sup> “Aber rhythmische Disziplin muß technisches Fundament bleiben, darf nicht zum Selbstzweck erhoben werden! Zwischen den hämmernden Rhythmen der Zeit erblühen die zeitlos exotischen Blumen der Seele.” Sam Wooding, “Die Verklärung des Jazz,” *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels Zeitung*, July 31, 1926.

rules as any eternal cantata by J.S. Bach. The crossing of this quite European “spiritual” choral style with the basic elements of our rhythm—this is jazz.<sup>47</sup>

This reference to taking the “mammy songs” back directly addresses the movement play trope at the center of *The Chocolate Kiddies*’s performance. In creating jazz, one reclaims the forms that had once been a part of the Black folk tradition, just as the revue attempted to reclaim plant plays and minstrel traditions. Once again, in their possession, “the mammy songs” are reclaimed from their white origins for the purpose of creating jazz. Wooding’s comments about the creation of Black music and the alteration of German culture to fit Black performance fulfills Claude McKay’s desire to see a counter to the discourses of Blackness that had overwhelmed Germany after the First World War. Although Lyons, Leonidoff, Flemming, and Wooding did not see themselves responding directly to German postwar racist propaganda, *The Chocolate Kiddies* proved integral to countering German racism toward Black people.

Wooding’s article appeared in the context of a full-page spread on jazz, where it seemed to answer an important question posed by *Berliner Tageblatt*’s editors: what was the significance of jazz in contemporary music?<sup>48</sup> In the same full page spread, Max

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<sup>47</sup> Die primitive Mammy-Lieder, die Schlaflieder der braunen Babys, wir nehmen sie wieder auf und versuchen sie auf kunstvolle Weise zu kontrapunktieren. Das quakt und ächzt, singt und blüht in alternierenden Neben- Zwischenstimmen. Wir haben von unseren religiösen Chören her eine Tradition des strengen Satzes, die auf den gleichen ewigen Regeln basiert wie irgendeine kantate von JS Bach. Die kreuzung dieses durchaus europäischen “spiritual” Choralstils mit den Urelementen unserer Rhythmik ist—Jazz. Sam Wooding, “Die Verklärung des Jazz,” *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels Zeitung*, July 31, 1926.

<sup>48</sup> “dem Problem der Bedeutung des Jazz für die Musik der Gegenwart” Sam Wooding, “Die Verklärung des Jazz,” *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels Zeitung*, July 31, 1926.

Butting, a board member of the International Society for Contemporary Music and well-known composer, took jazz seriously: “Jazz will either renew or corrupt all kinds of music after the Negro race.”<sup>49</sup> Yet despite this warning, Butting’s take on jazz was open to the positive influence that jazz could have in Germany. For Butting, jazz reflected modern times. More so, its influence could not help but lead the younger generation to look to jazz in the creation of new music. The acceptance of the influence of Black culture represents an alternate view of Black people than that which we see in the Black Shame propaganda. Whereas the propaganda made a clear disdain for what Black people may do to the cathectic ideal of the nation, culture, and women, Butting argues for a recognition of the possible debt that Germans may need to pay to Black culture. It is striking that Butting appears willing to accept jazz as a possible foundation for a new German music that would express contemporary social conditions. Butting’s response counters that of the bar patron that confronted Flemming. Indeed, in accepting jazz as modern, there is the completion of the circuit of the pedagogic modernist challenge. Unlike the bar patron, Butting not only knows that jazz is modern music but also accepts its triumph in Germany. His response to jazz reveals a developing discourse that Germans could benefit from participating in the New Negro Renaissance.

### **The Black Wave**

The very idea of the New Negro Renaissance that had become the watchword for Black intellectuals and their white allies in the United States became a major mode of

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<sup>49</sup> Der Jazz ist je nachdem eine Auffrischung oder Verballhornung aller möglichen Musik nach Negerart.

discourse in Europe through the postwar period. Historian Eric Hobsbawm in particular argues that the United States was at the vanguard of exporting modern culture through popular culture, and jazz in particular.<sup>50</sup> Counting the multiple ways Black culture appeared as modern, Hobsbawm drolly notes, “Jazz bands came from the same country as Henry Ford.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the appearance of *The Chocolate Kiddies* in 1925 coincided with the steady circulation of American products in Europe and Europe’s fascination with America’s capitalist development. To Europeans this new America appeared, in the words of historian David Ellwood, “as a political, economic, and cultural *competitor*, unprecedented in its ubiquity and dynamism.”<sup>52</sup> Germany’s transition from colonial power to occupied nation made cultural production by non-whites a contested ground. Yet the emergence of a Black American culture came as a special challenge to German audiences. Unlike white Americans, many of whom had lived in relationship to Black people since the first landing of European colonial settlers, Germans were unused to a domestic Black presence. Black culture had been entwined with the expansion of what has been defined as American from the beginning. However, the appearance of Black Americans as active cultural producers had been relatively new in comparison to their white American counterparts. This had specific implications for Germany, a country that had been defeated in the largest scale of warfare in human history. As explored in the

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<sup>50</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 183. Closing the circuit of mass production and popular culture, Leroi Jones suggests that the appeal of the Ford Motor Company and its products can be seen directly in the number of blues songs written about Ford. Jones *Blues People*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People*, 267

<sup>52</sup> Ellwood, *The Shock of America*, 74.

previous chapter, many people within Germany felt their culture was either threatened or indeed destroyed by the war and subsequent occupation. That occupation relied on racist ideas of Africans, and furthered at once a sense of humiliation as well as a sense of an embattled culture in need of racial-cultural purity. As explored in the previous chapter, many people within Germany felt their culture was either threatened or indeed destroyed by the war and occupation.

Even though Black Americans conceived of themselves as embodying reflections of a burgeoning culture, they were less concerned with a nationalistic competition in the arts. Still, for Germans, Black Americans became the symbol of America's music culture throughout the 1920s and 30s. The emergence of Black music, dance, and its representations in art coincided with different cultural forces in which American policy held no sway over the exportation of Black culture.<sup>53</sup> Instead, the emergence of Black culture in Germany came from managers of cabarets, clubs, and casinos looking for new acts across postwar Germany. Unlike the purposeful "jazz diplomacy" of the Cold War era, *The Chocolate Kiddies* were not agents of the state; they were self-employed performers taking advantage of any opportunity to perform in Germany. What Black performers brought with them, purposefully or not, was their art, shaped by and responsive to urban America.

Weimar scholar Gesa Frömming argues that the idea of "Amerika" as an industrial juggernaut came with the concomitant understanding that America had turned Africans into an industrial and urban people. This German view of America "may have

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<sup>53</sup> See Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting American in the Cold War Era*.

been another way to achieve national identity, by reassuring themselves not only about what it meant to be ‘white,’ but also what it meant to be ‘German.’”<sup>54</sup> These Africans—Black Americans—had been Americanized and, just as shockingly, America had been Africanized.

The language of the New Negro Renaissance became infused within German popular culture in the immediate aftermath of *The Chocolate Kiddies* tour. In the examples below, the language of *The Chocolate Kiddies* is replicated: the importance of Harlem and associated urbanism; the unique art of Black Americans and its own vitality; the transformative power of jazz in German art; and finally, the presumed supersession of Black culture in Germany. From this discourse, the German writers projected and produced their own wishes and desires on to Black Americans. These desires differed from what was presented by Black performers and instead revealed what Germans needed from performing Black bodies. Within a matrix of racial fantasy, these desires looked to Black bodies as a source of postwar German rejuvenation.

Shortly after *The Chocolate Kiddies*’ premier, articles in German newspapers and the illustrated and satirical magazines reveled in Black American culture. The magazines *UHU*, *Das Leben*, *Das Magazin*, *Der Querschnitt*, and *Revue Des Monats* were especially evocative for readers. Appearing in the mid-1920s, these magazines reflected a return to normalcy after the war and expanding modernization and industrialization. Created for an urban middle class, the magazines catered to a readership with a busy urban lifestyle.

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<sup>54</sup> Frömming, “Iconographic Representations of Black Americans by the Weimar Left” in *Imagining Blackness in Germany and Austria*, 136.

They also reflected a return to leisure activity for many Germans and the ability of mass production to rapidly disseminate ideas of Black Americans across the country. Articles were relatively short, with several photo spreads. Despite catering to a new urban class, each magazine had a specific demographic in mind. *UHU* addressed a more general audience, with contributions from Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, and, once, a guest review by Albert Einstein. *Das Leben* catered to young urban women who identified with the idea of the New Woman, catering to those interested in safe urban adventures and criticism of new art. *Revue des Monats* was the male-focused counterpart to *Das Leben* which focused on car culture and movie stars. *Das Magazin*, started by the film director and producer Robert Siodmak and journalist Franz Wolfgang, catered to audiences interested in film and dance. Its focus on the avant-garde included pictorials of works by Man Ray and Heinz Hajek-Halke. Although both used images of female nudes, *Revue des Monats* relied on them heavily, along with an “Automotive Review” column, providing different forms of excitement for its predominately male readership. Like *Das Magazin*, *Revue des Monats* provided detailed information on film and the film industry. Of all the illustrated magazines of the Weimar era, *Der Querschnitt* was considered the most intellectual. With contributions from around the world, it published works by Marcel Proust, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce.<sup>55</sup> The magazines became the carriers of Black American discourses, replicating *The Chocolate Kiddies’* message for an intellectual readership interested in modern popular culture outside of

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<sup>55</sup> Rossler, “Digitization of Popular Print Media as a Source for Studies Visual Communication: Illustrated Magazines of the Weimer Republic, *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 174-176.

Germany. *The Chocolate Kiddies* performances and the Black tours that followed prompted not only reviews of Black arts but also a deep interest in uncovering the birth of Black American culture.

One such evaluation was *UHU*'s assessment of "The Black Wave" (*die schwarze Welle*), written by Viennese journalist Arthur Rundt.<sup>56</sup> Appearing in August, months after the premier of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, "The Black Wave" focused on the emergence of Black modernity. Rundt chronicled a history of Black America for *UHU*'s readers before announcing the arrival of a new cultural force. Drawing on observations made during a three-month trip to the United States in late April 1924, Rundt focuses on the development of Harlem in the first quarter of the twentieth-century: "In upper New York, in a district between Fifth and Eighth Avenue, between 125<sup>th</sup> and 145<sup>th</sup> Street: the Negro City...Harlem is the largest Negro settlement in the world, the metropolis of Negro Duchy!"<sup>57</sup> Rundt choice of words at once reveals his astonishment at a site of Black culture. However, it also strikes a reductive note, as if to say that one could not believe that Black people could not create a center on their own. Rundt connects his understanding of New York City's changing cultural character with the decline of German cultural identity abroad, arguing that exported German traditions have been replaced with the "pure and mixed" Negroes of modern Harlem. The old New York

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<sup>56</sup> For the most detailed biographical information on Rundt, see Knox, *Weimar Germany Between Two Worlds: The American and Russian Travels of Kisch, Toller, Holitscher, Goldschmidt, and Rundt*, 192-212.

<sup>57</sup> "Im obern New York, in einem Viereck zwischen Fünfter und Acter Avenue, der zwischen der 125. und 145. Straße, liegt Harlem, die Negerstadt...Harlem ist die grösste Negersiedlung der Welt, die Metropole des Negertums." Arthur Rundt, "die Schwarze Welle" *UHU*, August, 1925, 30.

German “pubs of gymnastics clubs and choral societies with their weeknights of Westphalian ham, sauerkraut and Bavarian beer” was gone, Rundt wrote, and the sound of men’s choirs has been replaced with “today’s hammering of two-eight syncopated rhythms.”<sup>58</sup> Although Harlem had never been a location for the German immigrant community, Rundt was correct that German culture was no longer a distinctive component of New York. Especially after America declared war on Germany during the First World War, many German immigrants integrated into mainstream American culture under pressure from anti-German sentiment. Modern Black American urban culture developed and expanded concurrently.

Rundt’s article historicized the “Black Wave” by explaining the transition engendered at the turn of the century by the Great Migration—called the Great Flood (*die große Flut*) in the article. The focus on the cityscape would have been of special interests to many urban Germans, as the German historian Detlev Peukert states: “the [postwar German] urban and metropolitan spirit was fuelled by the sense of liberation from convention and the reins of community which the city offered.”<sup>59</sup> Germans in urban centers found descriptions of America alluring and could relate to Black urbanism as a similar environ to Berlin. It was thus this interest in New York that readers may have found enticing. “Harlem was the Black man’s third home [First Africa, then the American South]...And now this giant leap. Living in skyscrapers, daily baths, riding to

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<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of the impact of US propaganda aimed at Italian and German speaking populations during WWII, see Gerd Horten, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 181.

and from work through underground tubes, which are more like magic.”<sup>60</sup> Created in the image of (white) New York City (*alles in der Negerstadt gleicht aufs Haar dem Idol: New York*), Rundt perceives a Black culture that was enjoyed by all, even as Black Americans faced discrimination on a daily basis:

In Harlem, basement pubs and cabarets, where rarely a white man enters, the screeching half-animal rages at night with ginger ale—the unconverted natural sound roars its delight beyond the happy concourse in the metropolis. But at the Lafayette Theatre on Lenox Avenue, the local black author puts himself above the American sensations—following the example of literary ambitions on Broadway—to Shakespeare, Ibsen, Wilde and Shaw...Again and again drowned out by talking and thinking of the Negro, this hot desiring cry of blood: after equality. The blood cries wild desire, and—it screams horror simultaneously. Because the white man mixes his blood with the darker comfortably in sweltering nights, but during the day turns his nose.<sup>61</sup>

Speaking from the racialized notion of Black primitivity, Rundt confronts his urban readership with the struggle for civil rights in which white Americans partake in Black Americans’ cultural productions but ignore their desire for equality. He also echoes Zielesch’s language of a public sphere and a counterpublic, where vital energies are released in the production of a unique Black culture.

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<sup>60</sup> “Harlem wurde des schwarzen Mannes dritte Heimat...Und nun—dieser Riesensprung: Wohnen im Wolkenkratzer, tägliches Bad, Fahrt zur Arbeitsstätte durch unterirdische Röhren und was dergleichen Zaubereien mehr sind.” *UHU*, August, 1925, 32.

<sup>61</sup> “Aber im Lafayette-Theater an der Lenox-Avenue hat man sich vom schwarzen Lokalautor übers amerikanische Sensationsstück—nach dem Beispiel des literarischen Ehrgeizes am Broadway—bis zu Shakespeare, Ibsen, Wilde, und Shaw emporgespielt. Harlem will wie New York sein...Immer und immer tönt durch das Reden und Denken des Negers dieser heiß wünschende Schrei des Bluts: nach Gleichsein Das Blut schreit wildes Begehren, und—es schreit Entsetzen zugleich. Weil der weiße Mann sein Blut mit dem dunkleren wohl in schwülen Nächten mischt, aber--am Tage die Nase rümpft.” Arthur Rundt, “die Schwarze Welle” *UHU*, August, 1925, 32. The notion of blood crying (*Blut schreiend*), would have held religious connotations for readers.

Just as in the United States, Germany experienced its own “Negro Vogue.” At its most superficial, Germany’s vogue mirrored the racial hierarchies of Black performers and white patrons that Langston Hughes critiqued as a byproduct of the Renaissance:

...Harlem Negroes did not like the Cotton Club and never appreciated its Jim Crow policy in the very heart of their dark community. Nor did ordinary Negroes like the growing influx of whites toward Harlem after sundown, flooding the little cabarets and bars where formerly only colored people laughed and sang, and where now the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers—like amusing animals in a zoo.<sup>62</sup>

Rundt’s article mirrored this critique of the Renaissance as being a racial spectacle that ignored the political importance of Black life in the 1920s. Yet like Zielesch, Rundt’s article mixed a political awareness with the continued obsession with primitivity that created a sympathy through essentialist notions of a Black race.

**“Whistle me a few bars”**

Where Rundt’s article suggests the loss of German cultural markers in New York City, many Germans took note of the rising interest and preference for signifiers of Black America. The assumption that a new generation of Germans were more acculturated to American ideas of history and art than those of their own country’s became a key argument in magazines. Even as these magazines continued to drag out the racist discourses on the colonial African soldier past the height of the Allied occupation, they likewise parodied the notion of Germans becoming intimate cultural insiders of Black culture. They perceived a “Black Americanism” that displaced traditional German

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<sup>62</sup> Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, 224-225.

culture. In this respect, jokes became a particularly powerful representation of this attachment to Black identity by Germans who had a preference for “the New” and its association, not just with America, but specifically with Black people.

*Jugend*, an art magazine with a section devoted to riddles, jokes, and puzzles, included a short descriptive joke of the divide between an older generation and the new cultural consumers in Germany:

"My young friend," said the visiting clergyman gravely to the young daughter of the house, who was incompetently playing jazz melodies on piano, "Have you ever heard the Ten Commandments?"  
"Whistle me a few bars," was the reply, "and I can tell you right now."<sup>63</sup>

The simplicity of the joke and its familiar equivalents in America should not be taken lightly. The clergyman's role as representative of the traditional and religious past, and the daughter's ignorance of the Ten Commandments, would have been as humorous as it was striking. The additional difference between the clergyman's graveness (*ernstem*) and the incompetent nature in which the daughter plays the piano (*kimperte*) further reveals the ethos of work, play, and culture. Unlike the satirical magazines that had taken up the discourse of the Black Shame, the joke in *Jugend* presents a different concept of the loss of cultural capital that represented a different kind of occupation. In effect, this occupation was far more invasive. Without physical coercion, a generation of Germans had lost an awareness of their culture and had taken up another, submitting to Black American cultural hegemony. In the latter years of the 1920s, the joke suggests, young

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<sup>63</sup> "Meine junge Freundin," sagte der besuchende Geistliche in ernstem Tone zu der jungen Tochter des Hauses, die am Klavier Jazzmelodien klimperte "haben Sie schon mal die zehn Gebote gehört" Pfeifen sie doch mal ein paar Takte," war die Antwort, "und ich kann Ihnen gleich sagen. *Jugend* 1927 Number 13 page 312.

Germans were better acquainted with secular America than a religiously traditional Germany.

The satirical magazine *Der Wahre Jakob* had its own way of making fun of jazz's trendy stature with "The Original Jazz Record." Two boys playing in a garbage heap discover a warped pot cover and bring it along to a fashionable party. Placing the top under the needle of the gramophone, all the people were delighted that they got to hear the latest jazz!"<sup>64</sup> The short comic dismisses the sounds of jazz as pure noise, reflecting some of the sentiments that Wooding's band received in reviews [Image 3.2]. Like the sound of the pot lid, *The Chocolate Kiddies* were described as "The instruments crow like hens, bello like bulls, neigh like mares in heat."<sup>65</sup> However, the magazine makes fun of jazz's fashionable listeners as much as its sound. To *Der Wahre Jakob*, jazz records are equal to garbage. Disordering popular culture, *Der Wahre Jakob* brings the trash to the fashionable party: if the pot lid, a piece of trash, can be brought to a fashionable party, then surely a *real* jazz record likewise belonged in the trash. That the partygoers delight at music produced by a pot lid from garbage heap lampoons their lack of a discriminating, cultural taste. In addition, it places jazz as a culturally inferior product that only finds adherents with those lacking refinement. It thus framed Germans' desire for the cosmopolitan culture represented by jazz as silly, faddish, and perhaps dangerous

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<sup>64</sup> "Der kleine Hans und der kleine Fritz fanden eines Tages einem alten Topfdeckel. Sie entfernten den Griff. Legten den Deckel unter die Nadel des Grammophons, und alle Leute waren entzückt von dem neuesten jazz, den sie hören kriegten." *Wahre Jakob*, January 21 1928, no. 2 page 16.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Bernhard H. Behncke "Sam Wooding," *Storyville* Issue 60, Aug/Sept, 1975, 218.

for its contemptible source. Like the young daughter who offers to play the Ten Commandments on the piano, *Wahre Jakob* argued, cosmopolitan Germans were replacing real culture—*German* culture—with literal garbage.

This idea of noise and a lack of cultural sophistication among Germans was a frequent tool for disparaging jazz's place in German culture. Although less focused on the transformation of jazz into trash, *der Wahre Jakob* placed jazz as a continued object of ridicule for its unmusical qualities. In a featured woodcut titled "Village Jazz" (Dorf-Jazz), a quintet of older musicians sits in a circle. The caption reads, "So let's now make jazz music! We'll play 'Last Rose,' but each note must be handled wrong, otherwise the life of the Charleston won't be in it."<sup>66</sup> This notion of jazz-as-noise or mishandled music (*jede Note muß falsch gegriffen werden*) reveals a reading of the joke that also plays on the difference between the city and the village in the 1920s [Image 3.3]. As Detlev Peukert states, the rising number of Germans moving into the city and the creation of an urban class reinforced divisions between different elements of the German population.<sup>67</sup> It is also rural ignorance that the joke makes fun of the village musicians. Turning "Last Rose," an Irish song included in the libretto of Friedrich von Flotow's 1847 opera *Martha, oder Der Markt zu Richmond* (Martha, or the Market at Richmond), into a song for dancing the Charleston reveals the band's attempt to make the old new. It further places the village band out of touch with the urban Germans in their assumption in how

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<sup>66</sup> "Also jetzt wollen wir mal jazz-musik machen! Wir spielen "Letzte Rose," aber jede Note muß falsch gegriffen werden, sonst wird im Leben kein Charleston draus" *Wahre Jakob*, September 17, 1927, no. 6 page 10.

<sup>67</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 181.

jazz is made. In their attempt to be popular, the magazine argues, the partiers reveal their ignorance of jazz. Interestingly, this was counter to Wooding's usage of "O Katharina" and his idea of musical transfiguration. Where Wooding suggested that different traditions could be combined, *der Wahre Jakob* places Black music as nothing more than a vapid trend. The idea of merging music was threatening to a sense of keeping a culture—and nation—whole. By creating something new out of disparate parts, there was the threat that the culture, over all, would be corrupted by outside influences unbroken cultural whole. Evoking the "transfiguration" that Wooding thought was possible between two cultures, the satirical magazine's ridiculed the faddish attempts of Germans to play and dance to jazz. Although some, like Butting would see the value in jazz and Black performance, others saw a passing fad that was only worthy of ridicule.

The satirical magazines that had made the Black Shame a target for racial resentment through the early 1920s also looked to the sonorous "wails" of jazz for humorous exploitation. Still relying on ideas of the primitive, the satirical magazine willingly played into the new era's approach to imagining Black music. Importantly, these humorous takes on jazz's influence on German society exposes how Germans attached values to jazz and became interested in attaching jazz to their own practices. The placement of jazz piano over the Ten Commandments, the village band that tries to modernize its repertoire, and most importantly, the pot-lid "record" that the gathering immediately accept as if it were really jazz, all suggest the disordering power of jazz in modern Germany. These examples reveal the awareness of a new form of culture that threatens to displace German traditions. Importantly, these stories, which involve a sense

of insider knowledge—or ignorance—use jazz as a metonym for Black people. As the above excerpted description of Wooding’s band as noise suggests, a critique of jazz functioned as a way to differentiate European music from the pandemonium of jazz. Yet among the critical essays and satirical understanding of Black culture, there also emerged stories that Germans told themselves of the interaction between Black people and Germans. These stories for the first time told of a different encounter, one based on close *physical* intimate contact.

### **Intimate Attachments**

Peter Scher’s 1931 *Revue Des Monats* published a first person narrative about European slumming in Harlem. “Lola Tanzt mit dem Neger” (“Lola Dances with the Negro”) offers an alternative to the satirical magazines in modeling interactions with Black culture. The story is framed through the nostalgic German narrator fondly remembering his experiences in Harlem after finding his old membership card to the Harlem jazz club, the Nest. He recalls, Greenwich Village, the heart of Bohemian American, he tells his readers, where the titular Lola—the daughter of a Russian general and movie star—and Florence, a “beautiful and phlegmatic” “half-Indian,” convince the narrator to visit a Harlem jazz club.<sup>68</sup> The group is joined by George, a rather stoic American. Together, they attend the Nest—the Harlem club that Wooding himself had performed in in the early 1920s. Shane Vogel describes the Nest Club as an intimate space, unlike the more spacious Cotton Club, that placed patrons at tables in close

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<sup>68</sup> “Florence, a half Indian, beautiful and phlegmatic.” Peter Scher, “Lola tanzt mit dem Neger,” *Revue Des Monats*, October 31, 1931 pages, 1274-1277, 1337

proximity to dancers on the floor. Unlike other jazz clubs like the Cotton Club or Barron's, the Nest was an exclusively Black club. Paying for two special cards that men—and not the women—are required to have for the exclusive club, the narrator and George “the right to participate in the nightly events of colored gentlemen.”

While the group sits and enjoys music that the narrator describes as “that [which] grabbed the wildest part of the marrow, subdued it, and then gradually swelled, lashing out again,” George is taken by the appearance of a Black woman dancing table to table [Image 3.3]. “George was alternately pale and red, and his good boy face expressed everything in the mind of the American.”<sup>69</sup> Lola, taking notice of George's entranced expression, asks if he would like to dance with the “Negro girl” (mit dem Negermädchen tanzen). But George, “although Bohemian” is “too American,” (obwohl Bohemien, war doch zu sehr amerikanischer Jüngling) and fears that dancing with a black girl in public would violate American norms laws of segregation. Inquiring on George's behalf, Lola is confronted by the club defense of the color line: white and Black audience members cannot dance with one another. “Impossible! If it were to be known! It would be a disaster!” the club president responded, horrified.<sup>70</sup> Probing the colorline further, she asks the club president if he, a Black man, would dance with her. Surprised by the request, the club president looks around to see all the patrons and the band members silently watching to see how the president will respond. Taking out his handkerchief, he gestures that Lola

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<sup>69</sup> “wurde George abwechselnd blaß und rot, und sein gutes Jungengesicht drückte alles andere als amerikanische Geistesgegenwart aus.” Peter Scher, “Lola tanzt mit dem Neger,” *Revue Des Monats*, October 31, 1931, 1274-1277, 1337

<sup>70</sup> “Unmöglich! Wenn es bekannt würde! Es wäre ein Unglück!” Peter Scher, “Lola tanzt mit dem Neger,” *Revue Des Monats*, October 31, 1931 pages, 1274-1277, 1337

should touch the handkerchief and not “his colored flesh” (sein farbiges Fleisch).

Motioning to George, Lola signals since she has violated the greater taboo, a white woman dancing with a Black man, than he may dance with the Black woman.

As Langston Hughes reminds us, white observers experienced Harlem through the practice of slumming. Indeed, whereas Rundt’s article historicized and analyzed the ways that Harlem was a space divided between the segregated white patronized clubs and the exclusive Black clubs like the Nest, Scher claims to bring the reader into the bohemian scenes of Greenwich Village with its mix of artists and European ethnic types as well as the Black spaces of Harlem. Scher’s story represents the production of German stories of Black America and the attachment of values to that specific identity. If slumming was seen as one of the exciting hallmarks of modern urban America, Scher’s story created a story that placed Germans in the middle of the action. “Lola Tanzt” puts the exhilaration of crossing the colorline in the hands of the readers. It reveals the interest in racial border crossings that went further than the antebellum sexual fantasy found in Zielesch’s review of *The Chocolate Kiddies* or Rundt’s urban history of Black America. As a narrative of American urban slumming, Scher places Lola outside of American racial logics, willing to cross boundaries that, the story suggests, Americans do not cross. Here then, the sexual intimacy implied by Lola’s close proximity to the Black club president is negated by the distance that clothing provides. This cross-racial moment is treated as at once temporary but also a deeply important moment in the narrator’s life. The import of Lola dancing with a Black man lies not only in the context of American racism but also in German readers’ titillation when raced bodies touch.

George's desire, which starts the climactic event of the story, involves a whole matrix of taboo-breaking. Although it is Lola who is brave enough to dance with a Black person first and the president who nervously accepts the offer to dance as long as a piece of fabric separates them, it is all to complete the desires of George. Importantly, even though Lola is not touched by the black man, the same courtesy is not extended by George to the Black dancer. In Scher's story, white men have access to Black women without their consent. The place of the Black woman becomes a transaction between Lola, the club president, and George. The dancer never speaks, instead with a gesture from Lola, George and the Black woman dance. This interaction suggests, like Zielesch's rape fantasy, that a Black woman's consent or very voice is inconsequential for the joy it can create for the white man.

Scher's description of the club president, "his face was gray with excitement,"<sup>71</sup> exposes the ongoing pervasiveness of the racial myth of the Black male longing for the white woman. However, the illustrations that accompany the story erase Lola's forceful crossing of the racial border. Instead, the illustration of Lola and the club president's dance reveals the uncertainty of their close intimacy. Lola hesitantly looks over her shoulder back to her compatriots, revealing the apprehensive look on her face. The club president, too, looks over his shoulder unsure, seeing the band in the background staring and registering the prestige for the president in the intimate moment. The illustration makes George's racial crossing a chance to show the gallantry of the once red-faced

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<sup>71</sup> "sein Gesicht war vor Erregung grau." Peter Scher, "Lola tanzt mit dem Neger," *Revue Des Monats*, October 31, 1931 pages, 1274-1277, 1337

“good boy.” In comparison to the club president, George’s poise and gentility with the Black dancer are heightened, creating the assured image of white male gallantry [Image 3.5]. In contrast, the images then define Lola’s bravery for placing herself so close to the racialized danger of Black men—a danger to which George’s gender renders him immune while the Black woman’s feelings go unacknowledged. The look on Lola’s face adds to the importance of her dance with the Black man [Image 3.6]. It matters more that Lola dances with a Black man than George dancing with a Black woman. The greater social and cultural crossing is Black man/white woman. The narrator’s reminiscence of the story focuses on this racial crossing as much more than a night to remember: it celebrates the triumph for the characters that not only make it into a Harlem club but also become intimately close to Black people.

### **Conclusion**

To German audiences, Black performers symbolized modernism, urbanism, and cosmopolitanism. Yet colonial allusions and figurations of minstrelsy remained crucial reference points in representations of Black Modernity. Their performances were “haunted”—to use Marvin Carlson’s term—and as such, *The Chocolate Kiddies* could simultaneously offer themselves as modern, while strategically and thoughtfully referencing their difference from the “wild and semi-wild of Africa” or the “primitive mammy songs.” Indeed, Flemming’s interaction with the abusive bar patron repeats the performative pedagogy that *The Chocolate Kiddies* attempted on the stage. Where Flemming’s use of English “spoke” to his Americanness, his dark skin likewise told a story that relegated him to the role of a French colonial subject. As Marvin Carlson

reminds us, the hauntings “evoked by the performance are not of previous experience with the same basic configuration of stimuli but of the same grounding literary text and its implied patterns of action conceived by a different interpretive ensemble in different ways.”<sup>72</sup>

The German identification with a discourse of Black modernity was problematized by a persisting commitment to notions of Black primitivism, what Achebe calls “triumphant bestiality.” Zielesch’s reading of Sims’s body is a case in point, as it reveals the difficulty in disconnecting the plantation from New Negro arts. For theorist Frederic Jameson, “the coexistence of realities” is the quandary of modernity.<sup>73</sup> Within modernity, Jameson argues, there is “an uneven moment of social development.” Throughout the chapter, we see this uneven development in response to *The Chocolate Kiddies*. Likewise, the writings found in Rundt’s travelogue, the satirical magazines, and Scher’s short story all revel in the difference between Black cosmopolitanism and German culture, yet Black modernity is *dragged* back into notions of the primitive and the slave. “The modern period,” Jameson states, “was only possible because of the mixed, uneven, transitional nature of that period, in which the old coexisted with what was then coming into being.”<sup>74</sup> Jameson’s coexistence of realities mirrors Carlson’s concept of haunting. *The Chocolate Kiddies*, with their Charleston, jazz music, and Harlem scenery coexisted with the history of slavery, the traditions of the minstrel, and Germany’s understanding of the colonial subject. Audiences of the revue and readers of

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<sup>72</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 99.

<sup>73</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 307.

<sup>74</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 311.

the German press experienced and recognized the modern in its intervention and interaction with the old and traditional.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps this interaction between Black Americans and Germans should strike us not for the way it featured racism as a concomitant force of modernism, but for how much of the tension between modernity and racism replicated the interaction of Black Americans with white Americans. Just as Harlem's arts scene was a "mass of contradictions," Germany likewise proved to be a place of "simultaneous empowerment and oppression of African Americans; titillation and disgust with sexual experimentation; and liberation and anxiety over the era," according to James F. Wilson.<sup>76</sup> As Scher's story reveals, if Black culture could not be replicated by Germans, Germans could at least slum in Harlem like white Americans. Peter Scher's work brings the thrills of slumming to life for his readership, with Harlem as the prime site of enjoyment and accompanying danger. In crossing the boundaries of propriety, Scher's characters prove their modernity.

Germany, like America, shared in the contradictions of the New Negro Renaissance. Starting with *The Chocolate Kiddies*, Germans' interaction with and understanding of Blackness continued to place American slavery and the colonial subject as an important foundation of knowledge for understanding modern Black America. But importantly, *The Chocolate Kiddies* foregrounded notions of the wider African diaspora that acknowledged the symbolic value of Harlem. As Butting's example suggests, Germans could become part of modernity by recognizing Black people as advantaged by

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<sup>75</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 311.

<sup>76</sup> Wilson. *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies*, 8.

the modern world. As Rundt's article evokes, the expansion of the subway system, the democratization of technology, the spread of skyscrapers, were integral to the experience of modernity among white and Black Americans. Importantly, the contradictions of Black modernism—primitive, yet cosmopolitan—evoked questions that German artists, critics, and Nazi officials debated through the rest of the Interwar period. As we will see, Germans began to use the concept of Blackness to experiment with art, retell their own history, and, importantly, frame German ideals.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### Louis Douglas: A Hybrid Harlequin

Shortly after *The Chocolate Kiddies* arrived in Berlin to become the first Black revue to tour Europe after World War I, another Black tour arrived. *La Revue nègre* premiered at the Champs-Élysées Theatre in Paris on October 2, 1925. Best remembered for launching Josephine Baker from a chorus girl and understudy in *Shuffle Along* to preeminence in Parisian elite culture, *la Revue nègre* introduced the French to Black American performance culture. The image of Josephine Baker flipping over the back of the Martinican dancer, Joe Alex, during the “Danse de Sauvage” remains one of the most reproduced photographs of any transatlantic Black revue. Despite the fact that *The Chocolate Kiddies* toured Europe first, it would be *la Revue nègre* that created the most enduring and powerful images, to this day, of Black performance of interwar Europe.

French reviewers were taken by Josephine Baker. Driven by her erotically charged performance, many reviewers focused on their desire for or disgust with her body, her movement, and her performance. Biographer Phyllis Rose evokes the controversy created by Josephine Baker’s performance:

The opening night of the Revue Nègre was exactly the kind of Event that its backers had hoped it would be. It angered and irritated people just enough to guarantee that it would be considered significant. People agreed it was the sexiest thing they’d ever seen on a stage...only disagreeing—but disagreeing violently—over whether that was good or bad.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra*, 21.

However, when the revue came to Berlin's Rudolf Nelson's Theater am Kurfürstendamm in 1926, the audiences and critics who were familiar with *The Chocolate Kiddies* looked at the show differently from their Parisian peers.<sup>2</sup> Many German intellectuals recognized Black performers as a cosmopolitan vanguard—innovative and worthy of imitation. The surrealist poet and critic Yvan Goll's review of *la Revue nègre* for *der literarische Welt* celebrated the performance as a new force that could challenge ideas of a monolithic German culture.<sup>3</sup> Echoing Li Zielesch's review of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, Goll explained the historic meaning of Black performance for his readers, explicating the difference of Black Americans from Black Africans:

These Negroes come out of the darkest parts of New York. There they were disdained, outlawed... They do not come from the primeval forests at all. We do not want to fool ourselves. But they are a new, unspoiled race. They dance with their blood, with their life, with all their short history: memories of transport in stinking ships, of early slave labor in America, of much misfortune.<sup>4</sup>

The image of this “unspoiled race” from the “darkest parts of New York” provided an ironic reflection on the usual reading of colonization. It was their position as the subjugated people, according to Goll, that distinguishes Black Americans as distinctive

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<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Nelson opened the Nelson Theater in 1917. Nelson had already operated several other cabarets since 1905. He had cultivated over his career an elite and intellectual clientele at his various ventures. The Kurfürstendamm was the new center of fashion and entertainment in Berlin after the war. Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 95-137-138.

<sup>3</sup> Yvan Goll was born in Alsace-Lorraine when it was still part of the German Empire, but after the First World War was effectively a French-German Jew. In a self-description, Goll stated “Iwan Goll hat keine Heimat” (Yvan Goll has no home). Eric Robertson and Robert Viallain considered him “at the forefront of two avant-gardes in two different languages. His high profile within German expressionism did not prevent him from earning the respect of his fellow writers in France.” Eric Robertson and Robert Villain eds. *Yvan Goll-Claire Goll: Texts and Contexts*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Yvan Goll, “The Negroes Are Conquering Europe,” 559.

not only from Africans but from white Americans. Goll saw the Black performers as a yet unknown modern force in America that Germans should envy and embrace. Unlike Zielesch's review, Goll directly challenged the notion of the geographic boundaries of the New Negro Renaissance: "The Negroes are conquering Paris. They are conquering Berlin...And we are not shocked, we are not amazed: on the contrary, the old world calls on its failing strength to applaud them."<sup>5</sup> His response to these "conquering" Black Americans offers a further contrast to other elements of the African Diaspora by invoking the French occupation of the Rhineland. It suggests a knowing nod to his readers to the difference between the Black Americans on the stage and the colonial soldiers. However, this notion of a conquering race becomes a rallying call for an interracial rebirth in which the New Negro Renaissance is an essential ingredient: "the leading role belongs to Negro blood. Its drops are slowly falling over Europe, a since dried-up land that can scarcely breathe."<sup>6</sup>

He concludes with a final inquiry: "The Negro question is pressing for our entire civilization. It runs like this: Do the Negroes need us? Or are we sooner in need of them?"<sup>7</sup> Goll thus challenges the relationship not only between the German spectator and the Black performer but also between the New Negro Renaissance and German conceptions of *Kultur*. What could lead Goll to make such an extraordinary claim for Black rejuvenation during a time of European malaise? Watching *la Revue nègre*, Goll saw one exemplar of the Black modern ideal, but it was not Josephine Baker:

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<sup>5</sup> Yvan Goll, "The Negroes Are Conquering Europe," 559.

<sup>6</sup> Yvan Goll, "The Negroes Are Conquering Europe," 559.

<sup>7</sup> Yvan Goll, "The Negroes Are Conquering Europe," 559.

The leader, director, and principal dancer of the troupe is Louis Douglas, the equal of the perfect Baker. He is the only one who wears a dark black mask, while all the others are nearly light brown. He has a gigantic white mouth. But his feet! They are what inspires the music.<sup>8</sup>

Of all the interwar entertainers of the Black Atlantic, Josephine Baker has become the example par excellence for scholarly explorations of the European obsession with Black bodies. Beyond becoming the erotic and exotic focus of Parisian society, Baker's triumph as a public figure through the interwar period and the Second World War has made her the unerring symbol of modern Black performance in Europe.<sup>9</sup> Yet it was her colleague, Louis Douglas, a generation older than she, who appropriated the black mask and became a revered performer in Germany.

Douglas's career in Germany suggests that he developed a particular type of performative guise on and off stage that appealed to German audiences. As I argue, what made him compelling was his embodiment of the hybrid aspect of the New Negro Renaissance. The hybridity of his performance owed a lot to the traditions of Black performance at the turn of the century. In *Subversive Sounds*, Charles Hersch argues that the birth of jazz was a moment of hybridization—what he calls “creolization”—that “emphasize[d] the continuous quality of interaction between the races, calling into a question the idea of pure culture of any sort.”<sup>10</sup> This same concept of hybridity was

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<sup>8</sup> Yvan Goll, “The Negroes Are Conquering Europe,” 559.

<sup>9</sup> “Although the primal dancer and the Black Venus are closely related images relying on exoticism, they are distinct in Baker's case and have different implications as nested narratives and strategies of representation for her in literature, criticism, photography, and film,” Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Hersch, *Subversive Sounds*, 8.

critical to Douglas's success in Germany. Indeed, while many Germans argued for keeping their culture pure from Black influences, others noted Douglas's value to Germany. Recalling Butting's conviction that a Black-influenced modernity was inevitable, many who disdained the sound of jazz looked to Douglas's body as the model for Black culture. Douglas's dances were seen as innovative and wholly original. In striking contrast to the harsh appraisals of jazz music, the critical response to Douglas's performances was surprisingly uniform in its approval.<sup>11</sup> Where many critics would bemoan the transformation—or the transfiguration—of German music into jazz, like Wooding's "O Katharina," conservative Germans admired Douglas because they did not see his hybrid performance as a wrongful mutation of or threat to established European culture. Instead, audiences and critics alike saw something new in Douglas's performances, something modern and uniquely Black. As we will see in the next chapter, although some critics disliked the *sound* of jazz, they still admired the distinctive movement of Douglas's body. He was, as he would exclaim in his last German film, *Niemandsländ*, an "artiste internationale."

Douglas's successful career in Germany depended on his skill as a dancer. Although he frequently wore blackface during his years in Germany, it was not the mask that many audiences were drawn to, but the expressivity of his body. Douglas's legs and feet, as Goll suggests, motivated the performers in the revue, driving the musicians around him. Although the use of blackface is deeply tied to the history of minstrelsy and

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<sup>11</sup> Frömmling, "Iconographic Representations of Black Americans by the Weimar Left," 136.

the history of slavery, German audiences, and even Douglas's colleagues, recognized his performance not as a continuation of Black American stereotypes but as an adaptation of the European performance tradition of the harlequin from the *commedia dell'arte*. Moreover, he was marked by his unique contribution as a performer to the stages and movie screens of Germany. Thus, Douglas's racial guise was not only his masterful performance, but also how his body spoke for the future possibilities for Black Americans to perform outside of the racist caricatures and stereotypes of the United States.

Douglas's image as a masterful Black performer is especially important in relationship to two of his colleagues: his father-in-law, the composer Will Marion Cook and Josephine Baker. On one end, Cook represents W.E.B. DuBois's turn-of-the-century hope for a class of Black men that would represent the race and reveal the possibilities of Black people beyond the ethos of American rural labor. As a composer, working with Bert Williams and George Walker, Cook was indeed part of a community of DuBois's "talented tenth" that looked to be the "leaders of thought and missionaries of culture" for Black Americans and ambassadors to the larger white American mainstream.<sup>12</sup> Where Cook's career was built upon the creation of Black men as an elite cultural force, Baker navigated a world built on presumptions of Black women's sexuality. Her place in the African Diaspora—and Parisian culture in particular—was built foremost on her continued sexualization by audiences, critics, and directors. Yet it is important to note that Baker used the expectations of artists, producers, and directors to create an ambitious

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<sup>12</sup> DuBois, "The Talented Tenth," in *W.E.B. DuBois: Writings*, 861.

career from a comedic dancer in New York to an erotic dancer in *la Revue nègre* to finally reaching the fashionable heights of Parisian culture. Both Cook and Baker conceived and guided their careers through a daunting web of racist power structures: Cook had been classically trained in Europe but became well-known through the use of Black vernacular, much to the chagrin of his family. Baker managed to become a star and a fashion icon of 1930s France by acceding to the overt sexualization of her body by French producers. Douglas, in effect, represents the meeting of these two conceptions of Black performance and performativity. To Germans, he was at once a master of his art form, the expressivity of his body, and for his audiences, an object of study. Goll and others were convinced that he embodied Black modernity. Though less erotically bound to ideas of the Black body, Douglas's body was still part of a racial-sexual matrix of desire that looked to his performance as a sign of how a Black body should move and look. In keeping with Li Zielesch reading of Margaret Sims's body in *The Chocolate Kiddies*, the German gaze transformed Douglas's into a reservoir of Black experiences, where his body was read as at once representing the past of slave ships and chattel slavery and transcending those harsh realities to present a positive future.

Neither Will Marion Cook nor Josephine Baker were perfect foils for Douglas. Instead, they serve to reveal the differences of age, gender, location, and familial and business connections that informed in the development of Douglas's craft. While Cook was fading from relevancy in the 1920s and Baker flourished within Parisian society,

Douglas thrived contemporaneously on the frontier of Black modernism in Berlin.<sup>13</sup> His career in Germany was not only noted by critics within Germany, like Goll, but was noticed at home in white press outlets like the *New York Times* and the most important Black newspaper in the United States, the *Chicago Defender*. His years abroad affirm Goll's claim for the central significance of Blackness in German culture at the time.

### Up to the Revue

Louis Douglas spent his life tirelessly perfecting the art of a stage entertainer. Born in 1889, he spent his childhood training and performing with his father, a juggler, and his mother, a singer and dancer. The young Douglas quickly learned that a talented Black performer could acquire a level of financial stability that was denied most Black Americans in turn-of-the-century America. His early performances went unrecorded, but he first appeared in print after his family moved across the Atlantic, where Douglas performed as a pickaninny dancer with the *Georgia Picaninnies*[sic] in 1903. Pickaninny performances were Black children performances that, like much in Black culture had origins in minstrelsy, where white children played the role of Topsy in minstrel versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The next year, Douglas joined the troupe of Black mezzo-soprano Belle Davis. Davis had begun her career as a chorus girl in the Chicago revue, *The Creole Show* in 1890, but by 1904, she had begun performing in her own tours across Europe.<sup>14</sup> Black performance scholar Jayna Brown argues that Davis's performances with

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<sup>13</sup> Baker returned to Germany in 1928 for a short run of a new production called *Bitte Einsteigen*, but an attempt to run a full tour ran afoul of Bavarian obscenity laws. Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 172-173.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 15.

pickaninny dancers in the late nineteenth-century evoked “the trope of family.” By projecting on stage the image of the traditional family unit, Davis as the maternal figure with her pickaninny performers as her children provided ““proof” that civilization’s promises—freedom, brotherhood, and equality—had been realized.”<sup>15</sup> Davis’ European performances told of the successful emulation of Euro-American values, even as violent and coercive labor was being imposed on Africans in European colonial empires. For this reason, Brown criticizes these staged performances of ‘happy’ Black laborers for helping to assuage the violence of colonialism and European guilt about coercive labor in other parts of the world. Davis’s success, much like that of other turn-of-the-century performers, hinged upon infusing the logic of white supremacy into her stage craft. These performances were safe in their presentation of race. They did not counter narratives of Black inferiority, but instead represented Black people as capable of uplift in terms that avoided threatening the views of white supremacists.

Davis was extremely popular and her troupe toured throughout England, Europe, and Russia. On Douglas’s first trip with Davis to Germany (Hanover and Berlin) in 1906, Davis and her young protégés were filmed by Pathé. “Die schöne Davis mit ihren drei Negerin” (The Beautiful Davis with her Three Negroes) was available in public exhibition, most likely a part of a program of multiple short films in 1907 and 1911. Although the footage has since been lost, the creation of the film and its exhibitions suggests that Pathé believed that audiences in Germany would be interested in viewing Black dance. After a tour of Russia with Davis in 1908, Douglas struck out to produce his

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<sup>15</sup> Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 35-36.

own variety shows and tours. At the age of 19, he could no longer pass as a pickaninny [Image 4.1].

Douglas's time in England was one of extraordinary development of his performance repertoire. From April 1916 through February 1917, Douglas appeared in the revue *Pick-a-Dilly* at the London Pavilion. Written by C.H. Bovill, a frequent collaborator with P.G. Wodehouse, the revue included a new dance invented by Douglas called the "Hitch Kick," which newspapers were quick to note, was impossible for the British actors to emulate.<sup>16</sup> Yet what was stunning about the revue was not the other actors' inability to perform Douglas's steps but his inclusion in a racialized version of the harlequinade. Based in the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, the harlequinade is an improvised performance built around stock characters employing masks, pantomime, dance, and acrobatics. The narrative follows the relationship between the trickster Harlequin, his peasant love Columbine, and his rival, either the white-masked Pierrot or the elderly fool, Pantaloon. Through guile and wit, Harlequin always upstages Pierrot/Pantaloon and wins the love of Columbine. Actors became famous for their career-long portrayal of the same role.<sup>17</sup> Though the *commedia* was improvised, it followed a format that audiences had already grown accustomed to, with a focus typically on elements of romance: love, sex, and jealousy.

Douglas's performance was built upon the harlequinade structure. The *Dancing Times* described the show vividly.

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<sup>16</sup> This suggests that audiences in England, like future German audiences admired his talent while also noting his difference from the skills of British actors.

<sup>17</sup> Green and Swan, *Triumph of Pierrot*, 3-4.

The ‘Quite A Tragedy’ dance is a clever idea. [Alex] Goudin as a pierrot is ‘Quite A Classic’, both in dress and dance; Lewis Douglas as golliwog is ‘Quite A Rag’, also both in costume and dance; and [Andree] Dhery ‘Neither Quite’, for sometimes she makes love to the golly and ‘rags’ to the disgust of her other admirer, the pierrot, with whom she is most operatic in her steps. For the sake of art the classic must win, and so poor golly is stabbed in the back—not fatally however, for he ‘rags’ off the stage. A capital little trifle, well conceived and carried out.

The description of Douglas as a ragging golliwog is striking. The golliwog—a black-skinned doll with thick red lips and an afro—first appeared in the children’s book *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls* by the American Florence Upton and her English mother, Bertha in London 1895. The story follows two wooden dolls, Peggy Deutschland and Sarah Jane, as they seek to escape the confines of a toy store. The two, in their quest to escape, encounter other toys, including the “horrid sight, the darkest gnome,” the golliwog. While the two Dutch Dolls enjoy their freedom, the golliwog by contrast experiences “captivity and victimization.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, the golliwog proved to be a popular character and was featured in more stories by the Uptons, as well as other popular literature, postcards, and music. Starting in 1910, the golliwog appeared as the trademark of the James Robertson & Sons and its jam products, leading the image to spread across the British Empire.<sup>19</sup> Although it is unclear from the *Dancing Times* review if Douglas was actively performing the harlequin as the golliwog or if the reporter related Douglas to this popular story, either case suggests that Douglas’s performance was built around a popular representation of racial difference in the 1910s. Indeed, the *Dancing Times* writer

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<sup>18</sup> Tanya Sheehan and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Popular Imagery in the United States and Europe,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Tanya Sheehan and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Popular Imagery in the United States and Europe,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 28.

is delighted by the inclusion of the Douglas's golliwog within the harlequinade. The emphasis on Columbine's enjoyment of the rag dance and Pierrot's disgust builds upon two racialized notions: the torment of the golliwog and the suggestion of interracial desire. Yet the desire of Columbine that is the basis of the harlequinade suggests that Douglas's novelty was more than a performance on the stage but an enactment of the unconventionality of placing a Black man as the primary rival of Pierrot.

Further, the "clever idea" of Douglas continuing his dance after his wounding provides a clue to his golliwog role. Just as the story featured the torment of the Black figure, Douglas's continuous dance suggests that like the golliwog, he can suffer injury and keep "playing." Moreover, his ability to keep dancing becomes a form of resistance to death, conferring a strange afterlife in which his unstoppable dance supposedly outlives the dancer himself. Although a departure from the Uptons' original story, Douglas's golliwog harlequin derives from two popular forms in contemporary England. On one end, the harlequin trickster is the preferred lover of Columbine, causing a great deal of emotional turmoil for Pierrot. But on the other end, the golliwog suffers from the same activities that the Dutch dolls enjoy. As such, the combined figure, the golliwog harlequin, is caught between an existence built on experiencing love and joy at the expense of the white character, Pierrot, *even* as he suffers for that same enjoyment. Further, the traditional colors of Pierrot and Harlequin suggest a further contrast, as Pierrot wears a white costume and white face paint in contrast to the multicolored Harlequin.

Douglas's time in England was notable for Black Americans as well. Norris Smith for *The Chicago Defender* reported to Black America that Douglas's skill was extraordinary:

Douglas who hails from Philadelphia, has been in England since 1909...He left her and went for his own, toured all the continent and Eu-[sic] went into the Empire ballet. From there he went to the London Pavilion, the engagement being for one month but he stayed there for four years. I do hope that some day you will have the pleasure of meeting him for he is some more[sic] boy.<sup>20</sup>

The timing of Douglas's appearance as a harlequin is telling. By the end of the nineteenth century, British modernists recognized the commedia's potential to become a less sentimental and slapstick theater form. The British theater practitioner, Edward Gordon Craig, was key in revitalizing the commedia into a modernist stage form. His revival of the form was noticeable for its use of masks. Theater scholar James Fisher suggests that the mask helped Craig "eliminate unnecessary details and useless information that might obscure the effectiveness of a specifically chosen moment."<sup>21</sup> Following commedia's resurgence, both George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1899) and J.M. Barrie's *Pantaloone* (1905) were infused with pantomime and masks based on the commedia.<sup>22</sup> Like blackface minstrel shows or plant plays, commedia relied on mastery of expression as well as the use of masks, recognizable stock characters, improvisation, and dance to not only tell familiar stories but also upend and subvert them.

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<sup>20</sup> Norris Smith, "Dear Old Lunnon, Norris Smith, Defender European Theatrical Scribe, Sends Real Dope" *The Chicago Defender*, Jan 3, 1920, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Fisher, "Harlequinade: Commedia dell'Arte on the Early Twentieth-Century Stage,"

<sup>22</sup> Fisher, "Harlequinade: Commedia dell'Arte on the Early Twentieth-Century Stage,"

The harlequinade with its focus on trickery—and, indeed, its play on the Harlequin’s black mask with Pierrot’s white mask—would have reminded Douglas of Black American dance traditions, his time as a pickaninny, and the larger structures of Black performance founded in the minstrelsy. His ability to navigate European forms and make them his own shows both Douglas’s versatility as a performer and how his European experiences helped him to create new Black forms of performance. Douglas’s alteration of blackface represents a concern that many within the New Negro Renaissance held for the stage. In his 1937 autobiography, *A Long Way From Home*, Claude McKay turned “Negro comedy” on its head:

[Black nationalists, socialists, and communists] were against the trifling, ridiculous, and common side of Negro life presented in artistic form. Radical Negroes take this attitude because Negroes have traditionally been represented on the stage as a clowning race. But I felt that if Negroes can lift clowning to an artistry, they can thumb their noses at superior people who rate them as a clowning race.<sup>23</sup>

Douglas then, represents the transformation of the minstrel—or golliwog—into the kind of artistry that McKay hoped would enliven Black culture. While his black mask might label him a continuation of a pickaninny tradition in the guise of blackface, Douglas’ combining of the familiar American minstrel tradition with the British harlequinade actually produced something altogether new, which European audiences understood.

Douglas’ hybridized harlequinade represented an artist steeped in multiple forms of modern performance, and audiences understood the “clown” with the painted face on stage as more than a minstrel figure. The performance of the harlequinade he developed

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<sup>23</sup> McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 112.

in England was built upon his own knowledge of what drew audiences to Black American performances. Where the performances based around the minstrel were built upon racist assumptions, taking the performance traditions of the harlequin allowed Douglas to continue within a familiar usage of masks and trickery, while turning to a new script, one that did not demean Black people. In so doing, he took the familiar image of Black performers following the tastes of white audiences from the jovial plant plays and turned it into a modern performance of the stage. McKay's hope for Black Americans to propagandize for themselves can be seen in Douglas's hybridization of commedia as a way of propagating the adaptability of Black people to modern performance culture.

### *Connections*

Besides his major alteration to the minstrel tradition, the most transformative change in Douglas's life would come not out of European performance traditions but from his marriage, at the conclusion of the war. On August 15, 1919, at the age of 30, Douglas married Marion Cook and became a part of one of the most preeminent and elite Black theatrical artist families in the transatlantic world. A year after their marriage, on May 21, 1920, Marion Cook gave birth to their daughter, Abbie Louise Douglas.<sup>24</sup> Although Douglas was already an accomplished stage performer, Marion's parents, Will Marion Cook and Abbie Mitchell, had distinguished careers in Black theater and connections that stretched across the Atlantic.

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<sup>24</sup> Abbie Louise Douglas has used the names Marion Douglas and stage name Maranantha Quick. For reasons of clarity, I will use "Abbie Douglas."

Will Marion Cook was born in 1869 to John Cartwell Cook and Isabel. His father was dean of Howard University's School of Law. Cook studied music at Oberlin Conservatory and travelled to the Berlin Hochschule für Musik to continue his study of the violin with financial support from Frederick Douglass. From 1887 through 1889, he studied with the school's founder, Joseph Joachim. Returning to the United States, he continued his training with Antonin Dvořák at the National Conservatory. By the mid 1890s, he had moved to New York and become a part of what Louis Chude-Sokei called the "proto-Renaissance," a movement that "was primarily founded on the desire to transcend the minstrel tradition of representation not by rejecting it but by engaging it." Prominent members of this movement included George Walker, Bert Williams, and Paul Laurence Dunbar.<sup>25</sup> They took their work seriously as symbolized by the fact that they referred to their group as the Frogs after the play by Aristophanes.

In 1898, Cook wrote the musical sketch comedy, *Clorindy, or The Origin of the Cake Walk*, the first Broadway musical with an all-black cast. With a libretto by Dunbar, it premiered on the rooftop garden at the Casino Theater on Broadway. The production's lyrics famously claimed ownership of Black theatrical space: "White folks yo/Got no sho'!/Dis huh's Dartktown Night." *Clorindy's* 1903 follow up, *In Dahomey*, solidified Cook as one of the preeminent Black composers at the turn of the century. *In Dahomey* became the first full-length musical written and starring Black performers, including Cook's friends and colleagues Williams and Walker.<sup>26</sup> Based on contemporary

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<sup>25</sup> Chude-Sokei, *The Last Ducky*, 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant*, 63, 268.

understandings of West Africa, including knowledge from the living village of Dahomeans at the Chicago's World Fair, *In Dahomey* told the story of two conmen attempting to colonize Dahomey with money that had fortuitously fallen into their possession. Despite the overtones of racism toward Africans, the stars found the escape from minstrel tropes—and recognition of connections across the Atlantic—liberating. The production travelled to London over the summer, with a command performance at Buckingham Palace for the ninth birthday of Edward VIII, the Prince of Wales. These productions were part of an early shift in Black American stage productions, the first major Black performance to moving onto Broadway and into the American mainstream.

While casting *Clorindy*, Cook met 14-year-old Abbie Mitchell and took her on as his protégé. Born to a Black American mother and a German-Jewish father, Mitchell was raised by her Aunt Josephine following the death of her parents and maternal grandmother during her adolescence. She was an informally-trained soprano and child prodigy when she met Cook. After performing in the premier of *Clorindy*, Mitchell played the principal role in *In Dahomey*'s London premier. The two quickly became romantically involved. They married in 1899 and Mitchell gave birth to Marion Abigail Cook on March 22, 1900. Cook was 31 and Mitchell 16, barely half his age. His family opposed their relationship, objecting to her lack of formal education. For an elite family that prided themselves on their status, Mitchell was a disappointing, inferior match for their son.<sup>27</sup> After their marriage, Mitchell appeared in Cook's production *Jes' Lak White*

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<sup>27</sup> Carter, *Swing Along*, 47-53.

*Folks* and joined Bert Williams and George and Aida Walker in a 1903 performance of *In Dahomey*.

Throughout Will Cook's life, he suffered from bouts of anger and depression. He became emotionally and physically abusive toward Mitchell, resulting in their divorce in 1908.<sup>28</sup> Despite continued legal conflicts, the two continued to work with each other through 1911. Mitchell became a rising star of the New York theater, and she was featured in many of Cook's musicals and also performed independently in operettas. Most importantly, she would originate the role of Clara in the premier of *Porgy and Bess*, becoming the first person to perform "Summertime."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as Black arts grew in the 1920s, Mitchell's success continued along with it, while her volatile ex-husband Cook isolated himself from the Harlem scene.<sup>30</sup> As a new generation came of age, they surpassed him and he came to disdain the New Negro Renaissance.

By 1919, Will Cook was leading the Southern Syncopated Orchestra—the remnants of the jazz orchestra of James Reese Europe and the Harlem Hellfighters—on a tour of England. His daughter, Marion, accompanied him, and it was there that she would meet and marry Louis Douglas. Compared to the world of his wife and her father, Douglas's upbringing would appear to be just as unacceptable to the classical training of

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<sup>28</sup> Carter, *Swing Along*, 114.

<sup>29</sup> Nettles, *African American Concert Singers*, 120.

<sup>30</sup> In 1966, Ruby Dee wrote reflected on the lives of Black women performers in the wake of the death of Dorothy Dandridge, "I wondered where she had been trained. There was something about her personality—distinctly royal, profoundly human. She might have played any role from a queen to a peasant, representing any race or country... I felt fortunate that our lives had touches... Inspired by Abbie Mitchell, I began to read books about and by Negro Performers. Ruby Dee "The Tattered Queens: Some Reflections on the Negro Actress" *Negro Digest* April 1966, 33-34.

his successful father-in-law as Mitchell's had been to Cook's parents. Yet the elder Cook and Douglas worked with several of the same artists. In March 1924, Douglas would have one of his first documented returns to the United States to perform in *Negro Nuances: Episodes in the Musical Life of the Negro (The Soul of a Race told in Music, Drama and Dance)*. The show was produced and composed by Cook and based on a book by Abbie Mitchell. It would bring Sidney Bechet, a member of James Reese Europe and Cook's orchestra, in contact with Douglas for the second time after Will Cook's English tour of 1919.

*Negro Nuances* is an important, though short-lived, performance of the New Negro Renaissance. Cook's desire to stage the geographic movement of Black people to America and to infuse moments with the significance of the Africa diaspora suggests that he wanted to more than entertain audiences. He wanted to educate them. Its pedagogic value in telling of Black movement from Africa and America through song and dance would take audiences through the history of Black performance. In addition, it brought Black performance out of blackface minstrelsy, into the unique culture of the Renaissance.

*Negro Nuances* was one of the first musicals to enact the movement play. A predecessor to *The Chocolate Kiddies*, the play's narrative moved from East to West. Divided into four acts, or "nuances," the music and staging narrated the changes that Black people faced through the 400-year history of the United States. The first nuance takes place in the African jungle. An interlude, "The Ghost Ship," tells the story of a slave ship carrying thousands of Africans, where the slaves mutiny and "every soul on

board perished.” Cook’s notes for the production state that the ship now haunts the Atlantic, causing the destruction of any ship that sees it. The second nuance was a short plantation scene with songs by Jean Toomer, which Cook sternly states “must only be sorrow songs.” The next interlude takes place during the Civil War with Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and colored soldiers. The songs, Cook notes are to be “based on the type of music that immediately precedes and follows 1860.” In addition, he states the scene should include “a man dressed in old-fashioned minstrel clothes who can play banjo, sing, and dance.” After the Civil War scene came Cook’s already well known *Clorindy*. The final nuance, “New Orleans or the Land of Jazz” is set in New Orleans, yet as the performance scholar John Howland notes, it “is trumped by an overriding emphasis on modern Harlem through the episode’s big finale.”<sup>31</sup> As such, the production insinuates that Harlem is the culmination of the long journey in the creation of Black American culture. In naming his work *Negro Nuances*, Cook looked to tell the unique experiences of the African diaspora in the United States. Using a pastiche of scenes connected by theme instead of plot, *Negro Nuances* suggested that the modern Black world was created through the experiences of slavery. For both Mitchell and Cook then, the play’s movements importantly told a story far removed from ideas of minstrelsy. Instead, their production placed Black Americans at important points in American history, a history which is in turn appropriately centered on Black Americans. Thus by the conclusion of the musical, jazz has not only been established as a distinctive part of American history,

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<sup>31</sup> Howland, *Ellington Uptown*, 115-116

but also has succeeded in recuperating for these audiences the crucial place of Black Americans within that history.

Writing in the *Chicago Defender*, Cook spoke excitedly about the production. *Negro Nuances*. He argued would be “the soul of a Race, told in song and dance. This production will be a very gorgeous one. Every member of the cast and chorus is picked not only for their beauty, but talent.” He did not want his production to simply be a series of dance numbers; he wanted every member of his cast, including the chorus girls to act. “Each member of my company will in voice, face and body tell the story of the dialogue, the song and the dance,” he asserted.

He was especially excited about getting to the last scene, which would feature the music of Sidney Bechet: “The last nuance of my piece, ‘The Land of Jazz,’ will be a riot of color, rhythm, and beauty.” Cook had hoped after the success of *Negro Nuances* he would produce a “grand opera in Paris.” However, *Negro Nuances* never went into full production. It would take another year before Will Cook, Sidney Bechet, Louis Douglas and Marion Cook would all work together again over another contentious production in Paris, *la Revue nègre*.

### **Enter Baker**

As discussed in the previous chapter, *Shuffle Along*'s success encouraged producers to back similar productions, opening the doors for full Black musical productions during the 1920s.<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising then, that the already famous stars of

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<sup>32</sup> Glass, *African American Dance*, 179.

the show, Paul Robeson and Florence Mills, would go on to become the biggest names of the interwar Black American theater. Yet the show remains in popular memory for the young woman at the end of the chorus line, Josephine Baker.

When Baker auditioned for *Shuffle Along*—produced by Cook’s protégés Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake—she was not only too young but also too dark by the producers’ standards. Most Black stage performances relied on light-skinned Black women because they were viewed as more beautiful than darker-skinned women.<sup>33</sup> Through constantly pressuring the producers and through sheer force of will, Baker managed to break through the colorism of her era when she convinced Sissle and Blake to allow her into a production renowned for its light-skinned chorus girls. Despite being relegated to the chorus line, she used her time on stage to develop comedic movements, in contrast to the perfect rhythmic timing and regimentation of the other chorus girls. A sneaky violation of her assigned role, Baker’s revisions drew attention from the line of regimented dancers. In effect, they turned her minor role into a major one. She was soon part of the show’s national tour, subsequently joining the next Sissle and Blake production, *Chocolate Dandies*, in 1924.<sup>34</sup> She then went on to dance at the Plantation Club.<sup>35</sup> Like many Black venues that catered to exclusively white audiences, such as the Cotton Club, the setting and name evoked the antebellum South, and the obvious politics of that ambiance was

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<sup>33</sup> This continues to be an issue in film, that lighter-skinned Black actresses appear to be hired for more major roles than dark-skinned actresses.

<sup>34</sup> Wooding in his account of *The Chocolate Kiddies* stated that originally their revue was to be called *The Chocolate Dandies* but as they did not want to be confused with the Blake and Sissle production, changed their name.

<sup>35</sup> Haney, *Naked at the Feast*, 41.

amplified by the audience of white patrons transfixed by the Black bodies on stage. It was at the Plantation that Caroline Dudley Reagan, a young American expatriate returning from France, “discovered” Josephine Baker.<sup>36</sup>

Caroline Dudley Reagan, wife of foreign service officer Daniel Joseph Reagan, had grown tired of the routine of expatriate life in Paris. Recalling the Black performances she had seen in America with her husband before their move abroad, she began to think about bringing a Black revue like *Shuffle Along* to France.<sup>37</sup> With financial support from Rolf de Mare and Andre Daven, she returned to the United States with the promise of bringing an authentic Black show to France. Daven was the producer of the Champs-Élysées Theatre in Paris; De Maré—the creator of the Swedish dance ensemble *Ballet suédois*—had previously brought Black performers to the Champs-Élysées Theatre, including Paul Robeson and Will Marion Cook.<sup>38</sup> Dudley Reagan hired Cook to compose the revue, and he in turn recommended his son-in-law Douglas as an expert on Black performance in Europe to help guide and choreograph the production.<sup>39</sup> John Dos Passos, the writer and painter, was engaged for set design.

Despite the involvement of Black veteran performers in the preparation of the show, the production quickly devolved into a mess. It was not simply the usual conflicts between Black performers and their white producers, which were familiar to all of these veterans of Broadway and Harlem productions. The tensions here were even more

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<sup>36</sup> Baker, *Hungry Heart*, 82-83.

<sup>37</sup> Baker, *Hungry Heart*, 90.

<sup>38</sup> Haney, *Naked at the Feast*, 44

<sup>39</sup> Baker, *Hungry Heart*, 90-92.

extreme, as when, for example, Will Marion Cook and Louis Douglas fought over the inclusion of Josephine Baker, although it is unclear who argued for or against her inclusion. It is clear, however, that Dudley Reagan wanted both Douglas and Baker in the show and thus the conflict most likely pitted Cook against Dudley Reagan, Baker, and his son-in-law. Cook's infamous combativeness led to an argument with Dudley Reagan over the overall presentation of the production material. Although the details of the arguments remain obscure, Cook dropped out as the composer of the music and pianist Claude Hopkins took his place. Douglas and Sidney Bechet remained attached to the show. Dudley Reagan disliked Passos's designs of the south, describing one as "a street in the south with houses of all colors," and asked Mexican painter Miguel Covarrubias to become the set designer instead.<sup>40</sup> Without his father-in-law, Douglas had difficulty directing over two dozen dancers for the first time. Dudley Reagan was also an inexperienced producer. Some songs were not even written until the troupe was crossing the Atlantic, and the whole show coalesced into its final form mere days before the premier in Paris.

Daven and de Mare, anxious to have a successful season, called upon Jacque Charles, the producer and choreographer of the Moulin Rouge, to fix the show once they realized the production was in disarray. Showing their racial prejudices, they especially objected to the large choreographed dances, which Daven, de Mare, and Charles did not believe were a natural part of Black performance. Although Dudley Reagan thought that

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<sup>40</sup> Baker, *Hungry Heart*, 94. Dudley Reagan's unhappiness with the scene can only be speculated upon. It is perhaps the choice to show a colorful southern townscape instead of a much more stereotypical plantation that led to removing Passos from the production.

the chorus line and the *Shuffle Along*-style production would be a hit, Daven warned, “They keep tap dancing, tap dancing, tap dancing. The show is a bore. The reviewers will pan it.”<sup>41</sup> To the French producers, precision dancing was for German and English chorus lines and could not represent the current state of Black performance. Biographer Phyllis Rose argues that the producers saw the high kicks as “a misguided effort to put on airs for the French, and the effect was merely pretentious.”<sup>42</sup> Relying on French assumptions about Black people, Jacque Charles turned the show into a racially exploitative production. He suggested “We need tits. These French people, with their fantasies of black girls, we must give them *des nichons*”<sup>43</sup> Audiences, he argued, were less interested in the idea of Black America than they were in the sexual nature of Africans. Indeed, for many in France, Petrine Archer-Shaw argues, “The allure of black culture was that it stood for a spiritual wholeness that had been obscured in an increasingly ‘civilized’ and mechanized environment by layers of material development.”<sup>44</sup> According to Jean-Claude Baker, “The public would, by and large, have preferred the cast to be *more* black, resembling Africans right off the boat.”<sup>45</sup> The show, and especially Baker, was prized for the possibilities of sexual liberation that only a Black woman could teach. For some, dressing her in the finest clothes of Parisian couture was an opportunity for a walking advertisement.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Haney, *Naked at the Feast*, 56.

<sup>42</sup> Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra*, 5-6.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Baker, *Hungry Heart*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Baker, *The Hungry Heart*, 116. Emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> Haney, *Naked at the Feast*, 70.

*La Revue nègre* erased Black Americans' claims of modernity and attempted an erotic enslavement of its performers, especially Baker. Indeed, if *Shuffle Along*, the progenitor of New Negro dramaturgy, created a story centered on Black dignity, romantic love, and modern dance steps, *la Revue nègre* transformed the presentation of modern Black affect for the re-presentation of a white European narrative and gaze based on the assumption of the Black erotic. The narratives taken up in Black American musical performances like *Shuffle Along*, *Negro Nuances*, and *Chocolate Kiddies* attempted to value Black forms of kinship, family, and performance. Baker's dark skin, which had been a source of shame growing up and a hindrance performing as an adult, helped cement French interest in her body. Whereas *Shuffle Along* had made an exception for her dark skin, Jacques Charles chose to elevate Baker as a consequence of her dark skin. He gave the original star of the show, the light-skinned Maud de Forest, a lesser role when he added additional scenes. To match the other dancers to Baker's complexion, he had them wear skin-darkening makeup. The push for a literal blackness to match Baker's complexion led to the imposition of blackface on the lighter-skinned members of the revue. This darkening of the dancers' skin inscribed the image of the African primitive. No longer seen for the traditions of Black American performers, the production forcefully suggested the only proper place for Black people was Africa.

When *la Revue nègre* premiered, the coherent movement play narrative that had been a hallmark of Black performances since *Shuffle Along* was subsumed into a production to fit within French ideas of Black people. Unlike *The Chocolate Kiddies*, *la Revue nègre* did not take audiences through the contours of the Black American

experience or explore Black conceptions of the modern through the replication of the Great Migration. Instead, the production reverted Black Americans to the racist ideal of the African primitive. The vestiges of the original concept of the production can be gleaned from the first acts (*tableaus*) of the revue. *La Revue nègre* began with “Mississippi Steam Boat Race” highlighting the revue’s dance troupe, followed by the “Charleston Steppers” and “A Jazz Charleston Drill” with Louis Douglas [Image 4.2]. The first tableau also featured solo songs by Marion Cook, Josephine Baker, and Maud de Forest. The second tableau “New York Skyscraper” featured a single act: a harlequinade performed by Louis Douglas and Marion Cook as the “*Jazz Arlequin*” and “*Jazz Colombine*” respectively. During “New York Skyscraper” Douglas would wear black makeup, leaving a white circle around his lips and eyes, evoking the minstrel tropes with which audiences would have already been familiar. The designation of Harlequin and Colombine adjusted audiences to see the performance as a hybrid form with elements of the commedia. Although the plot of the tableau is not known, Douglas and Cook in the New York setting was the only scene that suggested Black cosmopolitanism. The distance and difference between minstrelsy/plantation and the harlequin/cityscape suggest that Douglas and Cook’s performance was meant to be read against the Southern Black past performed earlier in the production.

Yet the northern movement is disrupted as the performance goes back south for the third tableau, “Louisiana Camp Meeting.” Returned to the south, Maud de Forest performed the ring shout “Same Train.” This was followed by three dance numbers by Douglas: “Bootleggers’ Quartette,” “A lovers’ Quarel[sic],” and “Eccentric Dance.”

After the third tableau, “Les Strutting Babies” focused on the dancing of the Charleston Steppers, and Josephine Baker and Louis Douglas were given their own tableaux, “Darkey Impressions” and “Les pieds qui parlent” (Speaking Feet) respectively.

The final tableau, “Charleston Cabaret,” featured the final dance and song numbers, including the penultimate performance of the revue, “Danse de Sauvage” by Josephine Baker and Joe Alex. The dance began with Alex carrying Baker upside down on his back on to the stage. The dance, unlike the rest of the revue, was improvised every night. The audience’s response to Baker’s dance varied from exhilarating joy to disgust at the obscene performance on the stage. Some left, while others applauded the performance. The responses was exactly what Jacque Charles desired; he had turned a blasé chorus line-based performance into an exploitative celebration of perceived Black erotics. The show was likewise seen as the most controversial performance in Paris since Igor Stravinsky’s *le Sacre du printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*), which had also premiered at *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* in 1913.<sup>47</sup>

The involvement of Dudley Reagan and the French producers led to a reliance on the Southern plantation setting. The reorientation of the material from the precision kicks of the chorus line to conceiving Black Americans as primitive catered explicitly to French desires for the African. Instead of a celebration of Black modernity that had been the hallmarks of *Shuffle Along*, *Negro Nuances*, and *The Chocolate Kiddies*, the finale made the jungle the scene of Black people returning to a primitive life. In effect, it

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<sup>47</sup> Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra*, 9.

brought back white dominance at a time when Black narratives were fighting against these racist discourses.

*La Revue nègre* obstructed the development of staging Black progress that began with *Shuffle Along*. It diverged from the progress espoused in the movement plays; the production spoke less to a synchronous chronological and geographical advancement for Black people, and more to essentialist notions of racial inheritance. The sort of large-scale choreographed dances that had become the popular hallmark of Black entertainment like *Shuffle Along* were excised from *la Revue nègre*. Instead, the show highlighted the alleged instinctual dancing that Black people were believed to engage in. By making Baker's performance of the primitive the center of the production, it encouraged audiences to engage in fantasies about Baker's body and sexuality. By placing "Danse de Sauvage" in the Charleston Cabaret, the production collapsed notions of the savage with the urban, much as the Harlem segregated clubs, the Plantation and the Cotton Club, had done.<sup>48</sup> Recalling Goll's ironic placement of Black people in "the darkest parts of New York" suggests that despite his welcoming of conquering Black performers, he saw the performance as employing the urban cabaret setting as a reflection of the dark African "primeval forests."

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<sup>48</sup> Lynn Haney's biography, *Naked at the Feast*, is filled with the same racialized erotics as the reviews of the time, "Her skin glowed as if it had a lamp beneath it. Her breasts were small and round, like two apples. Her derriere was firm and smooth, cantilevered to an exaggerated degree...Josephine wore her nakedness with the confidence of a panther in her pelt. She slid into and out of Alex's arms, oily as serpent's skin. Her legs moved in response to his sensuous gestures. Her fingers caressed him. Her emotions seemed beyond her control. She did not appear to be acting. Rather, she seemed like a young animal suddenly let loose." Haney, *Naked at the Feast*, 60.

Baker's success in the show contrasts with Douglas's performances, especially his harlequinade in "New York Skyscraper." Whereas Baker's performance incorporated the primitive within the cabaret, Douglas's performance integrated tap dance with the commedia. Indeed, Baker was following the same trajectory and similar techniques when Douglas first arrived in Europe at the turn-of-the-century, playing on popular tastes and ideas of Black people. And yet, Douglas had moved on, turning his wounded golliwog Harlequin from *Pick-A-Dilly* into a successful romance with his wife as Columbine. Where Baker is costumed as the primitive through her lack of clothing, Douglas is fully clothed as the "Jazz Arlequin." Further evidence of Douglas's hybrid performance appears in available photos from *la Revue nègre* where his makeup recalls not the minstrel black mask, but the diamond eyes of the harlequin's mask. In addition, as he sits across from Baker in the photo he carries a large stick across his lap, the slapstick that started in the commedia tradition [Image 4.3].<sup>49</sup>

The use of the harlequin is a further disruption of not only the African represented by Baker but also the familiar performance of the minstrel. Recalling how the pickaninny performance reinscribed Victorian family values, the harlequinade represents "quite different values from young father, mother, and child who shine through the Victorian novel as the ideal human group."<sup>50</sup> Indeed as Harlequin is the hidden lover who cuckolds the husband, the typical harlequinade represents the unfulfillable future we plan for

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<sup>49</sup> Martin Green and John Swan discuss the typical costume for Harlequin, who "wears tights, designed in contrasting diamonds of color, often spangled, and carries a stick." Green and Swan, *Triumph of Pierrot*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Green and Swan, *Triumph of Pierrot*, 10.

ourselves. In this way, theater scholars Martin Green and John Swan argue, the figures of the harlequinade “do not belong in the same part of our mind as our plans for our own future... These figures preside over that part of our experience and our selves which does not make any sense—the part we laugh at or fear.”<sup>51</sup> It is thus that Douglas’s harlequin disrupts not only the Victorian values that had prescribed over the pickaninny performances of his youth but also the colonial fantasy in the Champs-Élysées Theatre in 1925.

Although the French were either excited or disgusted by the *la Revue nègre*, Black Americans who saw the show were generally disappointed. Eslanda “Essie” Robeson, Paul Robeson’s wife, wrote to Carl Van Vechten stating,

I hate to run down our own stuff, but the only good thing is Larry [Louis] Douglass[sic]. . . . The American scene is splendid and all fine until Josephine does this ridiculous, vulgar, and totally uncalled for wiggling. . . . They [Parisians] are crazy about it. . . . They seem to adore the music and the color and the crudity of it all.<sup>52</sup>

The difference that Essie Robinson noted between Douglas and Baker speaks to how Douglas’s use of the mask was not seen as a continuation of the minstrel tradition. Indeed, the ways that Robinson saw Baker as vulgar in her movements suggests that Douglas’s performance was, in her eyes, a much more representative performance of Black performers in the 1920s. Even Ottomar Starke’s comment that he saw Douglas as a clown can be read not as seeing him as a minstrel in blackface, but instead within the history of the commedia, where the harlequin was a status quo-breaking clown.

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<sup>51</sup> Green and Swan, *Triumph of Pierrot*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Boyle and Bunie, *Paul Robeson: The Years of Promise and Achievement*, 187.

Douglas's hybridized harlequin was in keeping with its growth beyond the commedia. As Marvin Carlson notes, the harlequin "carr[ied] out his subversive antics within almost every sort of traditionally recycled dramatic material," including classical mythology, popular legend, and "especially in England, within the highly popular domain of fairy and folk material." Recalling the concept of the haunted performance, Carlson suggests the harlequin was a "clear example of a recycled character who has broken free of the cluster of relationships and narrative frameworks that originally accompanied him and can move freely through an almost infinite variety of other relationships and narratives."<sup>53</sup>

Unbeknownst to Essie, Van Vechten had been one of the earliest supporters of Caroline Dudley Reagan. Like Jacque Charles, he had suggested the Black revue should be infused with ideas of the primitive. The same month that *la Revue nègre* premiered, Van Vechten had written for *Vogue* magazine, "Prescription for the Negro Theatre: Being a Few Reasons Why the Great Colored Show Has Not Yet Been Achieved." In it, he argued that Black theater had not yet found its voice. Instead, Black produced theater was filled with relics of minstrelsy. According to art scholar Iris Schmeisser, Van Vechten's "prescription" was to return Black performers to their primitivist roots and thus reveal the *real* power of Black theater. To be sure, Van Vechten was not wrong in seeing shows infused with elements of minstrelsy. However, despite his suggestion that Black theater should be completely divorced from the misrepresentation that minstrelsy reflected, he

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<sup>53</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 48

likewise insisted that Black theater should look to Africa. Schmeisser suggests that Van Vechten, as a confidant of Dudley Reagan, had actively sought for *la Revue nègre* to enact his vision of Black theater.<sup>54</sup> If Schmeisser is correct that Van Vechten played a hand in the production of the show—and there is ample evidence above that that is not the case—then it is worth considering Van Vechten’s hypocrisy in asking for an authentic performance in a show executed by French producers and presented for French audiences. Essie Robinson’s response is indicative of how Baker’s performance of the primitive could at once be praised by white audiences for its purported authenticity and likewise disliked by Black Americans for its continued reliance on Black primitivism.

Will Cook, who eventually saw the show he abandoned, felt similarly to Essie Robeson: he hated it. He did not take Baker to be the issue with the show, but instead blamed Dudley Reagan’s lack of knowledge about Black culture. Cook also hated other popular shows developed during the 1920s, including *The Chocolate Kiddies* and *Shuffle Along*, the latter created by his protégés Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle. To him, the shows of the 1920s represented a betrayal of Black culture. Having left *la Revue nègre* to his son-in-law and Dudley Reagan, he was at least partially responsible for how the show turned out. His response to the show, “this Paris abortion,” is indicative of how Cook viewed not only Dudley Reagan’s production but also the younger generation of performers.<sup>55</sup> Yet it is unclear what Cook would have preferred. Many in the New Negro

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<sup>54</sup> Schmeisser, *Transatlantic Crossings Between Paris and New York*, 169.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra*, 79-80.

Renaissance questioned his own productions relied on the same vernacular of Bert Williams and Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Despite the racist animality in the description of the revue and of Baker's body, Baker connected the experience of performing in Paris to the ethos of the New Negro Renaissance. When asked about her favorite part of the show, Baker replied, "Last night after the show was over, the theater was turned into a big restaurant. . . . And for the first time in my life, I was invited to sit at a table and eat with white people." For Baker, then, the performance opened up opportunities *off* the stage that held important political significance for its moments of integration. When another reporter asked what she thought of *la Revue nègre*, she answered, "It represents, slavery, discrimination and liberation. All of it is there, in the songs and dances."<sup>56</sup> Baker's response is indicative of what performance could mean to Black Americans in the 1920s. Even as *la Revue nègre* turned Black Americans into dancing colonial subjects, Black performance was still viewed as an important venue for making white people rethink race.

### *Coming to Germany*

In Germany, *la Revue nègre* had a different effect than it had in France. Indeed, Jacques Charles's transformation of Baker into an exotic African Other was neither as noteworthy nor as entertaining for Germans who resented Black Africans as reminders of the French occupation of the Rhineland and were therefore ambivalent toward Baker's theatricalized savage. Instead, German audiences preferred Black performances that

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Haney, *Naked at the Feast*, 64.

highlighted American cosmopolitanism. Unlike the French production, the Berlin performances ended with a jazz concert, which broke the fourth wall by encouraging the audience to dance along with the performers. No longer an audience to a revue, they too were club attendees—or city slummers—experiencing a night in Harlem. In France, where *la Revue nègre* staged fantasies about Black people around Baker’s performance, the German staging invited audiences to become part of the Harlem scene. Audiences were already familiar with *The Chocolate Kiddies* and their performances that suggested Black urbanity. Further the memory of the occupation of the Rhineland remained. Indeed, one reviewer stated “We already know the wild rhythms of these Children of Nature, and can therefore also comparatively say that other black troops (not those in the Palatinate!) were better than the negro revue of Mister Douglas, who is now doing their noise at Nelson-Theater.”<sup>57</sup>

As Goll’s review attests, the revue led to a reexamination of German culture. In fact, Goll thought the “Danse de Sauvage” was a *parody*, making fun of European expectations of Black performers.<sup>58</sup> Other critics similarly directed their readers toward Douglas’s talent. The artist and journalist, Ottomar Starke, admired Douglas’s performance over Baker’s in his review for *Der Querschnitt*:

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<sup>57</sup> Wir kennen den wilden Rhythmus dieser Naturkinder schon, können deshalb auch vergleichsweise sagen, daß andere schwarze Truppen (nicht die in der Pfalz!) besser waren als die Negerrevue des Mister Douglas, die jetzt im Nelson-Theater ihr geräuschvolles Gastspiel absolviert. Palatinate (Pfalz) was a region of the Rhineland. *Berliner Tageblatt*, Jan 4. 1926, 4. Despite this negative statement, the review goes on to say of Douglas “The director, dance, and cartoonist Louis Douglas himself owns real humor; With his feet, his arms, and his upper body, he quotes his whole life story.”

<sup>58</sup> Yvan Goll, “Die Neger erobern Europa,” *die literarische Welt* 2 (15. Januar 1926) Nr. 3.

The stars of this revue are Louis Douglas and Josephine Baker, and both are clowns. Louis Douglas is very remarkable...He dances eight dances with an unseen pagan virtuosity of the feet. He beats the sixteenth. In a Jazz Charleston Drill, he leads the eight Steppers, the girls of the troop, and his feet intone a drum roll.<sup>59</sup>

Starke's review, like Goll, was taken more by the movement, and importantly, the labor of Douglas's body. For Starke, even as Africa maintained its place as part of a constellation of Black American identity, the interest in Baker was neither her virtuosity nor her energy on the stage:

Josephine Baker is a grotesque dancer, where she touches the skin. Her bottom, with all due respect, is a chocolate semolina flummery of agility, and she is rightly proud of this gift of nature. Her dances, however, are without great variation. She wiggles again and again with different body parts, has completely stupid, doubly big eyes, and is indescribably on and off.<sup>60</sup>

Starke saw in Baker's performance what Jacques Charles hoped audiences would see—a sexualized Black woman's body. In his description of Baker's body, he transformed her bottom, "with all due respect," into a consumable chocolate dessert. Certainly, his description lacked the direct connection to Africa or ideas of the primitive, but without a doubt Starke saw how her body contorted as her "natural gift." Yet despite the attention to Baker's body, Starke perceives a lack of variety and talent that Douglas offers in his masterly performance offers. Similarly, for Goll, it was Douglas the Modern that deserved special attention for what his dance could convey:

He walks, he drags, he slips—and the beat rises from the floor, not from the flutes, which merely offer their accompaniment in secret. One number is called —My Feet Are Talking. And with his feet he tells us of his

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<sup>59</sup> Starke, "Revue," *Der Querchnitt*, February 1926,

<sup>60</sup> Starke, "Revue," *Der Querchnitt*, February 1926,

voyage from New York to Europe: the first day on the boat, the third in the storm, then the trip by railroad and a race at Longchamp.<sup>61</sup>

In a single scene of the Revue, Goll saw the entire movement of Douglas's voyage to Europe. Despite the fact that this journey was taken on by the whole troupe, it was Douglas's use of dance that communicated his unique place in that journey. Using his feet as his voice, he directed his audiences to understand how he came to be in front of them. Where Starke saw Baker as repetitive in her performance in the way that she "wiggles," Douglas offered a diverse set of acts that manifested not only his versatility but also his history.

The tour effectively ended after Josephine Baker broke her contract with *la Revue nègre* a few weeks into their tenure in Berlin to return to Paris. She had signed on to perform at the Folies-Bergère and decided to return to begin rehearsals without telling Caroline Dudley Reagan or the cast. Baker's choice was common for many Black performers, who could never be sure if their current engagement would lead to another.<sup>62</sup> Signing on to new acts and leaving a tour was not a selfish maneuver on its own and many other Black performers of the time had done the same. However, unlike other performances, *la Revue nègre* came to a complete stop without their leading star. In effect, although not Baker's intention, she stranded the rest of the troupe, who relied on the revue for money for living expenses. Importantly, the revue was necessary to pay for the cast's return to the United States. Despite Germans' burgeoning love of Douglas, he was

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<sup>61</sup> Yvan Goll, "Die Neger erobern Europa," *die literarische Welt* 2 (15. Januar 1926) Nr. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Despite the comments in reviews, Baker maintained that she loved Berlin and considered it a far more modern city than Paris.

not enough to sustain the show. *La Revue nègre* required a prima donna and no one could take Baker's place.

### Conclusion

Baker's return to France led to an amazing career on stage, in film, and during the Second World War, in the French Resistance. Importantly though, for Baker, and indeed for other Black American performers in France, the color of her skin created racist slippages of identity between Africa and America for French audiences, especially as France still remained a colonial in comparison to defeated Germany. As Jeffrey H. Jackson states, "French observers were never particularly clear on the distinction between Africans and African Americans, who they often believed had more in common than not." More so, the music of Black America led many in France to assume "that jazz expressed certain essential racial qualities that transcended specific historical circumstances or experiences, jazz easily turned the minds of French critics from antebellum America to sub-Saharan Africa and the colonial project at its height in the interwar years."<sup>63</sup> Yet, Germans, divested of its colonies, were more readily inclined to distinguish between the Black African and the Black American. Outside of the colonial soldiers that occupied the Rhineland in the first half of the 1920s, interactions between Africans and Germans were exceedingly rare. Yet the Black American tours that successively toured Germany through the rest of the Weimar era provided a continual elucidation of Black American identity and experience. Thus reviewers were keenly

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<sup>63</sup> Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 88.

aware that there were differences within the African Diaspora and that Germany had a stake in maintaining this difference.

Likewise, Louis Douglas had created a hybrid performance form that further offered a difference between the minstrel performance and modern Black stagings. Although his performance of the pickaninny and the inscription of the golliwog led audiences to read his body through a specific racist lens, his return to Germany in 1926 led to vastly different experiences than his youth. Unlike his performance of the imagined proper family, Douglas was performing the disordering tricks of the harlequin. Douglas's harlequin combined with his own traditions of Black performance culture became the perfect hybrid form for his life in Germany.

As we will see in the next chapter, Douglas's experiences in London, New York, and Paris shaped how Douglas presented himself for German audiences. Douglas's continued success in Germany was reliant on his ability to perform a distinctive Black identity based not only on the tradition of Black American dance, but also on his hybridization of the commedia. This in itself was an interesting development. After the Civil War, Black Americans who performed in plant plays attempted to offer their performances as authentic, in contrast to the antebellum performance of blackface minstrelsy. Yet this proved difficult to do, as the stage remained a predominantly white space for performers and audiences alike.<sup>64</sup> Even by the 1920s, performances of authentic Blackness were still presented to mostly white audiences; *The Chocolate Kiddies* serve as a prime example in both the United States and in Germany. Yet what Douglas did was

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<sup>64</sup> Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 99-100.

unique. He used the hybrid form to create a new character for audiences, one not based out of old traditions of Black performance, but a form that at once harkened to European traditions, while also appearing wholly new and owned by Douglas.

Without the financial backing of Dudley Reagan or the established theaters of Paris, Douglas's future productions had to accommodate Black artists who could only appear for a season before traveling elsewhere. Just like Black performances in the United States, commedia performances were based on staged improvisation *and* a production model that could be likewise improvised. Like the commedia troupe of past centuries, Black performers traveled with their families. Douglas was no different, as he traveled with not only his talented wife but also their daughter. Indeed, Marion Cook's brother, Mercer Cook, a future ambassador for the United States, took time off from his studies in France to briefly join *la Revue nègre* in Paris. As Richards states, the fate of a troupe and their families "turned ultimately on their ability to achieve and maintain market appeal, and in as financially modest a way as was possible." As such troupes were impelled "to devise a species of production which could meet these different market opportunities and requirements without imposing impossible demands on their time, materials and resources." Reliant on the talent of a few key entertainers, Douglas would tour yearly in Germany, often presenting material with slight adjustments that would continually draw new and returning audiences. It was the traditions born out of the Black experience and its similarities to the commedia that created an improvisational "mode of

production, a way of composing and presenting plays on a bread-and-butter basis, and one admirably suited to the needs of traveling players.”<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, Douglas’s performance brought to fruition McKay’s hope that “the clowning race” would turn the familiar minstrel act into a mature performance. Jessie Fauset, the literary editor for *The Crisis* shared McKay’s hopes. In her 1926 article, “The Gift of Laughter,” she framed the problem of Black performance through understanding the role white supremacy played in the history of American theater, “For years the Caucasian in America has persisted in *dragging* to the limelight merely one aspect of Negro characteristics, by which the whole race has been glimpsed, through which it has been judged.”<sup>66</sup> Fauset understood the power that the minstrel figure had on the Black American psyche:

To be by force of circumstances the most dramatic figure in a country; to be possessed of the wells of feeling, of the most spontaneous instinct for effective action and to be shunted no less always into the role of the ridiculous and funny,—that is enough to create the quality of bitterness for which we are ever so often rebuked.<sup>67</sup>

Yet, Fauset believed that the arts of the 1920s, especially Black musicals like *Shuffle Along*, brought a new perspective on race to the stage. Whereas the old minstrel shows encouraged audiences to laugh at Black people, these new productions called upon audiences to laugh with the Black actors on stage. That is, audiences began to see the world through the eyes of Black playwrights and the evocative force of a new generation of Black actors. The new “funny man,” she proclaimed, “is joy and mischief, and rich,

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<sup>65</sup> Richards, *The Commedia dell’Arte*, 105-106

<sup>66</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter” *The New Negro*, 514. Emphasis added.

<sup>67</sup> Fauset, “The Gift of Laughter” *The New Negro*, 517.

homely native humor personified...The spectator is infected with his high spirits and his excessive good will; a stream of well-being is projected across the footlights into the consciousness of the beholder.”<sup>68</sup> This gift for comedy, Faucet continues, likewise comes from the equal rise in the tragedy of the life of Black Americans:

Just as a person driven by great sorrow may finally go into an orgy of laughter, just so an oppressed and too hard driven people breaks over into compensating laughter and merriment. It is our emotional salvation...It is not surprising then that the period that sees the Negro actor on the verge of great comedy has seen him breaking through to the portrayal of serious and legitimate drama.<sup>69</sup>

For Faucet, the response to oppression created a new culture of performance that was inherent to Black people. Indeed, echoing the language of McKay, she believed that “Through laughter we have conquered even the lot of the jester and the clown.”<sup>70</sup> Black performers could now be seen for their talent, purposefully using the stage for audiences to understand who they were as Black Americans. Despite the distance between Douglas and the Renaissance scene in New York, German audiences connected him to the creation of a new Black culture. With his appropriation of the commedia, his art was indelibly marked as part of the modern movement of Black performers.

Douglas’s presentation of the urban Black man must not only be seen as a distinction between him and Baker, but a continuation of the trend of *The Chocolate Kiddies*. Douglas’s place in *la Revue nègre* and in future performances in Germany continually saw him as distinctly modern and called to mind the special place of Black

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<sup>68</sup> Faucet, “The Gift of Laughter” *The New Negro*, 517.

<sup>69</sup> Faucet, “The Gift of Laughter” *The New Negro*, 518.

<sup>70</sup> Faucet, “The Gift of Laughter,” 518.

Americans as cultural carriers. Indeed, as a resident of Berlin, he distinguished himself as a unique force of the New Negro Renaissance that would be called upon to not only represent his own country but forms of transatlantic modernity.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Louis Douglas: The Image of the Modern

The dissolution of *la Revue nègre* was the beginning of Douglas's mature period.

He staged new productions in Berlin that replicated many of the movement plays that *The Chocolate Kiddies* had brought to Germany a year prior. Unlike other Black performers in Germany, he built a devoted interracial network of directors and performers across the Atlantic. Now he would produce his own shows, work within Germany's modernist theater, and have his image appear in German press and film. Relying on the cadre of performers from *la Revue nègre* and *The Chocolate Kiddies*, his revues *Black People* (1926-27), *Africana* (1927) *Louisiana* (1929-31), *Liza* (1930), and *Black Flowers* (1930-31) toured across Germany and continued on into Denmark, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and the Middle East. Beyond his yearly productions in Germany, he worked with German stage directors Max Reinhardt and Erik Charell. Through his yearly appearance on German stages, his performances became identified with ideas of modernity.

In this chapter, I look at the discourses of German critics and Douglas himself in building his public image not only as a modern man but a messenger of Black modernity to Germany. If Douglas's youth with Belle Davis spoke to the success that came from emulating the the "trope of the family" while *Pick-a-Dilly* and *la Revue nègre* reproduced white fantasies of the performing Black body, 1926-1933 represents his effort to convey his model of a Black world to German audiences. Douglas's image up to this point had been defined by concepts familiar to Europeans, but now he would actively pursue his

own image of Blackness. As a dancer, his movements were an integral part of maintaining and expanding his image as a vital force within Germany. In response to his performances, the German press claimed Douglas as a model of vitality.

As Douglas designed his own tours, critics were especially impressed by his ability to direct, write, and choreograph whole productions. Douglas, like the New Orleans jazz musicians described in Hersch's work, "had to be a protean figure, altering himself with his surroundings and speaking a variety of cultural languages in the music itself."<sup>1</sup> Thus, we find in Douglas the image of a Black American artist that enraptured audiences and critics alike. Douglas's performance spoke to German audiences and critics, becoming the entry way for Germans to understand his unique talents as a representative of Black performance [Image 5.1].

Douglas was a constant in Black performance in Germany, not only representing modern Black performance but also embodying German anxieties around the presence of Black culture [Image 5.2]. The claims around Douglas's body demonstrate a German desire and anxiety for a new type of performance and vitalism. As German theater scholar Gerwin Strobl suggests, the trauma of war and a new system of government made cultural production a fraught battleground.<sup>2</sup> Every location that Douglas found himself in

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<sup>1</sup> Hersch, *Subversive Sounds*, 117.

<sup>2</sup> Weimar "was too uncompromising to carry a substantial proportion of the old audiences with it. Republican theatre made little little effort to win those audiences over... Weimar audiences were not 'normal' theatre audiences. They had survived a war of unprecedented savagery; they had seen the mass death of civilians in the winter of 1918 through famine, rampant infant mortality and the Spanish influenza pandemic; they had experienced defeat, the collapse of their state, national humiliation abroad, occupation of parts of Germany by foreign armies bent on vengeance; civil strife in the streets, entire regions under martial law; the collapse of values, traditions and symbols; and then – not

was inherently built upon racial hierarchical structure. None of the critics or thinkers, we will see, were without their racist assumptions. Sill, as Douglas appeared across multiple mediums throughout the closing of the Weimar era, he modeled a Black vitality that Germans could not ignore.

**“One has to admit that this character, Louis Douglas, got talent”**

Douglas’s first organized revue, *Black People*, came shortly after the dissolution of *la Revue nègre* and relied on the remaining members of the troupe. It was a successful show, but it depended on Douglas to provide something more than the novelty that Black revues risked becoming. A review in *Berliner Tageblatt* warned as much:

This negro revue...has the bad luck that we have already seen two other negro groups. The show’s stormy dancing and singing, accompanied by wild orchestral noise, is no longer a sensational novelty; they must come out of the shadows of their great predecessors, to live life to the fullest, to sing to the fullest, to dance to the fullest.<sup>3</sup>

*Black People* followed the format of *The Chocolate Kiddies* and eschewed any relationship to the African primitive of *la Revue nègre*. Once again, the production used the movement play format to tell audiences about Black modernity, placing the dancers first on the plantation and ending in the cosmopolitan scene of Harlem. Yet for the first time in Germany, the Black revue had a discernible plot. It followed Dinah’s journey

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once but twice within a decade – mass destitution: first through hyperinflation and then the Great Depression.” Strobl, *The Swastika and the Stage*, 19, 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> Diese Negerrevue, die mit Jazzband, Saxophon, und Erzentrik dem lahmen Berliner Theatersommer auf die Beine helfen soll, hat das Pech, das wir vor ihr schon zwei andere Negertruppen gesehen haben. Ihr stürmisches Tanzen und Singen, begleitet von wildem Orchesterlärm, ist keine sensationelle Neuheit mehr; sie müssen sich im Schatten ihrer großartigen Vorgänger ausleben, aussingen, austanzen. “Schwarze Revue: ‘Black People’ im Metropol-Theater,” *Berliner Tageblatt* 14. Juli 1926.

north from a plantation to Harlem and the attempts of her fellow Black southerner, Rastus Banks, to win her heart from the suave Black New York dandy. It was a small change from previous shows that Germans were familiar with, yet the additional story of individual Black people moving North made the point of Black modernity clearer than *The Chocolate Kiddies* had in their stage performance. Now, instead of a revue that simply presented the performances of Black people as having geographic significance, the audience experienced the lives of two southern Black people enacting the Great Migration for themselves. Indeed, the story seemed to include many elements of the harlequinade. Rastus, in love with Dinah, is upstaged by a wealthy and colorfully dressed dandy. This minor plot, with its use of names from the blackface minstrel tradition, was built around the commedia form, with the dandy serving as a Pantaloon to Rastus's harlequin. However, it was not just the use of the plot but also the movement from South to North that continued to create a hybrid form between American minstrelsy and European commedia. Douglas's revue also speaks to the continued separation between the static primitive with which Germans and other Europeans were familiar. Again, Douglas modeled the mobility of agrarian people who became integrated into a modern industrial world.

Despite the reviewer's disappointment that *Black People* lacked the polish and discipline of *The Chocolate Kiddies*—it was a rushed production after Baker's departure—the reviewer stated: “They dance so brilliantly and so exactly that you do not even realize how much more disciplined and how much better the ‘Chocolate Kiddies’

were.”<sup>4</sup> The reviewer’s disappointment in finding Douglas conducting the band instead of dancing suggests that Douglas was already considered a dance star by Germans:

But Louis Douglas, the excellent dancer, now sits as a conductor in front of the orchestra. He gesticulates wildly with his arms in the air. He fires up his people by calling to them, sings himself, often jumps up suddenly with great enthusiasm from his seat, forgetful that this time he is a conductor and not a dancer.<sup>5</sup>

The review reveals the manic effort Douglas put into putting the show together in the wake of the dissolution of *la Revue nègre*. Importantly, it also shows the reviewer’s reflection of the audience’s desire to see Douglas in his proper role as a dancer.

In early July, Dr. Erich Urban, a German correspondent for a Dutch newspaper, left the Metropol Theater in Berlin with his mind reeling. Thinking about his experience seeing *Black People*:

I thought all the time of the Indian princes who presented Wayang plays and dances and Gamelan music here last November. But I must apologize...for linking them to what I have heard and seen yesterday, without having mentioned first that it was not my intention to draw any parallels. I just thought of them, because the entire evening I had a feeling of sadness and a longing for beauty and refinement, the two characteristics of the art which they, the Asians, had brought us Europeans. We experienced a Negro revue, much like the *The Chocolate Kiddies* of last year, and a subsequent smaller edition at Nelson’s.<sup>6</sup> It was yesterday, and

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<sup>4</sup> Sie Tanzen so brilliant und so exakt, daß man gar nicht merkt, um wieviel disziplinierter und wieviel besser die “Chocolate Kiddies” waren. “Schwarze Revue: ‘Black People’ im Metropol-Theater,” *Berliner Tageblatt* 14. Juli 1926.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Douglas aber, der vorzügliche Negertänzer, sitzt nun als Dirigent vor dem Orchester, fuchtelt wild mit den Armen durch die Luft, feuert seine Leute durch zurufe an, singt selbst mit, springt oft plötzlich und mit großem Elan von seinem Sitz auf und vergißt fast, daß er ja diesmal Dirigent und nicht Tänzer ist. “Schwarze Revue: ‘Black People’ im Metropol-Theater,” *Berliner Tageblatt* 14. Juli 1926.

<sup>6</sup> This would be *la Revue nègre*.

it will continue for the next few days, a further step towards the conquest of Western civilization by the Blacks.<sup>7</sup>

Urban's response to the performance elicited the European orientalist desire in contrast to Black performing arts in Germany. For Urban, the emergence of Black American culture clashed against the idealized dichotomy of "Western" and "Eastern" civilization. Under such a view, the concept of a *Black* culture is foreign to the totality of possible civilizations, which can only encompass the idea of the East and the West and ignores the Global South. The idea of Black performers, therefore, is a surprising new front in the clash of cultures. Once more, his view of Black performers is that of conquest, where Douglas's revue brings on the anxiety of German decline as a Black force overcomes them.

A sure sign of this conquest, Urban registers, is the jazz band's alteration of European classical music:

[The jazz] compositions which are in fact stolen numbers, even from Mendelssohn and Wagner, and welded into tonal illustrations which are distorted by jazz music, into concoctions, rhythms, syncopations of the singing squeaks variety, into dances and acrobatic turns.<sup>8</sup>

Like *The Chocolate Kiddies*, Douglas's concert relied on bridging the world of German art music with Black American jazz. For many, the easiest and often most successful connection was to take German traditional music and turn it into jazz compositions. Yet for Urban, the modification of German music was an attack on culture that bordered on sacrilege: "They accompany their cannibal dances with adaptations from European

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<sup>7</sup> Erich Urban "De Negerrevue Black People Te Berlijn" 14 Juli 1926. Newspaper clipping, Rainer Lotz Collection.

<sup>8</sup> Erich Urban, "De Negerrevue Black People Te Berlijn" 14 Juli 1926. Newspaper clipping, Rainer Lotz Collection.

classics and they do not use their drums but rather violins and clarinets, and a Steinway grand.” Urban implies that Black performers are using *European* violins, clarinets, and pianos against them. The musical instruments are an affront to Urban’s sense of racial difference that is undercut by their melding. Yet in the midst of this depressing spectacle, Urban saw someone worth admiring:

However, one has to admit that this character, Louis Douglas, got talent. The kind which is poisonous to Westerners...How was the dancing? African American [*Afrikaansch Amerikaansch*] and this carried the show. There is swing in those syncopations, in that tremendous pace, in the capers of those elastic bodies.<sup>9</sup>

Urban’s review reveals a tension between disdain for the music and an admiration for Douglas. If the *Berliner Tageblatt* supported the appearance of another Black revue, Urban’s review for *Black People* reveals at once the growing suspicion around the place of Black performances in Germany *and* a continued belief that Douglas was a talented artist without equal. His focus on Douglas’s body in movement is an ecstatic celebration that admires not only the talent but its unique place as “African American.” Urban appears to appreciate Douglas’s performance, believing it as an authentic form of Black culture, unlike the melding of jazz music. Yet like the hybrid form of jazz, Urban still fears that taking on Douglas’s dance would prove especially dangerous to Europeans. Urban’s admiration issues from the belief that Douglas’s dancing is not attempting to hybridize Europe and African America. Still, Urban’s conclusion suggests that he did not understand Douglas’s use of the European Harlequinade and the American minstrel. This

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<sup>9</sup> Erich Urban, “De Negerrevue Black People Te Berlijn” 14 Juli 1926. Newspaper clipping, Rainer Lotz Collection.

is, perhaps, part of the cleverness of Douglas's performances. Audiences may have taken note of the familiarity of the commedia but Douglas's use of that form never outshone his talent.

Yet this admiration for Douglas exists in tension with an abhorrence of Black American adaptation and transformation of European culture:

When I left the theatre I felt a stale aftertaste. Is this the last symptom of the disease which began during the war and which we in the Old World still have to go through in order to emerge as being cured? Or is this the sure sign of an irreversible decline? I hope it is the former, but fear it is the latter.<sup>10</sup>

From these reviews, we see the reexamination of race and sense the challenge that Douglas's performances posed for German intellectuals. In contrast to jazz, which aroused polarized passions of love or hatred, Douglas's talents were never in doubt. Whereas Goll could affirm the "conquering Negroes" and accept the idea that Black America could challenge Germany with an entirely innovative modernism, importing an altogether *new* genre, Urban views Black modern performance, unironically, was a persuasive force in Germany. Like the Black Shame on the Rhine, this conquest could destroy what is distinctive in Europe generally, and Germany in particular:

This is the curse of Negro music. It thoroughly shakes us, stretches our already overstrained nerves has an affect on us vexed Europeans like cocaine does, lifts us beyond our normal level of laziness and beyond our natural sense of taste. It is on the best way to captivate all of us. The dark world is not about to conquer but to subdue Europe culturally.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Erich Urban, "De Negerrevue Black People Te Berlijn" 14 Juli 1926. Newspaper clipping, Rainer Lotz Collection.

<sup>11</sup> Erich Urban, "De Negerrevue Black People Te Berlijn" 14 Juli 1926. Newspaper clipping, Rainer Lotz Collection.

Cultural progress, Urban warns, is being made not in Europe and not within the art music tradition of Germany, but rather abroad and by a racial minority. Tellingly, his description of Black music as a drug that stimulates Europeans suggests that Black culture is too strong for Europeans.<sup>12</sup> Urban is most likely thinking of the primal vitality associated with Black people, and it is to their physicality that Europeans are lost in their attempts to keep up with Black performance. Indeed, to promote Douglas's talent, Urban presents Douglas as capable of a cultural expression that could force Europeans out of their cultural complacency. Thus, in keeping with other critics, Urban registers wonder at the vitality and novelty of this new music and its effects on German audiences.

Douglas would improve upon the Black revue format in coming years, expanding on their presentation of Black modernity. *Louisiana*, Douglas's production for 1929-30, created a clearer plot than the rushed *Black People*. Starting on a cotton plantation in Louisiana, the story follows a young woman also named Louisiana (Marion Cook). Opening on her birthday, Rastus (Louis Douglas), a young man in love with her, arrives at her party to sing a song for her. But the nephew of the local preacher, a "dandy from New York" (Jonny Jones), visits and falls in love with Louisiana. He convinces Louisiana to come with her to New York, with Rastus quickly following to win her hand. Losing a street battle with the dandy on the streets of New York, Rastus is soon discovered by a theater company and becomes a star of the stage. A year passes and

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<sup>12</sup> As we will see in the final chapter, this language of hygiene, poison, and purity in Urban's review was part of a growing discourse of anti-Semitism. However, where others were quick to connect Black Americans to the threat of Jewish people to the German nation, Urban's review only hints at the larger Jewish threat in its anxiety over the presence of Black music in Germany.

Rastus runs into Louisiana and the Dandy again on the street. However, the Dandy is wanted for smuggling whisky and arrested in front of Louisiana and Rastus. The reunited couple then return to the Louisiana plantation to celebrate her birthday.<sup>13</sup>

Like its predecessors, the first act opened on the simplistic Southern plantation. The songs included “Swanee River” and “Bandana Days,” as well as spirituals by the Utica Jubilee Singers.<sup>14</sup> The journey north replaced the “Mississippi Boat” with a train station (“Am Bahnhof”), while several of the performances would be familiar to Germany audiences, especially the foxtrot “Kleines Mädel.” The second act again finds its audience in Harlem ready for modern jazz. Included in the third act was “Ain’t Misbehavin’” (spelled “Miß Behavin’”). Now in the modern Black setting, the *Louisiana* took the audience from the street into the Harlem Theater and the Cabaret.

Despite following in the same path as *The Chocolate Kiddies*, the inclusion of actual spirituals along with the familiar “Swanee River” suggests that Douglas was attempting to further integrate Will Cook’s ideas from *Negro Nuances* and further provide audiences with previously unheard musical numbers from America. Although the Black revue’s form, with its loosely connected scenes that did more to *show* Black traditions than to *tell* its audiences, may have become repetitive for audiences, it is important to note that Douglas filled these performances annually. These tours, which always started in Berlin, would continue, sometimes without him, touring throughout Scandinavia, Central Europe, and Egypt. Whether returning audiences reveled in the

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<sup>13</sup> The production would continue in 1930-31 as *Liza* or *Black Flowers* with the same basic plot with Valaida Snow as the prima donna and Ferdinand Jones as the Dandy.

<sup>14</sup> The Utica Jubilee Singers were created after the success of the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

repetition, or new audiences were attracted through word of mouth, Douglas's star power grew through the Weimar era.

Douglas's early reviews in the wake of Baker's departure reveal that Douglas had acquired enough talent and business acumen to continue without Baker and Dudley Reagan, who had likewise abandoned the tour in Berlin. Although Douglas had not toured Germany since he was a child, these reviews suggest that his was recognized as a unique talent that not only differed from Baker's but also further distinguished Black modernity as a continuation of a tradition whose origins extended well beyond *The Chocolate Kiddies* of 1926 to Will Cook's premier of *Shuffle Along*.

**“The Last of the Niggers”**

Just as Douglas had fashioned the harlequin's mask by way of minstrelsy to create a unique performance, he likewise continued to develop his skills as a mesmerizing cosmopolitan dancer. This was the star image for which he labored, a deliberate representation of Black American identity for German consumption. Douglas's interview with Wolf Zunk, printed in the liberal-democratic newspaper *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, reveals the care with which he conceptualized this cosmopolitan Black persona.

Zunk's introduction highlights the combination of essentialism and gratitude in German responses to Douglas: “Douglas is the last of the niggers, whose great jumps and wild rhythms in all cafes and dance companies speak for themselves. His black colleagues have long since left Germany.”<sup>15</sup> Despite Zunk's racist terminology, he

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas ist der letzte der Nigger, deren tolle Sprünge und wilde Rhythmen in allen Cafes, Gefellschaften und kritiken von sich reden machten. Seine schwarzen kollegen

distinguishes Douglas unique role as a Black dancer in Europe, establishing his curious decision to remain in Germany instead of returning to America.

In the interview, Douglas discusses his hopes of remaining in Berlin. He also explained his belief—possibly to flatter the German readership of *Volks-Zeitung*—that German girls were more responsive to Black dance than the British women he had trained years prior:

“Surely it’s hard work to teach your German girls how to dance! [?]”  
 “Not that hard! German girls have great—how do you say?—great skill for Negro dances. English girls have much less skill. English girls always do it like this...” He jumped up, put himself in a position and shows the typical, empty gesture of the London dance girls. “German girls feel for dancing, German girls...”  
 “Have a soul for it,” I suggest.  
 “Yes, well, they have a lot of soul.”<sup>16</sup>

In his exchange with Zunk, Douglas invokes racial and national types in order to establish his style as a natural fit for German culture. Attributing to German dancing girls a skill lacked by their English peers, he exploits the German eagerness to recuperate a cultural capital that seemed one among many casualties of the First World War. His mockery of the “empty gesture of the London dance girl” enables a moment of Black-

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sind längst aus Deutschland abgereist. Wolf Zunk, *Berlin Volks-Zeitung/Illustrierte Sport-Zeitung*, 13. April, 1926

<sup>16</sup> “Sicher eine schwere Arbeit, deutschen Mädchen Ihre Tanzmethode beizubringen!”  
 “Nicht so schwer! Deutsche Mädels haben großen...wie sagt man—großen Geschick für Negertanz. Englische Mädchen viel weniger Geschick. Englische Mädchen immer so machen...” Er springt auf, stellt sich in Positur und zeigt die typische, leere Geste der Londoner Tanzgirls. “Deutsche Mädchen Gefühl haben für Tanzen, Deutsche Mädchen...”

“seele haben, Ausdruck” ergänze Ich.

“Ja, well, sehr viel Seele haben.”

Wolf Zunk, *Berlin Volks-Zeitung/Illustrierte Sport-Zeitung*, 13. April, 1926.

American-and-German solidarity in the face of failed English efforts to emulate Black culture. This small performance, designed to flatter Zunk's readership, echoes British theater critics of Douglas's performance in *Pick-A-Dilly* in 1916. Yet it was undoubtedly the case that England, France, and other sites for the African diaspora developed their own means for appropriating the language and performance of Black modernism. As interest in Black dance captivated German audiences, believing in its difficulty transmitted a sense that Germans were in a unique position to bear Black performance. Still, Douglas suggests helpfully that the German chorus girl holds the promise of the European incorporation of Black performance.

Zunk's conclusion further suggests the unique relationship between Douglas and Germany. Professing surprise at Douglas's suggestion that it is not England but Germany that is most responsive to the soul of Black dance, Zunk states,

Douglas, who, in addition to the unforgettable *Chocolate Kiddies*, has injected a whirling feverish tempo into our blood, transplanted into our European, Nordic soul. How odd this Negro, rooted in Anglo-Saxonism, sees an emptiness in English-American dance, has felt the depth, the animatedness in German dance.<sup>17</sup>

In Zunk's meditative conclusion, then, the special role that Douglas plays in Germany is the establishment of a location for modern culture. This is surprisingly similar to the conclusion that Urban reaches when he describes the power of Black performance in

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<sup>17</sup> Douglas, der neben den unvergeßlichen *Chocolate Kiddies* uns das wirbelnde Fiebertempo ins Blut gejagt hat, aus Urgründen hinein verpflanzt in unsere europäische, nordische Seele. Wie seltsam, das dieser Neger, in Angelsachsentum verurzelt, die Leere in englisch-amerikanischer Tanzkunst erspät, die Tiefe, die Beseeltheit in deutschen Tanz erfühlt hat. Wolf Zunk, *Berling Volks Zeitung/Illustrierte Sport-Zeitung*, 13. April, 1926.

Germany. Whereas Urban sees the achievement of Black performance as its capacity to unsettle German audiences, Zunk sees Douglas's performance as being in sync with the spirited nature of German dance. If the "unforgettable *Chocolate Kiddies*" had taught Germans about Black modernism, Douglas's ongoing German productions served both to transmit specific dance forms and to demonstrate *for Germans* their special place in a renovated Black-American modernism. Thus Zunk reveals the unique role Douglas played in Weimar Germany. Whereas Goll had asserted that "the leading role belongs to Negro blood," Zunk presents Douglas as a catalyst for transforming Germany into a key site for the African Diaspora. Moreover, the capacity of the German "Nordic soul" to understand and master these dances provides a new center for cross-cultural exchange in the shared modernism of Germany and Black America.

**"The rhythm of our time is the Blues"**

In "Blues," an article he published earlier that year for *Revue des Monats*, Douglas described what made Black people uniquely modern. He spoke of Black music as the poetics of the mechanical and industrial world:

The trump card of our music today is not in the melody, but rather in its rhythm. The uniform pounding of four-four time, like the sound of the machine, aligns with how people now experience time. Because work is machine-like, time is cut into pieces, the motors fire uniformly, the hum of generators that throw sparks at perfectly timed seconds is precise.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Die Musik unserer Tage erhebt nicht die Melodik als Trumpf, sondern der Rhythmus ist ihr Leben. Der hämmernde, gleichförmig bewegte Viervierteltakt, der maschinell klingende Ton trifft die Empfindungen der Menschen und ihrer Zeit. Denn die Arbeit ist maschinell, abgezackt die Stunden, gleichförmig explodierend der Ton der Motoren, präzise das Summen wie Generatoren, die ihre Funken in abgezirkelten Sekunden gleichförmig von sich werfen.  
Louis Douglas, "Blues," *Revue Des Monats*, November 1926, 22-23.

As a dancer, Douglas placed rhythm as the preeminent form for modern music. He further inscribed the important connection of rhythm between the modern industrial world and Black people. To him, the mechanical world spoke specifically to Black people because of the history of slave labor in the United States: “For the white people do not have the sense, as creators of the boiling machines, to draw out the sounds, to read out the sweet lamentation, the soft crying, in the raging rhythm of the almighty forces.”<sup>19</sup> Unlike the white Americans, Black people were in touch with the machines that now labored in their stead. To be sure, Douglas’s description suggests essential notions of Black Americans, yet it also uses notions of Black primitivism to create a modernist Black American ontology. In his version of a logical proof, Douglas establishes Black men as the people of the modern world. “The rhythm of our time is the Blues,” Douglas declares, and “the Blues is a music of colored men.” For Douglas, Black people were the translator of the machine age, for it is

a compromise, an integration of oneself into a remote mechanical world, a mix of technical roaring with the primal rhythm of another continent, whose music is borrowed from the progressive growth of the plants, the flowers, the leaves, the soft murmur of the wind, the whistling hurricanes, the melodic step of animals - mixed with the resonances of machines thrown together with the grotesque, which is the true antithesis of the rugged life.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Denn die weißen Menschen besitzen den Sinn nicht, als Schöpfer aus den kochenden Maschinen die Klänge hervorzuziehen, im tobenden Rhythmus der malmenden Kräfte die süße Klage, das leise Weinen herauszulesen. Louis Douglas, “Blues,” *Revue Des Monats*, November 1926, 23-24.

<sup>20</sup> Ein Kompromiß, ein Sicheinfügen in eine entlegene mechanische Welt, ein Vermischen der technischen tosenden Umgebung mit den Urrhythmus eines anderen Erdteiles, dessen Musik dem progressive Wachsen der Pflanzen, der Blüten, der Blätter, dem leisen Raunen des Windes, den pfeifenden Orkanen, dem melodischen Schritt der

By suggesting a relationship to machines, Douglas expresses his German readers the possibilities of Black modernity and the struggle for self-created culture. In Douglas's poetic language, the article suggests that Black people have taken on a middle ground between the primitive and the modern world. At the same time, they are capable of discerning and translating the modern world into music. Douglas reflects similar notions to Butting and Wooding about the necessity of hybridity as a major force within modernity. It is not surprising Douglas would focus heavily on rhythm in discussing "a compromise" to be assumed in a mechanical world.

In effect, Douglas was explaining what made *him* so unique. Although he was characterizing Black men in general, he understood how he exemplified in his own work their unique situation in the world. As a representative of Black modernity, a rhythmic performer introducing new forms into the melody-based music of Germany, he embodied what Black Americans in particular had to contribute.

Douglas's description of the blues anticipates Leroi Jones's framing of Black American music. Blues, Jones tells us, "was a music that developed because of the Negro's adaptation to, and adoption of, America, it was also a music that developed because of the Negro's peculiar position in this country."<sup>21</sup> The article with its bold claims around Black ontology expresses a strong belief in the right for Black people to take up public space, including Europe. It expands on the notion that there is something

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Tiere entlehnt ist – vermischt mit den Resonanzen der Maschinen,. Louis Douglas, "Blues," *Revue Des Monats*, November 1926, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, *Blues People*, 66.

unique about Black performers and, importantly, that this is imparted through their history in America. Douglas's point not only hints at what Jones would write decades later, but also to the writing of the German writers who were amazed by Douglas and *The Chocolate Kiddies* before him. The transition from the turn-of-the century blues to the jazz of the 1920s reflect, "the fact that the Negro had created a music that offered such a profound reflection of America that it could attract white Americans to want to play it or listen to it for exactly that reason."<sup>22</sup> This seemed to be clear to Douglas when he interacted with Germans. His body at once expressed the unique talents of Black Americans and, simultaneously, revealed the universality of that experience.

### *Cigarette Cards*

If Germans missed Douglas's masterful dances on stages across the country or in periodicals of the Weimar era, they could always encounter his image in one of the era's pervasive mass media forms: the cigarette card or Zigarettenbild. Packaged with cigarettes, these miniature photographs were often collected as parts of a yearly series that might include hundreds of photographs and short biographical information. In 1930, the second largest cigarette distributor, Haus Neuerberg released a complete card collection, *The Artistic Dance (der künstlerische Tanz)*, in a single book album.<sup>23</sup> Like many cigarette manufacturers, Haus Neuerberg managed several brands, including Mannengold, Overstolz, Ravenklau, Löwenbrück, Blaupunkt, Ranius, and Eckstein Nr. 5.

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<sup>22</sup> Jones, *Blues People*, 149.

<sup>23</sup> This was a common practice for those who wished to have a complete set of the cards.

Marketed to a variety of groups and classes, the cards had a far reaching impact as informative collectibles.

*The Artistic Dance* series is an especially instructive example of how Germans framed Louis Douglas and dance culture overall. In contrast to the individual cards, the book came with an introductory text that entreated collectors to reflect upon the humanistic value of dance. Indeed, it argued that a culture could be known by its dance forms. The cards introduced readers to different dancers and their styles and constituted them as an audience to the dancers posing in the photographs. Consisting of 240 cards, the collection was divided into thirteen categories of dancers, mostly by region or nationality. Yet among the various dancer groups was one designated for the racial Other: Group 10, Exotic Dance Artists. (Gruppe 10: exotische Tanzkünstler). The Exotic Dance group was described as “representatives of the exotic peoples, presenting us with ancient dance cultures.” These representatives had been brought up in specific castes dedicated to dance: “We have seen in Europe in the past few years again the obsession for Hindus, Japanese, Javanese, Persians, and Negroes dancing. We are not able to understand all dance related symbols, because they are based on millennia of traditions of foreign cultures.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Uralte Tanzkulturen vermitteln uns die Vertreter der exotischen Völker...Prinzen, Brahmanen, Samurai, und sonstige Angehörige der höchsten Stände widmen sittlichen Ernst dem tänzerischen Werk, es ganz mit ihrem Wesen erfüllend... Wir haben in Europa in den letzten Jahren wiederhold Geigenheit gehabt Hindus, Japaner, Javaner, Perser, und Neger tanzen zu sehen. Uns sind nicht alle tänzerischen Symbole verständlich, denn sie fußen auf jahrtausendalten Überlieferungen fremdartiger Kulturen. Aabel Hermann und Marianne, *Der kunstlerische Tanz unserer Zeit*, 1930. Leipzig: Karl Robert Langewiesche Verlag, 1935. New York Public Library, MGTI 11-5, 306.

It was to this group of “representatives of exotic peoples” that the only two Black dancers, Louis Douglas and Josephine Baker, were assigned. Separated from the category that contained the American dancers (Gruppe 9: Das tanzende Amerika), the placement shows how Douglas and Baker stood for the performance of racial difference. The cards constructed the dances of exotic peoples within a caste system. This certainly did not apply to either Baker or Douglas, as Germans familiar with Black performers would have known. Although Douglas’s parents were dancers, his career was not predetermined by theirs. Moreover, Douglas recognized that performance offered unique opportunities for advancement. Although Black performers were seen as uniquely talented stage performers, their performance culture was far different from the traditional dance forms of Java, India, and Japan. And Baker and Douglas were presenting *new* Black culture that developed over the last three decades.

However, it is possible that their categorization was meant to suggest that Black people were emblems of culture separate from the United States, that their roots were in the exotic land of Africa. Much like Li Zielesch’s suggestion that Black Americans had preserved and expanded their own culture separately from white Americans, the cigarette cards may have worked from similar assumptions about Black performance culture. Yet the American cards’ description suggests that Baker and Douglas were put in the wrong section:

America is the real birthplace of modern dance... We are accustomed in other areas to be surprised by the pace of American development. Dance is no exception... America, however, is too colorful and large to be one-sided. There, all dance styles are maintained and increased to top performances. We find here the so-called girl dance for revue and operetta

use, exotic dances of all flourishing oriental nations, Negro-based step dance, ballet and modern expression dance in peaceful competition.<sup>25</sup>

This inclusion/exclusion of Black American performance from the American category is notable. The description of American dance included tap dance as a specific Black performance, yet the actual card group excluded Louis Douglas, the only Black tap dancer in the collection. Certainly, the album *included* Black American artists within the list of 240 cards, but it also *segregated* them into a category that affirmed their difference from the dominant Western national categories. Instead of appearing with Martha Graham and Lisa Duncan, Isadora Duncan's adopted daughter,<sup>26</sup> Douglas and Baker appeared with the Indian dancer and choreographer Uday Shankar, the Javanese dancer Raden Mas Jodjana, and the Japanese dancer, choreographer, and founder of the Ballet Art School at Carnegie Hall Yeichi Nimuara. Also included in the group was the French-Indian dancer Nyota Inyoka, who never studied the dance traditions of India but instead performed her own imagined variations of Indian dances.<sup>27</sup> Like orientalist ideas about countries of the East, the classification hints at the pernicious stereotype that Black people lack a culture or civilization of their own. Indeed, the album reveals a two-

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<sup>25</sup> Amerika ist die eigentliche Geburtsstätte des modernen Tanzes... Wir sind auf anderen Gebieten gewöhnt, vom Tempo amerikanischer Entwicklung überrascht zu werden. Die Tanzkunst bilden keine Ausnahme... Amerika ist aber zu bunt und groß, um einseitig zu sein. Dort werden alle Tanzarten gepflegt und bis zu Spitzenleistungen gesteigert. Wir finden da den sogenannten Girtanz für Revue- und Operettengebrauch, exotische Tänze sämtlicher orientalischen Nationen, negerhaften Steptanz, Ballett und modernen Ausdruckstanz im friedlichen Wettbewerb nebeneinander gedeihen. Hermann Aibel, *Der künstlerische Tanz*, 1930. New York Public Library, MGTI 11-5, 306.

<sup>26</sup> Lisa Duncan, born Elisabeth Milker, ironically was born in Dresden and only became an American citizen after Isadora Duncan adopted her in 1919. She, along with the five other "Isadorables," Anna, Maria-Theresa, Irma, Gretel, and Erika, were all German.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, *Modern Dance in France*, 91.

headedness around Black people. At once the album explicitly states the history of tap dance and yet refuses to place the two Black Americans within that category. The collection, then, exercises a racial exclusion that placed all raced performers together, excluding them from representation of a national culture. The placement of Douglas and Baker goes against the idea that Douglas explicated in his article, namely, that Black performance exists because of its history in the United States.

Baker appeared on two cards in the collection, Bilder 191 and 192, to Douglas's singular image on Bild 190 [Image 5.3]. Her photograph on Bild 191 shows Baker elegantly dressed, standing *en pointe*. The accompanying description states "the famous Negro dancer, whose latest news, with some skill, was pointe technique (Spitzentanz)." Compared to the elegant gentility of her first image, Bild 192, showed Baker in her familiar erotic image. Wearing a jeweled brassiere and a skirt of long fabric with her hair straightened flat against her head, Baker looks over her shoulder seductively at the viewer. The accompanying text stated "the gifted Negro dancer, whose dances and extravagances excite attention across Europe."<sup>28</sup> Douglas appears on Bild 190 in a tuxedo costume—the tie and vest were printed on his shirt—in the middle of dancing, with his arms out and one leg moving forward. He is described as "the prominent Negro dancer, whose breathtaking rhythm, revealed in his tap dancing, grabs you immediately."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "die berühmte Negertänzerin, eignete sich als letzte Neuigkeit nicht unbeträchtliche Fertigkeiten in dem klassischen Spitzentanz an." "Die tanzbegabte Negerin, deren Tänze und Extravaganzen in Europa Aufsehen erregten."

<sup>29</sup> "prominenter Negertänzer, dessen hinreissend, im Steptanz sichtbar gemachter Rhythmus unmittelbar packt."

Baker and Douglas pose in keeping with their public persona. Baker is a celebrity, a Parisian trendsetter, elegantly dressed and seductive. She is described as a famous performer who has added ballet to her repertoire. The equal weight paid to her dancing ability and her “extravagances” suggests how her celebrity is conceived. By using “erregten” (excite) the notion of excitement is purposefully ambiguous, hinting at the possibility that her performance is not only thrilling to see, but also provocative and sexually arousing. Douglas is described through the movements of his body and how such talent “grabs” the viewer-collector [Image 5.4]. Thus, his photograph shows him in motion, in contrast to the static image of Baker in her two poses. They are distinguished by their status: one is “famous” and the other only “prominent.” Baker’s description suggests a wider circulation of her persona, where her performances are another of her many novelties, while the use of “prominent” for Douglas suggests the more muted quality of Douglas’s status. Still, Douglas’s characterization also implies a more active and animated role for the performer. Douglas’s “breathtaking rhythm” seizes the collector’s attention, drawing the viewer in to his performance. By focusing on his mastery in its description and emphasizing the sophistication and ornamental cast of Baker’s appearance, the cards set out two types of Black celebrity. Baker is a spectacle—often described as a work of art—while Douglas is Black talent embodied. Neither is fully human, nor credited as an artist. The Black female is portrayed as exotic in dress and in the description of her talent. The Black male appears in neutral “professional” attire but is known through his body. The cards place Baker and Douglas separately from

the American dancers suggesting how race informs their place in the world created in the album—not quite American, not quite exotic.

Douglas’s photograph on cigarette cards presented another way for Germans to learn of his unique skill as a Black performer. As a collectible item, his image became a commodity as well as a source of commercial desire. Whereas previously people would only be able to see Douglas on tour, the cards brought the image of the Black dancer to a larger audience that would come to know him as part of a wider entertainment world.

**“At Home All Over the World”**

In 1930, Douglas began a short career in film. Douglas’s appearance on screen was helped by his time working with the stage directors Erik Charell and Max Reinhardt. Through his tenure in Germany, Douglas went beyond staging his own productions, integrating himself into German theater and film by working with other German artists. His “crossover” from stage into film was an outgrowth of his choreography for Erik Charell’s revue *Von Mund zu Mund* (1926) and Max Reinhardt’s *Die Artisten* (1928), an adaptation of the American Broadway musical *Burlesque*. Douglas received equal mention in the press for his involvement in these productions. Both staged in Reinhardt’s Grosses Schauspielhaus, they represent elements of 1920s Weimar culture. Charell’s revues were some of the largest productions in Berlin; they were often referred to as “hyper revues” for the size of its cast and the elaborate stage settings they used. *Von Mund zu Mund*, as Karin Wieland describes it, was “absurd and kitschy.” Indeed, the plot, which was divided into two acts, follows five children who dream of their future

lives in the first act, and experience that future as adults in the second.<sup>30</sup> Importantly, *Von Mund zu Mund*'s dramaturgy followed the decadent example of the Paris's Folies-Bergère revues with its elaborate sets and several different dances from around the world. Yet Charrell's revues increased the number of performers to an even larger quantity.

For Charell, Douglas danced and directed the chorus girls in *Von Mund zu Mund*, a revue that was, like *Black People*, a loosely cohesive story. The first act follows the various dreams of children as they imagine their possible future [Image 5.5]. Then the second act presents some of the possibilities of that future. Douglas, along with the German stars, was singled out: "a class of his own is the negro dancer Louis Douglas, to whom eccentricity is innate."<sup>31</sup> Importantly though, the revue acknowledges how well the chorus girls dance: "With graceful security, every image in the movement and in the groups is enhanced by a hundred German girls, nimble legs, beautifully grown, dancing accurately through the revue."<sup>32</sup>

The quality of Douglas's direction was noticed by Charell's friend, Max Reinhardt, who took Douglas to direct his own performance of the Broadway musical, *Burlesque*. Retitled for German audiences, *Die Artisten* follows the misadventures of a white American Broadway couple as they deal with their growing fame. Unlike *Von Mund zu Mund*, which featured Douglas throughout, *Die Artisten* kept Douglas in the

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<sup>30</sup> Wieland, *Dietrich and Riefenstahl*, #

<sup>31</sup> "Eine Klasse für sich ist der Negertänzer Louis Douglas, dem die Erzentrik angeboren ist." "Von Mund zu Mund: Die Charell-Revue im Großen Schauspielhaus" *Berliner Tageblatt*, September 2, 1926,

<sup>32</sup> Mit anmutiger Sicherheit wird jedes Bild in der Bewegung und in den Gruppen gesteigert hundert Deutsche Girls, flink auf den Beinen, schön gewachsen, tanzen akkurat durch die Revue; ihre Spitzen

background even as he worked as the primary choreographer for the show. These early stage productions introduced Douglas to the burgeoning sound-films (Tonfilm) at the end of the Weimar era.

*Die Artisten* was a direct translation of *Burlesque*. Following the behind-the-scenes drama of a Broadway musical, the choreography that Douglas presented most likely helped to give the show-in-translation the feel of a New York show. With Douglas's knowledge and work with chorus girls, he would have been the ablest person to add this element to Reinhardt's production. Yet, most importantly, his presence in teaching the steps to German women, would have lent authenticity to Reinhardt's production as well as a certain metanarrative for Douglas as he played a tap dancer within the production.

Schwartz's *Einbrecher* starred Willy Fritsch as Jacque Durand and Lillian Harvey as Reneé Dumontier. The film is a prototypical 1930s screwball comedy and is a continuation of the light fare of Douglas's time with Charell and Reinhardt. The film follows the unconventional romance between Jacque, a thief, and Reneé, the wife of a toy maker. At the climax of the film, Reneé plans on meeting Jacque in a Parisian jazz club. Yet the jazz club becomes a detour from the plot for Douglas's only scene in the film. Up to the meeting between Reneé and Jacque, no Black character had been seen or introduced. Douglas appears in the club without introduction. The film effectively stops its plot for viewers to watch Douglas and two Black women dance. Then, *Einbrecher* gives us a chance to imagine how audiences saw Douglas's performance. Although the setting is a Parisian jazz club, Berlin audiences would have recognized it as the Haus

Vaterland, a prestigious Berlin entertainment complex that took up an entire city block in Potsdamer Platz in Berlin.<sup>33</sup> At any given time, Haus Vaterland claimed to have 6,000 patrons. Appropriately, its motto, “Every Nation Under One Roof,” was illuminated over its entrance. It housed multiple restaurants devoted to provincial German and international cuisine. Each restaurant was decorated to match its location, including costumed waiters. Along with Viennese, Hungarian, Turkish, and Spanish restaurants was the American restaurant, the Wild West Bar. The bar incongruously mixed a cowboy aesthetic with an in-house jazz band, which Bechet played in 1929. According to theater scholar Mel Gordon, it “radiated modernism, like a still from *Metropolis*.”<sup>34</sup> Still, Haus Vaterland, not only in its name but in the way it “captured” so many scenes at once, evokes its imperial control over the world. Where Germans could come and be treated to the exotic without leaving the country.

Douglas’s scene at the end of *Einbrecher* is telling in its focus on Douglas’s mastery as well as the racialized imagery that Black performers confronted abroad. As Sidney Bechet’s band plays at a breakneck pace, the viewer sees Douglas smiling, completely in control of his body. His smile as he completes complicated steps reveals that Douglas is comfortable and enjoying what his body can do. As he dances, the song quickly increases in tempo and the camera pulls in to focus on the movement of Douglas’s feet. Recalling how much critics noted Douglas’s quick feet work, this focus on his feet—again unrelated to the plot of the film—suggests that this would amaze

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<sup>33</sup> Bechet, *Treat It Gently*, 157.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon, *Voluptuous Panic*, 53.

German audiences. Yet even as the audience is entreated to look at Douglas's fleet feet, the film begins a quick montage across the bar's décor of smiling Black audience members, automated toy monkeys swinging around fake plastic trees, and a giant poster of a Black man's head with pursed lips. Condensing space and time, the montage's use of racist imagery is striking, not for the fact that Germans held racist beliefs toward Black people, but for how the bar *replicated* Harlem bars frequented by white Americans to watch Black performers. The staging was similar to what one would see in the Plantation Club or the Cotton Club. As the film and the actual Haus Vaterland suggests, Germans wanted not only to see Black performance but also to replicate American venues in the creation of their own amusements. Thus, the scene reveals how Germans had imported many of the ideas around Black entertainment for their own use by the end of the Weimar era. Yet importantly, this singular moment in *Einbrecher* also suggests that there was an interest in seeing more of Douglas than his revues and, further, that taking time out of the plot to watch Douglas was worth the diversion.

Douglas's earlier performances with stage and film directors suggest that not only was he not interested in German politics but neither were these directors. As Peter Jelavich states, revue directors were "balanced and cautious in their political statements, in order to avoid offending ticket-buyers of any political persuasion."<sup>35</sup> The journalist Montague "Monty" Jacobs worried that "the director was 'terrorized' by 'fear of the great masses.'"<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 188.

<sup>36</sup> Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 189.

Yet if these directors were worried about the masses, Victor Trivas's anti-war film, *Niemandsland*, directly addressed the political climate of the Late-Weimar era. Filmed in 1931, the film appeared at a time when the economic crisis of 1929 destabilized the "Grand Coalition" cabinet led by the Social Democrat Herman Müller. The Grand Coalition, Evans explains, "was a rare attempt to compromise between the ideological and social interests of the Social Democrats and the 'bourgeois parties left of the Nationalists.'"<sup>37</sup> In the aftermath of the collapse of the coalition, the German military proved capable of weathering the storm while other institutions crumbled. As Detlev Peukert states, the "crisis of the years 1930-33 gave the Nazi movement a prime opportunity to present itself as a dynamic, modern totalitarian mass party."<sup>38</sup> Thus, the film was released at a time of increasing hope for authoritarianism and continued disenchantment with the Weimar Republic.

Indeed, the film put Louis Douglas in the center of a politicized retelling of the First World War. Many in Germany still responded to Black soldiers as figures of disdain given their association with France and the Treaty of Versailles. Yet Trivas's film wished to present Black men—through Douglas—as part of an international brotherhood. Douglas's appearance in the film as a Black soldier argued against the historical nationalism of the First World War and the new anti-Semitic and racist nationalism of the 1930s.

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<sup>37</sup> Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 247.

<sup>38</sup> Detlev, *The Weimar Republic*, 280.

Premiering on December 10, 1931, *Niemandslan*d had, like many films in Germany and the United States, a limited release. Yet, those critics who saw the film, praised it.<sup>39</sup> From its introductory crawl, the film directly tells the audience of its pacifist intentions:

This is a story of conflict... This film portrays the lives, loves and hates of five men and their family. Their experiences transcend war. Their plea is a call to all embittered humanity... Despite their different tongues and despite the fact that they have been swayed by various propaganda, they seek to reach a common goal.<sup>40</sup>

This is followed by the sound of explosions and the images of the destruction caused by World War I. The film introduces each of the five central characters through small vignettes: the Englishman, Charles Brown (Hugh Douglas), seeing his newborn child for the first time; the Frenchman, Charles Durand (Georges Péclet), falling in love with a woman on a Parisian tram; the Jewish man, Lewin (Vladimir Sokoloff), celebrating his marriage and the beginning of his new family; the Black man, Joe Smiles (Louis Douglas performing in a French cabaret) and the German man, Ernst Kohler (Ernst Busch), playing war with his son. As the film's image cuts from staring down into the abyss of the German's toy cannon to the real implement of war, the narrator rhythmically states, "Cannon, cannon, cannon, all over the world, shells, shells, shells, orders, orders." This commentary introduces an extended montage of different nationalities, including France, Japan, Germany, Russia, England, and the United States, preparing men for war and celebrating their deployment.

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<sup>39</sup> Nenno, "Undermining Babel: Victor Trivas's *Niemandslan*d (1931)" in *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema*, 286.

<sup>40</sup> *Niemandslan*d, 1931

Following a scene of trench warfare and artillery bombardment, Durand and Kohler find themselves in a bombed-out building in no-mans-land. Together they soon discover Lewin, trapped under a beam and missing his uniform—making him unidentifiable to either the Frenchman or the German. Together Durand and Kohler help Lewin from his trap, only to discover that Lewin is shell-shocked and incapable of speech. Resigned to returning to their own troops, Durand and Kohler plan to leave Lewin, only to discover that as they move to leave the cratered out building, they are indiscriminately fired-upon by their own countrymen.

Shortly thereafter, Louis Douglas's character, Joe Smiles, who was also stuck in no-man's-land, drags the unconscious Brown into the same building as the other soldiers [Image 5.6]. Smiles is joined by Lewin in the care of the wounded Brown. Soon, Kohler and Duran join to tend to Brown, symbolically putting aside the animus between Germany and France. Silently agreeing to a ceasefire, the five soldiers make their location in no-mans-land their home. Joe Smiles becomes the translator for other soldiers, delivering necessary information. Translating Duran's French to the injured Brown that he will soon recover, Smiles informs the group that "Here is no man's land, here is no war." Singing with the Frenchman as they make soup from tree bark and a side of bread, Joe Smiles entertains the shell-shocked and now mute Lewin, "si vous plaît, essen, manger" ("Please, eat, eat"). Before allowing his new colleagues to eat, he toasts each of the soldiers, stating that they are each now friends. Yet, this shared meal turns into a false start for their international comradeship. After finishing their meal, Joe Smiles inquires of his new friends, "Why war? Do you want war?" This launches three of the men, except

for Lewin and Joe Smiles, to defend their nation's reason for going to war, including the German conquest of Belgium and the expansion of African colonies. As their voices rise, the sound of machine gun and cannon fire likewise intensifies. Opposed to the British, the French, and the German position is the mocking laughter of Joe Smiles and Lewin's meditative look as he listens to their squabbles. Soon they all notice Joe's laughter as it rises above their own arguments. Having gained their attention, he launches into the primary lesson of the film:

Hurrah! Already enemies, you make the noise like the shells, and why? You all say the same thing but in a different language, that's why you don't understand each other. How stupid! You see, you have different languages, different uniforms. I understand but the dumb man [Lewin] he has no uniform, he can't speak. We're all friends to him. Before the war, I was an artist. A variety artist from London: Alhambra. Paris: Moulin Rouge. Berlin: Wintergarten. Über all.

Next comes his own performance: "Ladies and gentlemen; mein damen und herren; messiers, mesdames. Joe Smiles, artiste internati...[interrupted by gunfire] artiste international. Programme Nummer eins, number one." Showing off his amazing dance skill, Smiles tap dances on a fallen plank to the sound of the machine gun and cannon fire, which replicate the timbre of the snare and bass drum, mesmerizing his international audience as they stare amazed at his feet. It is Joe Smiles' dance which breaks up the argument, leading the soldiers to begin to communicate in earnest despite the differences in their languages. Soon after, the soldiers strip off their military jackets, removing any identification of what side of the war they belong to. In effect, they join Lewin, the only character who was unidentifiable.

Lewin, who had served as a character of sympathy that brings the three recognized nationals to set aside their animus at the beginning of the film, is given the most evocative moment of the film. When a gas grenade is dropped into the soldiers' dugout, Viktor Sokoloff gives his character pathos as he screams in warning to his comrades. Each character's response to the gas attack and the close up of the actor's faces reveal the mortal danger and the disfiguring capabilities of mustard gas present. Saving all of them from certain death, Lewin's role reinforces the comradeship that Joe Smiles began. As the characters huddle together, the dangers of the outside world force the men to be not only ideologically closer but also physically in contact with one another.

After surviving the gas attack, the five men are besieged by a barrage of cannon fire which destroys their dugout, forcing them to come together in order to survive. While their efforts to preserve their make-shift shelter fail, they manage to prevail. In the final scene, they don their uniforms, rearm, and march out of the dugout together, destroying the barbed wire surrounding it. As the screen fades to black, the following lines provide summary and prophecy:

What is their end? They march forward – five men. Five men who met in No Man's Land and refused to kill each other. Marching forward. Defying their common enemy—War.

The ambiguous ending confirms that the experience in no-mans-land has changed the five soldiers. No longer confined by their nationalities after working together to survive, they have created a little utopia, however tenuous and brief, in no-mans-land.

*Niemandsland* presents the Black American as a mediating voice in Europe. The German critical reception in Germany took note of Douglas's performance. The film

critic Hans Siemsen recognized the power in having a Black character in the film.

Recalling the scene of Douglas serving as mediator for the German, Frenchman, and Englishman, Siemsen saw it as

...one of the most beautiful and best thoughts of this beautiful film that this Negro, this member of a despised "uncultivated", "inferior" race (due to his internationality) is the interpreter and mediator... And not only because he is an "international artist", not only because he can stutter a few words in any language, this Negro is the good spirit of this collapsed island between the feuding speeches of the enemy, but also because he, the negro, has no national interest, has no "patriotism", because he is not a German, not a Frenchman, not an Englishman, but "only" a Negro, only a poor but reasonable little man.<sup>41</sup>

Siemsen understood the irony of Louis Douglas' appearance in the film. Joe Smiles is divorced from the world of national allegiance. He holds none of the old-world patriotism of the three nationals depicted in the film. Earlier scenes depicting the regimentation of European men going off to war excluded Joe Smiles, and instead showed him bowing good-bye from the stage. Depicting art as utterly at odds with war, the scene of Douglas with the four other men, positions him as an alien among a group of different nationalities, soldiers who each represent his own country. And though Lewin's home is identified as from "somewhere in the world" (irgendwo in der Welt), the extended scene of his wedding ceremony is the longest introductory scene for the five characters. Thus

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<sup>41</sup> Und es ist einer der schönsten und besten Gedanken dieses schönen Films, daß dieser Neger, dieser Angehörige einer verachteten "unkultivierten", "minderwertigen" Rasse (infolge seiner Artisten-Internationalität) Der Dolmetscher und Vermittler wird... Und nicht nur weil er "internationaler Artist" ist, nicht nur weil er... jeder Sprache ein paar Worte stottern kann ist dieser Neger der gute Geist dieser zusammengeschossenen Insel zwischen den feuerspeienden feindlichen Linten, sondern auch deshalb, weil er, der Neger, keinen Nationalehrgeiz, keinen "Patriotismus" hat, weil er kein Deutscher, kein Franzose, kein Engländer, sondern "nur" ein Neger" nur ein armer, aber vernünftiger kleiner Mensch ist. Hans Siemsen, Bühne und Film Column, Rainer Lotz Collection.

even the diasporic Lewin is defined by his grounding in a family and tradition that is soon to be destroyed.

In 1932, Charles Hooper Trask, reporting from Berlin, shared with the readers of the *New York Times* that he had grown tired of World War films: “We certainly have had our share of war films.” Thinking over the various war films he has seen, *The Big Parade*, *Journey’s End*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, he began to feel that each fell into a set of clichés. A weary Trask confesses, “I attend each new war picture with apprehension and some distaste.” Despite his exhaustion with war films, Trask noted one film that caught his attention as different from the rest: “But now along comes “Niemandsländ” (No Man’s Land) at the Mozartsaal and knocks my theories lobsided[sic]. Here is a film that has a lot of things to say about war and says them in an entirely new language.” As a German-made war film with an international cast and a Russian director, *Niemandsländ* not only spoke about war in “an entirely new language,” it came from an unexpected place. Like German critics, he was taken by one actor in particular:

Where the players are so good it seems almost out of place to select any particular one for especial mention, but, perhaps due to his role as the Negro international music hall artist who functions as interpreter for the German, Frenchman and Englishman, the work of Louis Douglas is outstanding.

The acclaim accorded Douglas’s performance in *Niemandsländ* confirms the extent of his success in Germany. As scholar Anton Kaes has shown, German films after the First World War were reticent to create war films in the model of America, Britain, and France. The reasons were not as simple as the fact that Germany had lost the war.

Instead, it was “the double wound of war and defeat [that] festered beneath the glittering surface of its [Weimar’s] anxious modernity.”<sup>42</sup> Germans were more likely to place their experiences of war in other genres. Thus the films *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *a Symphony of Horror*, and Fritz Lang’s *Die Nibelungen* and *Metropolis* “found artistic expression” for the traumas of the First World War. They were representatives of what, Anton Kaes called, “shell shock cinema.” The experience of “Shell shock was an unconscious rebellion and bodily reaction to the horror of trench warfare.”<sup>43</sup> As Hobsbawm states, the trench warfare of the Western Front “became a machine for massacre such as had probably never before been seen in the history of warfare. Millions of men faced each other across the sandbagged parapets of the trenches under which they lived, like and with, rats and lice.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, these hallmarks of Weimar cinema feature many of the anxieties created by war, including “pathological serial killers, mad scientists, and naïve young men traumatized by encounters with violence and death.”<sup>45</sup> As Kaes suggests, German cinema dealt with the war most significantly through metaphor and memories of trauma throughout the Weimar era.<sup>46</sup> In *Niemandland*, we see a direct confrontation with the trauma of war. The models of Joe Smiles in his dance-of-critique against the war and Lewin in his embodiment of the symptoms of shell shock

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<sup>42</sup> Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, 2

<sup>43</sup> Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Direct representations of the war would only become a part of German cinema during the Nazi-era. These films, as part of a larger ideological campaign to inculcate audiences into a nationalist construction of community focused on the battlefield heroism of the middling years of the war, reveling in the possibilities of victory through those decisive German battles that forestalled the end of the war.

offer war not as a valiant effort, but rather as an inhumane and destructive force that tears men from their families and destroy the homosocial brotherhood.

Siegfried Kracauer, German intellectual and cultural critic, critiqued the film for its unrealistic utopian ideal. To him, the film “attempt[ed] to defame war by contrasting it with a community which has all the traits of the lamasery of Shangri-La.”<sup>47</sup> He believed the film argued that the “community results from the acute pressure of catastrophic events, it is nothing but an emergency brotherhood...From no-man’s land they move towards never-never land, and the war continues.”<sup>48</sup> The film works through the fantastical where racial difference is effaced, not in solidarity in the individual struggles of the soldiers but in their group effort. Although Douglas’s performance as Joe Smiles and Sokoloff’s performance of Lewin counter the squabbling of the British, French, and German soldiers, in truth this is done in service of their education. To be sure, the film does not work through virulent stereotypes, but it does suggest that it is the three nationals are the central characters. Further, the ambiguous ending only hints that perhaps the five men will change society, their guns at the ready as they charge forward together. Yet told without comment, the film reveals itself as a fantastical wish fulfillment for a war that was decidedly already over.

The film’s director, Victor Trivas, was emphatic that the film was constructed not to show the real conditions of war, but rather to expose how war dehumanized the common man: “If enemies who have escaped the atmosphere of mass hysteria meet on a

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<sup>47</sup> Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 235.

<sup>48</sup> Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 235-236.

spot of earth between the fronts, then they will also discover the common language of simple human feelings.”<sup>49</sup> In this mission of humanism, then, it is the characters, Joe Smiles and Lewin who are able to keep their humanity even as they are surrounded by the allegedly advanced and nationalistic men of Europe. Already residing in the no-man’s-land of racism and anti-Semitism, Lewin and Smiles reveal something beyond a nationalistic and racist hierarchy. A new world of “human feeling” that they are aware of in their statelessness.

Indeed, the film reinforces this notion through the placing—or lack thereof—for both characters. With the exception of Smiles, all of the main characters are introduced through interactions with their family, Smiles is introduced on the stage of a Parisian cabaret. With a backdrop of New York, Paris, and Berlin, Douglas taps his way up and down a staircase that suggests a journey from America to Germany. It similarly harkened to Bill “Bojangles” Robinson’s famous stair dance that had been seen in international films through the 1920s. Many in the cinema would have recognized Douglas reenacting his own journey from America to Germany. Indeed, the life-preserver on the staircase read “Luisiana,” which could at once represent the birth of jazz in New Orleans as well as Douglas’s revue *Louisiana*, which had just ended after three years of touring Central Europe. Thus the dance sutured the connection between America’s Black traditions and the furthest distance that Douglas had taken these traditions.

Douglas’s dance in no-man’s-land extends the global reach of Black dance traditions, yet places that tradition within a heterotopia as defined by Michel Foucault: a

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Rogowski, *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema*, 287.

place out of time, that does not function like the world around it. Foucault conceived of the heterotopia as a place in which the priorities of normal power relations are altered.<sup>50</sup> The no-man's-land in the film speaks to the "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible." Thus, no-man's-land becomes a site where the soldiers remove their uniforms and create a homosocial utopia, turning their makeshift home into a stage for Joe Smiles whose performance challenges the war beyond their dugout.

This performance directly referenced the struggle between the men of Europe, who erupt into a verbal conflict that replicates the war outside of their shelter. Laughing at their conflict, Douglas expresses his ambivalence through his dancing in rhythm to the shells and machine gun fire outside. It is then Douglas who is the lynchpin of the film, who subverts the war in the middle of the battlefield. In turning hell into a home and responding to the war as folly, he brings sense to his fellow soldiers.

No-man's-land creates a space in which the battlefield becomes a place of parallax. From one viewpoint, the trench becomes the Harlem stage, in which the men

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<sup>50</sup> Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" *Diacritics*, 25. Once more, no-man's-land recalls Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of carnival, "a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act." In *Niemandsland* we see this interaction when Douglas asks his audience of soldiers about the war. He, in effect, lets them perform before him. When Douglas finally interrupts them when he bursts into laughter, it becomes his time to perform. Indeed, Bakhtin had also analyzed the role of Harlequin and his description cannot help but remind us exactly of the role that Douglas serves in the film. "The heroes of folk humor often descend into hell. One of them was Harlequin... In hell Harlequin turns somersaults, leaps and skips, sticks out his tongue, and makes Charon and Pluto laugh. All these gay leaps and bounds are as ambivalent as the underworld itself. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 396-397.

around him, like the cabaret audience at the beginning of the film, watch the Black performer at his mastered craft. Furthermore, no-man's-land alters the racial hierarchy that would place the European men at its apex. It reverses the claim and places Joe Smiles as the most knowledgeable figure among them. Similarly, the one who warns of the gas attack is Lewin, saving Smiles and the three men who can claim national belonging. From this performance a burgeoning internationalist community comes into being to challenge the nationalist conception of community outside of no-man's-land. Thus, the heterotopia alters the racial hierarchy, making Douglas not only the multilingual interpreter, but also the trickster-fabulist, who alters nationalist animosities toward an internationalist ends.

The year the film was released was a year in which street violence had increased and the Nazi party received 15 percent of the Berlin electorate.<sup>51</sup> In spite of the sporadic use of Black Shame propaganda into the 1930s, Trivas reveals the importance of Louis Douglas for late-era Weimar racial politics. His ability to sympathetically play a Black soldier, when the occupation of the Rhine was a constant tool of propaganda throughout the Weimar era, speaks to his singular popularity in Germany. As an admired dancer across Germany, his role as Joe Smiles, suggests that only Douglas could play that role.

Douglas's career marks the culmination of the Black modernist challenge to Germany that *The Chocolate Kiddies* began in 1925. For critics, his performances were at once familiar not only to various American traditions but also to European popular

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<sup>51</sup> A smaller number than the Communists and the Social Democrats who received 27.3 and 27.2 respectively but by 1932, the Nazis would surpass the Social Democrats 26 to 23 percent. Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 228-229.

performance forms. He furthered a challenge of the racial norms between the European and the Black person. It was this idea that Douglas spoke to Germans of only Black modernity *and* said it in a way they understood that marks Douglas as a unique performer of the New Negro Renaissance. As Goll suggested in his review of *la Revue nègre*, it was no longer the gift of European civilization passed on to the primitive African. Like Joe Smile's comrades in no-man's-land, Europeans should applaud this new Black American cultural conquest as it takes over Europe. Douglas's role as teacher and master dancer made his body a desired object. In trying to understand and capture the cultural power of his mastery, it opened up space for welcoming the Black male body into relationships with Europeans.

### *Out of Step*

On May 6, 1933, the Chicago *Defender* informed readers of the effects of Adolf Hitler's dictatorship on Black people. Four days after Hitler had dissolved all labor unions, "the strong arm of Hitler, dictator of Germany, again asserts itself in the administration of stringent rullings[sic]. This time he bans all Negro entertainers including screen and stage stars." To the point, the *Defender* revealed the breadth of Hitler's racism, "Just to make sure that no one is left to sympathize with the Colored brother, the 'great arm' even order the makers of the film, 'Hell on Earth,' sent out of the country." Doubly affected by this was Douglas, "a featured artist in this picture...he went

two weeks ago [to France] when ordered out by Hitler.”<sup>52</sup> This was a shocking turn after the positive press that *Neimandsland* had acquired on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>53</sup>

That year the film had been voted by the National Board of Review one of the best films of the year. In addition, it was voted the year’s best war picture, beating *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Big Parade*, and *Journey’s End*, the movies that Trask viewed as clichés of the genre. Writing for the *Defender*, Chappy Gardner was effusive about the award. The film

has been emphatically voted the greatest of all the war films in a ballot recently conducted by the exceptional photoplays committee of the National Board of Review... The ballot was the result of a special preview of the picture conducted by the committee to which any prominent writers activists, economists, civic leaders and social workers were invited.

Out of a total 175 voters, 116 chose *Niemandslan*d for “its general effectiveness as entertainment of all the films which have resulted from the great war,” 123 voted for its “effective propaganda against war” and “On the score of its general effectiveness irrespective specifically of either entertainment or propaganda, 105 votes were cast for ‘Hell on Earth.’” Gardner made sure to tell readers of the *Defender* that “There is a Colored fellow playing one of the important leads in this film. His name is Louis Douglas... In Paris he became the toast of the boulevards because of his artistic ability. Later he played throughout Europe... and working with various dramatic organizations.

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<sup>52</sup> “Actors Barred by Germany Are Back” *The Chicago Defender*, May 6, 1933, pg 5.

<sup>53</sup> It is unclear if Douglas was chosen specifically by the Nazis or if a larger decree was issued. The Reich Culture Chamber (Reichkulturkammer) would have effectively ended his career by 1933 when anyone seeking artistic work in Germany would need to be a member of the Nazi party and by necessity be classified as an Aryan. Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 231-232.

He speaks German, Italian, French and Russian fluently. In the picture 'Hell on Earth' he makes excellent use of three of these languages.”

Yet despite the accolades of his first starring role, Douglas would slowly fall into obscurity. Following his expulsion, Douglas and his family maintained an address in Paris before they moved sometime in the mid-1930s to Italy. Yet by 1937 with Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, Italy had copied the laws of its German allies, forbidding Black people from working in the arts. Douglas's wife, Marion Cook had already returned to the United States and told Douglas that the country, which he barely knew, had opportunities for Black artists through the Works Progress Administration. Finally, he and his daughter Abbie returned to the United States, where he found himself in an unfamiliar world. His hybrid guise, which had served him so well for almost a decade in Germany, could not translate into work in the United States. Despite the recognition of *Niemandland* by the National Board of Review and the special mentions not only in the Black press but in the *New York Times*, Douglas was unknown. He faced the bitter irony of leaving a foreign people that had once loved him to return to a segregated country that was out of step with his ideas of Black performance. Where Max Reinhardt, Viktor Trivas, and Erik Charell, had been displaced by Nazism's anti-Semitic policies, it was Douglas, the Black *American* who found it more difficult finding work than the German and Jewish expatriates who would make their careers in Broadway and Hollywood.

By 1939, he would make *Policy Kings*, a little known Broadway musical, with James P. Johnson and choreograph various productions for his friend, Langston Hughes. Although Hughes's plays, like *Don't You Want to Be Free*, were well received, reviews

only referenced Douglas in passing as choreographer for these productions. Yet, it was likely he did not receive any accolades because he was too sick to appear on stage. During his interview with Zunk in 1926, Douglas mentioned an intense stomach pain. He had told Zunk of a stomach ulcer and insisted that he would not leave his German doctor to return to the United States.<sup>54</sup> Judging by the films he made in 1930 and 1931, Douglas was in prime condition and his dance steps appear contemporaneous to the steps that younger dancers performed in the United States. Yet returning to the United States, it is very likely he did not receive proper care for his stomach. By the late 1930s, his name all but disappeared and on May 19, 1939, Douglas died of stomach cancer.

The medical care Douglas received in Germany provides some of the rationale for Douglas's choice to remain in Germany as long as he did. Still it only provides part of the story of why Douglas remained in Germany during Hitler's rise to power in the spring and summer of 1933. An interview with a Belgium newspaper explains how the general treatment of Black people in America informed his reluctance to return to the United States: "The Americans despise us, or at least they have long despised us because our skin is of a different color than theirs. They have repeatedly exposed their ideas and what they call the point of view of white citizens." He, like many members of the New Negro Renaissance, believed that Black Americans should be responsible for their own representation: "We owe much to American whites, who have delivered us from slavery,

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<sup>54</sup> Healthcare in the United States was abysmal for Black Americans and it is no exaggeration that the care he would have received in Germany prior to 1933, would have exceeded what was available to Douglas in America.

but we must not barter our freedom for half-slavery. If we have the intellectual and moral value of an American, we are entitled to the same advantages as well.”

In a set of interviews in the 1980s, Douglas’s daughter, Abbie Douglas, recalled her father’s difficulties coming back to the United States:

My father came over [to the United States] and nearly died of a broken heart. Because he had been his own producer, director and everything over in Europe. And over here in ‘37 it was very bad for Black people. And when he would go see Max Reinhardt and all these people that he knew when he had been in Europe, they would tell him ‘if you can get to Hollywood, we’ll help you.’ What was he going to do? Play Stepin Fetchit? He wasn’t the type. He was just out of step for this country.<sup>55</sup>

Douglas’s hybrid image which did so much to challenge notions of race in Europe, was ultimately not understood in America. White and Black American audiences were familiar with Black dance, and indeed there were more innovative Black dancers, such as the Nicholas brothers, that were loved by American audiences. Where he had been one of a kind in Germany, he was one of many in America.

In his 1940 biography, *The Big Sea*, Langston Hughes provides the closest thing to an obituary for Douglas.<sup>56</sup> In a short anecdote, Hughes provides evidence of the central role Douglas contributed to one of the key figures of the New Negro Renaissance. In 1924, prior to Douglas’s return to the United States to begin work with Dudley Reagan on *la Revue nègre*, he performed with his wife in France for the first time since the First World War. It was during his engagement that he came in touch with Hughes at Ada “Bricktop” Smith’s café, Le Grand Duc. At the time Hughes worked at a restaurant and

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<sup>55</sup> Daniel Goldfarb Interview, 1988, Tape Cassette.

<sup>56</sup> No newspaper obituaries have yet to be found.

when he moved from washing dishes to the front of house, he recalled “Louis Douglas gave me one of his old stage tuxedos to work in, a funny, comedian’s tuxedo with wide lapels, but it served as a waiter’s uniform.” In this short reverie, Hughes saw Douglas, “the great dancer and pantomimist,” as part of a cadre of performers that made Paris feel like Harlem: “These Negro entertainers liked Bricktop and they rallied around her. Late, any morning, the Grand Duc was almost like a Harlem night club.”<sup>57</sup> Although Douglas had yet to live in New York, Hughes suggested that he helped to turn a small group of Black Americans into a community of the Renaissance. Much like the community of Bert Williams, George Walker, and Will Cook a generation earlier, Douglas and others turned their after hours into a rich environment that became Hughes’s Harlem community. For Hughes, one of the pioneers of the New Negro Renaissance, to single out Douglas for consideration in his biography speaks to the importance that Hughes placed not only on his formative year in Paris but on the import Douglas played in his early career. To offer Douglas as part of what made Paris feel like Harlem, especially considering Douglas had yet to live in Harlem, reveals that despite a lifetime in Europe, there was a sense of solidarity during those after hour club nights. As one of the most astute observers of the Renaissance, the mention, even if brief, suggests that Hughes considered Douglas an important figure of the New Negro Renaissance.

Although Douglas did not die of a broken heart, as his daughter suggested, we can understand that he had spent his life acclimating to Europe and Germany in particular and a return to America was truly a form of culture shock. Coming back to America shocked

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<sup>57</sup> Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 179.

him not only because he barely knew the culture but also because the place hardly knew him. The body of work he had created—outside of *Niemandsland*—was unknown.

Douglas built his image for Germans. Whereas others like Paul Robeson navigated the Atlantic world and had expansive followings, Douglas unknowingly trapped himself in his own Germanized image, thoroughly integrating himself into German popular culture.

The tragedy of Douglas's death is doubled by the fact that he had made his career in Germany, which was radically changing its discourses of Black men. Nazism deprived Douglas of his own importance in German popular culture. Despite a life spent on the stages of Europe, the enforcement of strict racial categories destroyed Douglas's history. This dispossession speaks to the precarious place of Douglas not only in Germany but the United States, where "pleasure and suffering depend from the start on a sustained social world." Douglas's performance, to which Germans were so responsive, was built for a Germany that would virtually disappear in 1933.

Following from the modernism of *The Chocolate Kiddies* and what Jameson called "coexistence of realities," Douglas's tenure in Germany is an interesting singular case of the racial guise. He was, by the end of his life, a former pickaninny, choreographer, a trained Harlequin, a user of blackface, and a star of latter-day Weimar film. Douglas's choice to live in Germany can be seen in his attempt to find a place where he could be valued, a place where he would not be hated. Truly, as the critical responses show, even among those who disliked other Black performers, Douglas had a place of pride on German stages. It is clear that if it were not for the rise of fascism in Germany that Douglas's career would have continued. Reflecting on her father's career,

Abbie Douglas was unrestrained in describing her father's work in Germany, "He was trying to express his Black soul," but in a country that would come to disown him.

## Chapter Six: Krenek and the Height of Germany's Negro Vogue

It was a period when white writers wrote about Negroes more successfully (commercially speaking) than Negroes did about themselves...It was the period when the Negro was in vogue.<sup>363</sup>

-Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*

On January 6, 1926, the Austrian-born composer Ernst Krenek wrote to his parents from his hotel in Frankfurt-am-Main about a “Negro Revue” called *The Chocolate Kiddies*. He enthusiastically recommended that if the revue came to Vienna, they should “absolutely please go take a look. They are fabulous.”<sup>364</sup> Soon after writing his letter, he began composing a new opera, *Jonny spielt auf*. The opera premiered the following year at the Leipzig State Opera House on February 10, 1927. Despite critics lambasting the opera and Nazis actively sabotaging several performances, the opera was a huge success with fifty staged productions across Germany in its first season. Krenek’s opera was a striking departure from the traditions of German opera.<sup>365</sup> Set in contemporary Europe, Krenek told the story of Jonny, a free-spirited Black musician who upends the world of the reclusive, German composer, Max, a stand-in for Krenek

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<sup>363</sup> Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 228.

<sup>364</sup> In Frankfurt sah ich eine Negerrevue “Chocolat Kiddies”, wenn sie je nach Wien kommen, bitte unbedingt ansehen, sind fabelhaft. Ernst Krenek, January 1926. Wien Rathaus Bibliothek.

<sup>365</sup> Guido Heldt argues that despite the growth of modern operas by Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, Alban Berg, and Arnold Schoenberg, “The repertoire of older operas, though, remained stable and was in 1927 not much different from that in 1917 or 1907. Most frequently performed were the works of Wagner, Verdi, Mozart and Lortzing; Bizet, Weber, and Offenbach also figured prominently.” Heldt, “Austria and Germany, 1918-1960” 147-148.

himself. The opera's inspired use of jazz, film, and radio made the production a modern theatrical wonder. Krenek infused the opera with references to the ascendance of Black culture and the prediction that Europeans would find rejuvenation in its emulation. More to the point, Krenek wanted audiences to feel what he felt when he saw *The Chocolate Kiddies*. Indeed, Jonny not only amazes Max but changes him. In following Jonny's example, Max casts off his European ideals for those embodied in Krenek's muse, *The Chocolate Kiddies*.

In striking contrast with the opera's technological advancements and its innovative use of jazz was the use of blackface at each performance for the singer performing the role of Jonny [Image 6.1].<sup>366</sup> The signification of Blackness for Krenek differed from its history in the United States. Indeed, where American blackface performance was built on the alleged authentic performance of Black traditions by white performers, Krenek's only experience with Black American culture in creating the opera was *The Chocolate Kiddies*. Inspired by their unique appropriations of minstrelsy, *Jonny spielt auf* attempts an interpretation of Black modernity that uses blackface toward modern ends. Simply put, Krenek's opera did not try to replicate the performance of *The Chocolate Kiddies* but tried to bring a similar message of Black modernism to the opera house. This is not to suggest that Krenek's opera is free of racist assumptions about Black people, but to state that Krenek's assumptions are not based on the chattel slavery that

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<sup>366</sup> German opera productions rely on a company of performers employed by the opera house, unlike the Anglo-American practice of performers auditioning for each production. It is unclear if any of the opera houses would have hired a Black opera singer, but the decision would ultimately have been out of Krenek's hands.

defined American blackface from the nineteenth- into the twenty-first century. Instead, his opera reflects the traditions that gave birth to *The Chocolate Kiddies*: Bert Williams, George Walker, and Will Cook at the turn-of-the-century and Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle's *Shuffle Along* in 1921.

This chapter examines the ways that Krenek commodified and altered the blackface tradition to tell his own story of Black modernity. Derived from his experience viewing *The Chocolate Kiddies*, Ernst Krenek's opera offers an implicit argument for the place of Black modernity in Germany. Although Krenek was a Czech Austrian and actively viewed himself as a foreigner within Germany and Switzerland, he created his own Black American character as a counter to his view of a static German culture in need of reinvigoration. Through representing the Black performer through blackface, he created an opera that told a story of a commanding Black culture that Germans could learn from. Indeed, by emulating Jonny, they might succeed in abandoning their interwar weariness and embracing a new way of life. There was of course plenty of essentialist condescension in what Krenek imagined for his fellow Europeans by way of adopting Black American styles and aesthetic forms, but the enthusiasm with which audiences responded to his work demonstrated that the ultimate implications of the work were far more complex.

A brief look at Krenek's biography provides valuable context for his characterizations in the opera. His short-lived marriage to Alma Mahler inspired the *Jonny spielt auf* protagonists Max and his lover Anita, who recall key aspects of Krenek's and Mahler's personalities. Max's indecisiveness and his inability to be an agent in his

own life frustrates Anita, who is adventurous, unencumbered by the world around her, and, importantly, independent. This autobiographical gender dynamic becomes important within the opera as Anita, the New Woman of Europe, seems increasingly more suited to the Black American way of life than the European men around her. The similarities between Anita and Jonny expose Max to a dual model of modernity, one pursued not only by Black men but by European women. What this reveals, then, is a critique of European masculinity and a self-analysis of his own position in relationship to Black men and European women. I then examine the scenes within the opera, where the modern cityscape becomes the setting that Anita and Jonny navigate, expressing their modernity in contrast to Max who prefers the solitary existence of his chalet. By looking at this juxtaposition, I reveal how Krenek uses Jonny and Anita's urban adaptation as a requirement for a modern life. The finale makes this point explicitly, placing Jonny on a giant globe as the men and women of Europe dance around him. Thus, the ending makes the claim abundantly clear that Black people are a new force to be praised.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the 1929 American premier of the opera. While German audiences responded to *Jonny spielt auf* with great enthusiasm, the premier at the Metropolitan Opera House demonstrated the persisting allure of the American minstrel tradition at home. For the opera house manager, Giulio Gatti-Casazza, a Black American character could have nothing to do with modernity, but symbolize a return to nineteenth-century tropes identified with slavery. In contrast to the German productions that aligned the cityscape with the bright lights of Time Square and American nightlife, the American production ended with a chorus line of blackfaced

women and Uncle Sams. The Met's official libretto seemed to erase Krenek's adaptation of blackface for Black modernity. It removed all references to interracial romance from the libretto and the most radical revision of all: Jonny was no longer a Black man, but a white man in blackface. *The Chocolate Kiddies'* transplantation of Black Broadway in Germany, was completely reversed at the Metropolitan Opera House, where American racism required that the opera be grounded in the repudiation of Krenek's original intent.

Despite such promises of turning Jonny white, the actual production stuck to Krenek's original libretto. Such subterfuge in the promotion of the opera replicates the same maneuver as *la Revue nègre*, where the intent of the material was subverted by racist assumptions. Yet as we will see, some critics at the *New York Times* were keenly aware that the American production had missed the point. They lambasted the production for relying on American stereotypes and asked audiences to understand the opera's attempt to reconcile a Black modernity with German culture. The Black American press at *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* felt similarly and thoroughly chronicled the history of the American production for its readers. By concluding on the American production of *Jonny spielt auf*, I uncover how the opera worked within different logics of the 1920s. Where many within Weimar understood Black Americans as an urban and modern people, in America, Black performance traditions, especially those that relied on blackface, were still steeped in ideas of the plantation. The production in the United States exposes the differences in context and traditions of Black performance in America and Germany.

By offering this transatlantic analysis, I reveal how Krenek used ideas about Black American modernity to highlight differences between the Old World and the New.

As Krenek stated in 1931

I thought that by using the jazz elements I might hit on an atmosphere that would fit the collective feeling of the age. As jazz music in practice enjoyed undisputed mastery and general validity, it seemed conceivable that from it one might derive an artistic means that after all belonged to the sphere of music, and so was capable of the most serious and intellectual development, while at the same time having a natural place in the life of modern man.<sup>367</sup>

Krenek's words echo Max Butting's belief that jazz would inevitably leave its mark on Germany.<sup>368</sup> In almost direct fulfillment of Butting's prediction, Krenek's opera is indebted to *The Chocolate Kiddies*. Critics like Yvan Goll believed that Europe was a "dried up land" in which Black people would take on "the leading role" as cultural producers. Krenek's opera was groundbreaking in the way it introduced new aesthetic forms into the language of opera. The last line of the opera signals Krenek's awareness of the significance of his innovations: "The New World comes across the sea in radiance, and inherits ancient Europe by means of the dance!"<sup>369</sup> The American production undermined Krenek's intent, suggesting that *Jonny spielt auf* could only be promoted within the comforts of American minstrel roots. The American production of *Jonny* promoted the dismissal and trivialization of a Black performance history that had been developing since *Clorindy* and *In Dahomey*. Even if white Americans had largely ignored

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<sup>367</sup> Krenek, "New Humanity and Old Objectivity," 586.

<sup>368</sup> Both Butting and Krenek were members of the International Society for Music. Their appreciation for jazz may stem from their involvement in the organization's efforts to heal the music communities across Europe after the First World War.

<sup>369</sup> Michael Hass and Albrecht Drühling, liner notes, *Jonny spielt auf*.

these developments, Krenek modernized blackface tradition by bringing in contemporary story to the opera stage. In effect, Krenek, like Louis Douglas, created a performance of hybridity, where jazz and opera combined yielded something new, and indeed created a new language.<sup>370</sup>

### **Krenek's Life**

Ernst Heinrich Krenek was born on August 23, 1900 in Vienna to Ernst Josef Krenek, a career officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army, and Emanuela Josefa Auguste Čížek, the daughter of a military officer. Krenek Sr. had hoped that his only son would study law or another vocation that would take him beyond his own military career. Yet when the young Krenek showed an aptitude for music, his father supported his development. Krenek Jr. was also a gifted humorist, and started his own satirical journal *Der Skorpion* modeled on *Simplicissimus*.<sup>371</sup> John L. Stewart, points out that by the age of sixteen, Ernst Krenek's writing and music composition reflected his "powerfully visual imagination"<sup>372</sup>

In 1916, in the middle of the First World War, Krenek entered the Imperial Academy of Music and the Performing Arts (*Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst*). The timing for Krenek was significant, he studied under a new modern composer, Franz Schreker who, as the founding director of the Vienna Philharmonic Choir, introduced contemporary works into a city "where music was worshipped to the point of

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<sup>370</sup> Other productions include Kurt Weill's *Mahogany* (1930) and Eugen d'Albert's *Die schwarze Orchidee* (*The Black Orchid*, 1928).

<sup>371</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 12.

<sup>372</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 14.

idolatry but its best living composers were scorned or neglected.”<sup>373</sup> For Krenek, Schreker’s insistence on “originality and the avoidance of banality” remained an important guidepost.<sup>374</sup>

By the end of the war, his taste in reading had evolved from sentimental fiction to the plays of August Strindberg, Frank Wedekind, and the Expressionists. Both Strindberg and Wedekind drew on personal experience to critique bourgeois culture in their work. Wedekind’s dramas, in particular, treated sexual taboos including masturbation, homosexuality, sado-masochism, and abortion. These playwrights directly affected the ethos of expressionism, which sought to evoke their subjects’ versions of reality. Such influences greatly affected Krenek’s operas.

When Franz Schreker was appointed director of the National Academy of Music in Berlin in 1920, he brought along his best students, including Krenek. Berlin was an ideal place for a young artist inspired by Expressionism. Like many youth at the beginning of the interwar period, Krenek was disposed toward radicalism, but his focus was always aesthetic rather than political. Stewart describes Krenek as “a fastidious elitist by temperament, a deeply, though unconsciously, loyal son of the Viennese professional class, with a distaste for the general populace, its past times, culture, and society.”<sup>375</sup> In 1922 he joined the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), the same organization that Max Butting served as a board member. Organized in part to present young composers’ new music, the ISCM helped to restore musical relations between

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<sup>373</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 7.

<sup>374</sup> Quoted in Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 15.

<sup>375</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 26.

England and the countries of continental Europe. Under the leadership of its president, Edward J. Dent, the ISCM became the most well regarded society for new music during his tenure.<sup>376</sup>

Despite his professional growth in Berlin, Krenek never adapted to the city's general atmosphere, and remained disenchanted by its grey weather and its art scene. Under the patronage of Werner Reinhart, he moved to Zurich, where he began a short lived relationship with Anna Mahler, the daughter of the composer Gustav Mahler.<sup>377</sup> Anna, in contrast to the studious Krenek, was extremely extroverted and, according to Stewart, "drew [Krenek] away from his desk to share the amusements she enjoyed."<sup>378</sup> According to Peter Tregear, Anna "had accused his music of lacking 'flowing sentiment' [fließende Empfindung]."<sup>379</sup> Inspired by Mahler's irreverent exuberance, Krenek wrote his second opera, *der Sprung über den Schatten* (The Leap Over the Shadow) in 1923.<sup>380</sup> Although a farce composed with the hope of supporting his more serious works, *der Sprung* featured many hallmarks of his later opera, *Jonny spielt auf*, including jazz tonalities and references to American popular culture. Moreover the plot reflected Krenek's own personal transformations by focusing on a male protagonist overcoming his introverted restraint.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 46.

<sup>377</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 46.

<sup>378</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 49.

<sup>379</sup> Tregear, *Ernst Krenek*, 26.

<sup>380</sup> Krenek's first opera was *Zwingburg*.

<sup>381</sup> Krenek, *Horizons Circled*, 37.

*Der Sprung über den Schatten* tells the story of Princess Leonore who loves the inhibited and impoverished poet, Goldhaar. Goldhaar is in love with Leonore, but unaware that she returns his feelings. Unfortunately, Leonore is already married to the abusive and irascible Prince Kuno. Despite the many obstacles to their relationship, Leonore and Goldhaar are able to rendezvous at a masked ball, where a charlatan hypnotist and psychoanalyst, Dr. Berg, preaches that the key to overcoming inhibitions is, literally, to jump over one's shadow. Dr. Berg's "cure" becomes Leonore's plea for Goldhaar to leap over his shadow and free himself. Following an improbable revolution at the end of the opera, during which Kuno is overthrown, the lovers elope, and Dr. Berg is elected president of a new republic. The farcical ending suggests a critique of the liberal democratic mores of the interwar period, where charlatans could be placed in high office. It reflected Krenek's own uncertainty around the Austrian and Weimar Republics.

*Der Sprung*, Krenek's first libretto, contains many autobiographical elements. As he would later do with *Jonny*, Krenek inserted himself into the narrative as Goldhaar. The name Goldhaar (literally translates to Gold Hair) was a clever reference to the anxious nature that Krenek and other Europeans felt. As Krenek mused late in life, "This idea [that nobody can get over his inhibitions] has haunted me through all my adult life, for I have always entertained the wish and hope that I could rearrange some traits of my personality."<sup>382</sup> Further, the opera reflected the tempestuous relationship between Krenek and Anna Mahler that ended their brief marriage in 1924. The opera's focus on an

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<sup>382</sup> Krenek, *Horizons Circled*, 37

inhibited artist, an elusive romantic attachment and a highly extroverted compatriot, Dr. Berg, made *Der Sprung* a precursor for *Jonny spielt auf*.

The opera premiered at the Frankfurt Opera House on June 9, 1924. It appealed to audiences who were critical of Weimar institutions and gave voice to Krenek's own distance from interwar politics.<sup>383</sup> *Der Sprung* also references the burgeoning sounds of jazz. Dancers move to a syncopated rhythm, the music periodically used a flat-third in a major scale imitating the blues scale, the libretto references the mad jazz songs of America (*Jazzband spiele tolle Lieder auf!*) and the instrumentation includes a banjo and xylophone.<sup>384</sup> The use of these tonalities and lyrical references were not innovative in themselves. Other composers, such as Igor Stravinsky, had already used ragtime motifs in his 1918 piece, *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*.

Still, the opera was also a major departure from traditional German opera.<sup>385</sup> It marked the first time that Krenek used the sounds of telephones and car horns in the score. According to Stewart, the audience enjoyed the opera, but critics were divided. Many praised Ludwig Rottenberg's conducting as well as the staging, but most hated the libretto. Critics denounced the opera for being incoherent and overly long. For Krenek the most biting criticism was that using psychoanalysis was already a dated reference.<sup>386</sup> Yet, the suggestion that the psychoanalysis was passé by 1924, ignores that for many psychoanalysis was viewed as a "Jewish science" made lurid by its focus on sex and

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<sup>383</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 70-71.

<sup>384</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 72-73

<sup>385</sup> During rehearsals for *Der Sprung*, Krenek would begin a life long friendship with Theodor Adorno

<sup>386</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 72-73

sexuality.<sup>387</sup> Further, the name “Berg” may have implied a Jewish identity. Krenek’s possible portrayal of a Jewish character that leads German characters to a new life suggests at once a willingness to play with the anxieties of anti-Semites while simultaneously reinforcing the stereotypes through his portrayal of Berg as a charlatan. Indeed, the conception of Dr. Berg as a charlatan and a Jew further suggests that Goldhaar’s recovery may either not last long or that the cure was simply a placebo. In both cases, Krenek’s opera used ideas around race to suggest that the interwar period was permeated with cultural anxiety.

Like his character in *Der Sprung*, Krenek decided to abandon his homeland for Paris in 1924. While he used the money from *Der Sprung* to begin work on his third opera, *Orpheus und Eurydike*, he spent his free time pursuing new forms of urban entertainment. Whether ballet or opera, revues or theater, Krenek threw himself into a vibrant cultural milieu he had avoided for most of his life. Among others, he met Stravinsky, a composer whom Werner Reinhart also supported. Krenek’s first major introduction to jazz came from the writings of playwright Jean Cocteau. But there was no substitute for hearing the real thing for the first time, in a 1926 performance of *The Chocolate Kiddies*, which had a transformative impact on his music.

**“Everything of value in the world is mine”**

*Jonny spielt auf* features many of the themes that Krenek elaborated in *Der Sprung*: a love triangle, a protagonist crippled by inhibitions, and the popularity of

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<sup>387</sup> Frosh, *Hate and the ‘Jewish Science’*, 63-90.

American music. The story follows Max, who Krenek described as “an introverted, problem ridden composer...representing the typical mental attitudes of the ponderous, inhibited Central European intellectual.”<sup>388</sup> The opera opens with Max standing in the shadows of the Alpine glaciers, wishing to remain separate from the world beneath him. His reverie is disrupted by a chance encounter with Anita, an opera singer who has lost her way on a hike. In contrast to Max, who is comforted by the solitude of this remote terrain, Anita is terrified by its immensity and stillness. He attempts to convince her of the beauty of the mountain but all she feels is its deadly solitude. Finally, he relents in his efforts to convince her. Noticing that Anita is freezing, Max offers to help her back down the mountain to her chalet. They quickly fall in love, but Anita must complete a performance engagement in Paris before they can be together. She urges him to come with her but he is afraid of how the city will change him.

These opening scenes of the opera immediately set up a juxtaposition between Krenek and Anna Mahler’s stand-ins, Max and Anita. In establishing these characters, Krenek’s protagonist and the prima donna express their personalities and outlooks on the world: Max, the romantic intellectual, and Anita, the modern urbanized woman. They love each other but have different views on how to live. Where Max praises the Alps, wishing to be lost in their grandeur, Anita sees the mountains as lifeless and a danger to a life well-lived. This is emphasized, when Anita offers Max to come with her, reversing the proposal Max offered Anita to stay in the Alps with him. Max refuses, and Anita travels to Paris alone, promising to return shortly.

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<sup>388</sup> Krenek, *Horizons Cirled*, 38.

The Alps were a powerful symbol in German culture, one wrapped up in notions of the nation and race. Historian Tait Keller, has shown that the Alps and mountaineering—Alpinism—played an important role after the First World War, “Alpinism became a tool for national defense and the common good. Social dislocation, economic turmoil, and heightened cultural anxieties following defeat in 1918 politicized civic Alpinism to an unprecedented degree, which resulted in a decided shift to the right.”<sup>389</sup> Throughout the 1920s, Alpinism appealed more and more to militarism and anti-Semitism. Max’s inability to confront the world outside of the Alps, suggests Krenek was again using familiar anti-Semitic imagery to argue against the contemporary political mood in Germany and Austria.

This was made clear in the next scene, which juxtaposed Max’s isolation from the action with the variety of urban types that Anita meets the night of her performance in Paris. Indeed, the plot jumps from the perspective of the prima donna to Yvonne, a hotel maid. Inside a hotel room, she listens to the music of Jonny’s band. While she listens to the music of the jazz band just off stage, she sings of her love for Jonny. Yet the appearance of the world renowned violinist and noted Don Juan, Daniello grabs her attention, as he brags “The whole earth is girdled by a wreath of my countless triumphs.”<sup>390</sup> Just as Jonny returns from his concert, he notices how stricken Yvonne is by Daniello. Envyng the violinist, Jonny sets his sights on stealing Daniello’s prized Amati violin. While waiting for the right time to steal the violin from Daniello’s hotel

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<sup>389</sup> Keller, *Apostles of the Alps*, 217.

<sup>390</sup> Hass, Michael and Albrecht Drühling. Liner Notes, *Jonny spielt auf: Entartete Musik, Music Suppressed by the Third Reich*. DECCA.

room, he spots Anita on the street. He makes his sexual interest clear as he sings, "O, by Jove, the white lady is beautiful." Significantly, Jonny suggests that interracial desire goes both ways, "I know you white women well. At first you resist, then you enjoy yourself and then 'adieu'" to which Anita admits to an "urge of the blood." Noticing Jonny's seduction of Anita, Daniello intercedes in hopes of becoming Anita's savior. To ensure his success, he takes Jonny aside, offering to pay him off to take a fall in Daniello's "defense" of Anita. Accepting the money, Daniello "rescues" Anita, exclaiming, "Get away from here, Negrillon," as Jonny leaves. Daniello, in Jonny's stead, successfully takes Anita back to her room. Using the seduction as a distraction, Jonny sneaks into Daniello's room and steals the violin. The next morning, as Anita begins to depart the hotel, she discovers that Daniello has fallen in love with her. Shrugging off the night of seduction, she departs back to Max, leaving Daniello shocked by his unrequited love. As she departs, Jonny hides the violin in Anita's banjo case. Discovering his violin is missing, he accuses Yvonne and has her fired. Seeing the maid's rough treatment by Daniello and the hotel, Anita sympathetically hires the maid to return with her to the resort.

The second act begins in Max's chalet, where the young composer anxiously waits for Anita in to return from Paris. Exhausted and depressed, he angrily confronts Anita when she arrives a day late. Feeling strongly reproached, Anita responds that Max cannot live for her but must find happiness and strength within himself. After Anita exits, Yvonne recounts the details of Anita's night with Daniello to Max, and the angry composer storms off to the Alps. With Max's room empty, Jonny finds the violin with

Yvonne's help, claiming, "Everything of value in the world is mine. The old world created it but no longer knows what to do with it. So now the new world in all its splendor arrives across the sea and conquers old Europe through dance."<sup>391</sup> Jonny's triumphant declaration reveals Krenek's full suggestion that Black modernism is a leading force in the world. Unlike Dr. Berg, who played upon anti-Semitic concerns around republicanism and Jewishness, Jonny is presented, despite his theft as the rightful heir of the violin and by extension European culture.

While Jonny celebrates his triumph, Max has returned to the mountain. Seeking escape in the solitude of the mountain, the voice of the mountain urges Max to return to humanity, insisting that unlike nature, which is immortal, mortal humans must live and suffer. Hearing Anita's voice over the radio from the resort, Max decides to return to her only to discover that she has decided to leave for America. Concurrently, hearing Jonny playing his newly acquired violin on the same radio station, Daniello recognizes the sound of his stolen instrument and informs the police. Although aware that the violin has brought him immense popularity, Jonny knows that Daniello will pursue him and the violin. To avoid any chance of his crime being discovered, Jonny resolves to return to America as well.

The opera reaches its climax at a train station where all the characters have appeared. Max has followed Anita, hoping to join her to America. Jonny, also on his way to America, ditches the violin among Max's luggage, leading the police to accuse him of stealing the violin. Picking up the violin, Max is accused of being the culprit. Meanwhile,

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<sup>391</sup> Michael Hass and Albrecht Drühling, liner notes, *Jonny spielt auf*.

Daniello angrily confronts Yvonne, who defends herself by pushing Daniello onto the tracks where he is crushed by an approaching locomotive. Recognizing the trouble he has caused, Jonny saves Max from prison by leading the police on a high speed chase back to the train station. In the wake of Daniello's death, Max decides to live his life with meaning and accompanies Anita to America, while Jonny stands astride a giant globe as people of the train station dance around him, praising his victory over Europe.

Despite this celebration of a Black man on the stage, German critics responded negatively to Krenek's opera. Yet while hostile reviews typically ended an opera run, as was the case of *Der Sprung*, *Jonny* generated enough excitement among audiences to offset the negative press. Despite the dismissiveness of the established critics, some reviewers saw the opera as introducing Black culture as a dominant force into European art music. Friedrich Schwabe, writing for *Der Reichsbote* of Berlin, offered typical praise, "The Negro Jonny plays on a stolen master violin and all, all, dance to its tones. The culture of the white race lies on the ground; the Negro plays on."<sup>392</sup> By the end of the season, the production had 50 separate stagings in Germany with a total of 400 individual performances. It was also translated into Russian, Hungarian, Slovene, Serbian, Polish, and Flemish by the end of the year, with *Jonny* going into production all over Europe by 1928.

Rudolph Smirzitz's promotional map for Krenek's publishing firm Universal Edition speaks to the popularity of Krenek's opera [Image 6.3]. Smirzitz's image was a powerful invocation of Krenek's image of Black Americans; Black figures stood atop the

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<sup>392</sup> Quoted in Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 87.

regional capitals of Germany. Each of the Black figures on the promotional map was dressed like Jonny in an iconic vaudeville suit. Some danced with each other, some played musical instruments, and some juggling the letters of various cities. In so doing, they were playing with the dominant culture itself: turning it upside down and inside out. These little figures portrayed a country overrun by Black men. In effect, the map suggested a new colonization by Black Americans, propagated by Krenek's opera. However, unlike the Black Shame, the map suggests that this invasion was eagerly embraced, venerating the cultural invasion of the sacred spaces of the opera house by Black American music.<sup>393</sup> By showing how German culture was being revitalized by the image of a Black man, these figures suggested that Black men *had become* the celebrated manifestation of German culture.

### *Creating a Stage for the Modern*

Krenek's opera rearranged many of the symbols that audiences were familiar with. The use of the Alpine glacier provides a powerful case in point. Krenek's use of the mountain was not only the refutation of the Alps as a site of racial purity but a critique of the popular German mountain films (Bergfilme) of the 1920s. Mountain films were, for their time, daring films that symbolized the triumph of the human spirit over nature. And like the actual practice of Alpinism, the Bergfilm genre was "kindred to the Nazi spirit," according to the cultural critic, Sigmund Kracauer.<sup>394</sup> Indeed, Leni Riefenstahl's second

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<sup>393</sup> Peter Tregear suggests that the image may have been purposefully provocative and controversial in its suggestion of a Germany overrun by Black men. Tregear, *Ernst Krenek*, 37.

<sup>394</sup> Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 112

action role was in the Bergfilm, *The Holy Mountain* by Arnold Franck.<sup>395</sup> Although Krenek could not have known the role that Bergfilm would play in its promotion of nature over the city, Jonny juxtaposed the urban environment as a place of self-realization with the solitude of the mountain retreat. Nancy P. Nenno asserts that the Bergfilme present a narrative of “confrontation between a [male] mountain climber and an urban woman.” More over, she argues, they presented a confrontation between two conceptions of the mountain: the masculine “alpine tourist” versus the mass culture “urban tourist.” “In the eyes of the urban tourist, the alpine landscape is transformed from inhospitable to accommodating, from turbulent to harmonious, no longer a site of spirituality and pilgrimage, the landscape is transformed by the gaze of mass tourism into a consumer item.”<sup>396</sup> Krenek is critical of this model of transformation, where the mountain serves as a place of human development. By having Max choose the life that waits for him in America, instead of life in the mountains, Krenek rejects the ethos of the Bergfilm, for the city. It is Anita, the urban visitor to the mountain, who convinces Max, the permanent alpine tourist, to escape the mountain together. Through her strong will and his desire for her, Anita beckons Max to the urban environment and eventually to America. It is the modern city, the opera suggests, that will be the home of the uninhibited and the adventurous.<sup>397</sup> The opera thus opposes the purity of the nation that supposedly resides in the Alps and purposefully aims the heroes toward the multiculturalism of city life.

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<sup>395</sup> Nenno “‘Postcards from the Edge’: Education to Tourism in the German Mountain Film,” 62.

<sup>396</sup> Nenno, “Postcards from the Edge,” 63.

<sup>397</sup> Walter Brüggemann, the stage director of the premier of the opera at the Leipzig Opera House, helped to realize this vision. He filmed his own face to be projected onto

Opposing the stillness of the Alps was the train, which captured Krenek's idea of American modernity. Like the movement from the rural plantation to the city of *The Chocolate Kiddies* or Louis Douglas's plays, *Jonny spielt auf* features characters transformed by their journey into the urban center. Even though Europe had a modern rail system by the 1920s, the train was symbolically associated with America.<sup>398</sup> The distance covered within the opera from the Alps to Paris (over 500 miles) suggests the rapid connection between cities and countries promised by train travel. If the mountain was passé non-modern environ, then the train station was its antithesis. With its symbolic value as a site of transportation and transformation, the station challenged the static glaciers of the Alps, Max's initial home. Daniello's death is also suggestive of the import of the locomotive and the train station. At the climax of the opera, it is the very vehicle of Krenek's modernity that crushes the antagonist, freeing the protagonists to go to America.

Yet more so than the symbolism of the Alps and the train, it is Jonny who exemplifies the modern world of America. The Vienna State Opera House production made this point clear in its New Year's production of 1927-28. As Jonny stands on an oversize globe that positions North America facing the audience during the finale of the opera, he is surrounded by the literal signs of American consumer culture: billboards for

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the mountain as it demanded that Max return to society. Despite Krenek finding Brüggemann's theatrics kitschy, audiences loved the use of film, and to the point, made the reference to Bergfilm all the clearer. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 86.

<sup>398</sup> John Stewart, suggests the use of trains in *Jonny*, were directly related to Krenek's childhood picture book that included a giant train of the Santa Fe Railroad. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 81.

Macy's, Arrow Collar, and Monroe Clothes; a neon sign displaying "Drink Delicious Coca-Cola"; and a separate sign that simply read "Coke." It bore a striking resemblance to Time Square [Image 6.2]. Together at the finale, the opera suggested Jonny and American consumer culture were connected. Like Rundt's article that discussed Harlem as a microcosm of New York City, this finale with its spectacle of American signage places Jonny at the center of this narrative of urbanism and modernism.

**What's in a name?**

The differences between *Der Sprung* and *Jonny* are revealing. Both deal with an inhibited protagonist who confronts his arrested development through a representative of modernity: the psychoanalyst and the Black American respectively. Yet, the ways these roles are used are quite different. Berg is a charlatan, who demands others do what he cannot demonstrate himself. Jonny, on the other hand, is the embodiment of the uninhibited life. As Eric Lott suggests, blackface minstrelsy was a place in which white men could perform an imagined version of masculinity. In the antebellum performance of the minstrel, "To wear or even enjoy blackface was literally, for a time, to become black, to inherit the cool, virility, humility, abandon, or *gaité de coeur* that were the prime *components* of white ideologies of black manhood."<sup>399</sup> This belief in Black performativity was stated by Krenek directly.

In opposition to him [Max] I placed Jonny, the American jazz fiddler, a child of nature, totally free of inhibitions, acting on impulse at the spur of the moment. Obviously the invention of this antithesis was inspired by my first contact with the Western world and my experience of the very evident contrast of mentalities and life-styles between East and West. America, at

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<sup>399</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*, 52.

that time entirely unknown to me, seemed to lend itself most convincingly for localizing the epitome of natural grace and uninhibited freedom that I had in mind.<sup>400</sup>

Although Krenek does not name his first contact, the reference to Jonny suggests he is referring to *The Chocolate Kiddies*. To be sure, the Black revue had intentionally presented themselves as a unique force but in their pronouncements from the stage, it was meant to distinguish themselves from the white America. In Krenek's telling, *The Chocolate Kiddies* like Jonny represent the American way of life. To this, Krenek's idea of "child of nature" is not simply a racist demarcation for Jonny but praise for the "natural grace" that Krenek saw in American culture. Thus Krenek's statement on the American influence includes a reference to Max's way of life as a form of slavery, "Of course, here the hapless composer is eventually freed of his *bondage*."<sup>401</sup> Now free from his narrow view of life, Max can live the full life that Jonny exemplifies.

As a figure who is at once an addition and substitution, Jonny suggests the problematic nature of the use of blackface. The opera itself is not new in its suggestion, as Krenek had dealt with inhibition before and relatedly, the use of blackface in opera was also not introduced in *Jonny*. In these respects, the opera was not making Blackness in opera new. What is important then, is not simply that there is a representation of a Black man in *Jonny spielt auf*. Indeed, Giuseppe's Verdi *Otello* (1887) is another important opera that placed a Black man at its center. The critical factor in *Jonny spielt auf* is the Black *American* appearing concomitant with the number of Black American

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<sup>400</sup> Krenek, *Horizons Circled*, 38-39.

<sup>401</sup> Krenek, *Horizons Circled*, 39. Emphasis added.

performers that had performed across Germany. As a symbol of modernity, then, Jonny is loaded with meaning. In attaching such strong symbolic value to a Black American, *Jonny spielt auf* argues for European opera as a new site of hybridity. Indeed, the opera suggests within and outside the opera that Black America is not only a part of America, but can serve an important role in European music and culture. Within the opera, Jonny's theft is his rallying cry that he claims ownership not only over the violin, but also over modern culture. His statement further critiques the weariness of modern day Europe. By stating his primacy within the opera, Jonny becomes the oracle for a European future. Outside the opera, the idea of a "jazz opera"—even though Krenek hated the term and never used it himself—became a divisive race issue in contemporary opera. The opera's suggestion that not only would a contemporary Black character exist within the opera, but also that opera as a genre had a place for Black people, bordered on sacrilege.

For many, Jonny was a dangerous character for two reasons. First, he served as an analogy—a warning—for a German culture that was becoming infused with the alien influence of Black modernity. Second, many responded to Jonny not as a dramatic persona, but a representation of the very presence of Black performers in Germany. His presence was perhaps better known than Louis Douglas, becoming the most emblematic referent to Black American culture in Germany. If anything, it is these negative responses to the opera that suggest the import that the opera served in Germany. As Stewart states, "In their barbarous way the Nazis took the opera seriously, not because it was meant to be taken that way but because they regarded it as an affront to Aryan dignity and

morality.”<sup>402</sup> Like the images of the colonial subject, it was not the reality of Black people that was invested with mental energy, but the image of Jonny that was so strongly imbued with meaning. Jonny becomes the object in which the normal hierarchical relationship between the European and the Black Other are thrown into disarray. It is Jonny who at once successfully gets Anita to admit her desire for him *and* it is he who is also paid off for his apparent sexual transgression against Anita, instead of harassed, chastised, or murdered for his attempted sexual relations with a white woman. Then, his theft of the violin is not a crime, but his right. His mastery of the violin proves him the equal of Daniello. His talents mark him not as a primitive but as a man thoroughly adapted to the world around him. Throughout the opera, Jonny’s role goes beyond the stereotypical criminality of the Black man as thief and sexual aggressor. Instead, his energy is presented as a vital force that should be admired for its undisguised ambition.

Recalling Erich Urban’s reference to the cocaine-like sensation elicited from *The Chocolate Kiddies*, Krenek’s opera similarly performs Blackness as a form of bodily liveliness that is too much for Europeans. This performance of Blackness aimed at critiquing European inhibition suggests that Black identity is a temporary substitution until Europeans can take up Jonny’s example. Thus, Krenek locates Jonny in opposition to Max’s European culture in order to demonstrate what should occur next in European culture, i.e. modern European culture should evolve. Jonny at once is presented as the opposite of Max, threatening to replace him as Anita’s sexual liaison, yet he also *adds* to Max’s life as an example of who Max should become. The relationship between Max and

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<sup>402</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 83-84.

Jonny is neither diametrically opposed nor are they equals. Instead, each is constructed out of the relationship to the other. Max needs to acquire a sense of life that Jonny already has *and*, at the same time, Krenek constructs Jonny as a capable entrant into the life and culture of Europeans. His navigation of the city, the beginning of his attempted seduction of Anita, and his theft of the violin are all signs of his manipulation of the European scene. Unlike the satirical illustration in *Kladderdatsch* at the beginning of the German colonial empire that voiced an ambivalence the Black person's place in the city, Jonny becomes the archetypical flâneur.

Where *Der Sprung* had developed its male protagonist, Goldhaar, against Dr. Berg, *Jonny* offers multiple examples of extroverted men in contrast to Max. First, Daniello, a consummate Don Juan, is presented not primarily as a rival to Max, but to Jonny. Indeed, Daniello and Max do not confront each other at all throughout the opera. Instead, the interactions between Daniello as a representative of the Old World and Jonny's New World, suggests that both vie for supremacy not only over Anita but the future of music, symbolized in the violin. Their roles in the opera speak to Krenek's notions of modernity and how it is navigated. Daniello's old world charm holds little sway over Anita. Certainly, she enjoys her one night with Daniello, but she expects little else from her affair with him. Anita, like Princess Lenore, was certainly a stand-in for Anna Mahler. And like Mahler in Krenek's life, their responses to the men around them reveal much of Krenek's experience with the New Woman. Anita's desire to live her life of her own accord and not within the limits that Daniello or Max wish for her, resists gender expectations. Both share in the belief that Anita should live for them. However,

they are undermined by her sense of self and, indeed, her decree that Max should likewise live for himself. It suggests that she, like Jonny, models the modern life for him.

The relationship between Daniello and Jonny offers two representations of masculinity for Max. Jonathan O. Wipplinger argues the rivalry between Daniello and Jonny over Anita represents “a shift away from black-white sexual relations toward the theme of black-white musical and cultural relations. Beginning with Jonny’s acceptance of the money, the racial threat and difference of Jonny are transferred from the sexual to the cultural realm.”<sup>403</sup> Instead of a rivalry that places sex as a test of their masculinity, it is instead the opera’s focus on music and culture, that positions Jonny not only as a musician but as a dominant culture force. Further, their rivalry recalls the ways that the *Black Shame* positioned Black men as uncultured sexually aggressive monsters. Krenek’s opera offers a different reading of Black sexuality. The interrupted relationship between Jonny and Anita never comes back into play. Jonny, unlike Daniello, can let go of his feelings for Anita. Although removing Jonny may keep Anita racially pure, the opera also presents Daniello as a dispirited and unfulfilled character. He is continually hampered by his desire for a response from Anita and is likewise besotted by the loss of his violin. The relationship between Jonny and Daniello was made explicit by Krenek who described Daniello as, “The European version of the Negro, who combines the close proximity to life and vitality with a cultivated and dapper *exterior* agreeable to the civilized white person.”<sup>404</sup> Krenek’s description of Daniello is telling. As the European Negro, his

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<sup>403</sup> Wipplinger, “Performing Race in *Jonny spielt auf*,” 241.

<sup>404</sup> Wipplinger, “Performing Race in *Jonny spielt auf*,” 240. Emphasis added.

“exterior” appearance is a guise that presents the acceptable side of European culture.

Yet, Daniello, Krenek suggests, is hiding a darker element inside, that pushes against this respectable “cultivated” presentation of his white European identity.

Still, the opera’s most farcical element appears in its treatment of Jonny and Daniello. Although Jonny is the literal criminal in his theft of the violin, it is Daniello’s inability to accede to Jonny that leads to his death. Krenek, in describing Daniello, further states that he is the “conceited, empty headed, yet instinctual smooth operator who greedily profits from the precious, yet abandoned inheritance of our [European] artistic culture.”<sup>405</sup> Thus, the opera offers an interesting understanding of modernity, that punishes Daniello for his attempt to hold on to perceived objects of Europe: the white woman and the violin. The fact that Jonny’s crime, stealing the violin, goes unpunished while Daniello dies suggests an opera built upon changing moral values and a predilection toward “the new” symbolized in Jonny.

Additionally, the relationship between Anita and Jonny is built not on a personal level, but on their shared sense of adventure and living life for themselves: new rules applied in new places and new places that permit or require new rules. Although Jonny’s initial seduction of Anita raises questions of consent between the two characters, their relationship to Max and, importantly, to America, demonstrates that Krenek positions Anita as the initial European follower of the uninhibited life promised by America and additionally the model that already defines Jonny’s life. Anita’s decision to go to America indicates that she will become, like Jonny, imbued with a new freer spirit. Thus,

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<sup>405</sup> Wipplinger, “Performing Race in *Jonny spielt auf*,” 241.

when Anita exhorts Max to live for himself, she is not only asking him to follow her lead to America, but to also become like Jonny. This suggestion that Max should be like Jonny is interesting as it is only an inference the audience can make between Anita's declaration and Jonny's action, but more so because Max, the protagonist and the titular character Jonny only meet when Max is being rescued from jail, literally liberated.

Krenek's use of Black American identity in the opera suggests a strong valuation of Black modernism and indeed the import that the Black body serves within the nation and the national space of the opera. In the first chapter, I referred to the possibilities of parts of Blackness to stand in for a larger matrix of Black identity. Be it the associated color of the skin, the coarseness of the hair, or the shape of the lips, these racial objects have spoken to and for Black identity in the United States because of the power that blackface minstrelsy held in formulating Black American identity. The use of blackface in *Jonny* should not be misread as a continuation of the same values and ideas of minstrelsy. Instead, it is important to see how the *necessity* of Blackness in Krenek's perception of European malaise and inhibition required a representation in some form. Having a Black man—even represented in blackface—served the ultimate purpose of the opera, an artistic argument for Black modernity in Germany and in the opera.

This unsettling decision of placing blackface in the opera should be seen for the complex weight it put on viewers' ability to discern what is happening on the stage. As Stewart states, "Krenek was greatly disappointed by the general response [to the opera], for Max and his fate were of profound personal concern. He was trying to make a point about how 'to live' ... people paid the effort no more heed than they had paid to

Goldhaar's attempts to leap over his shadow."<sup>406</sup> The production could be viewed as a challenge to racial stereotypes or it could be seen inhabiting them through its use of blackface and Black sexual aggression and criminality. This becomes abundantly clear in the 1929 American premier. The American production not only altered the narrative, but also promoted the production around these alterations. In effect, the narrative of *Jonny spielt auf* became the narrative of how the production would handle race and interracial desire. Thus, the production was no longer centered on Krenek's concerns of a Europe touched by Black modernity, but instead it became a metanarrative on American views about race in the promotion of the opera.

### Coming to Amerika

When *Jonny* came to America, the opera's notoriety preceded it. Since its premier in Germany, Americans had been aware that Germans were enthralled by the "jazz opera" and that it had caused a fair amount of controversy in Munich, Kassel, and Vienna. Navarre Atkinson for the *New York Times* reported

a most noteworthy revolution in the musical history of the Vienna Opera House had taken place. Ernest[sic] Krenek's ultramodern jazz opera, "Johnny spielt Aus[sic]"...had just been performed in the house about which cling the somber ambitions of Wagner, Puccini, Mozart and Beethoven, who have dominated the performance there since the beginning. In the words of leading musicians of Vienna, the spirits of these composers must have flown from the opera house amid the shrieks of jazz; and, still in their words, the musical reputation if[sic] of Vienna has been *blackened* by this bow to modernity.<sup>407</sup>

<sup>406</sup> Stewart, *Ernst Krenek*, 84.

<sup>407</sup> Navarre Atkinson, "Vienna to Devote Year to Shubert," *New York Times*, Jan 8, 1928.

Atkinson understood immediately the problem that the opera stirred for Viennese audiences. From their perspective, the performance of the Black modern had a tarnishing effect on the traditions of the Vienna Opera House. Still, the *New York Times* continued to report the attacks on the opera by those concerned with the sanctity and tradition of the German opera house. Another incident occurred at Kassel, the paper reported, where,

during one of the scenes an express train is supposed to move across the stage. It is set in motion by pulling a wire. When the moment came for the train to move, it failed to function. The stage hands found that the cable had been cut by some unknown person. This was the signal for the anti-jazzers to start a rumpus which made further performance of the opera impossible.<sup>408</sup>

The excitement the opera drew from central Europe was not lost on Giulio Gatti-Casazza, manager of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. He saw *Jonny* as an opportunity to take advantage of the opera's growing notoriety. Gatti-Casazza was an Italian-born opera manager who began to manage the Metropolitan in 1908. Through his careful management, the opera house enjoyed a long era of modernization, including innovative productions; world premiers, including Giacomo Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* in 1910; and star conductors, like Gustav Mahler and Arturo Toscanini. By the time of *Jonny spielt auf*'s world premier in Leipzig, Gatti-Casazza had been featured on the cover of *Time* magazine twice (November 5, 1923 and November 1, 1926). Having successfully enhanced the prestige of the Metropolitan, bringing *Jonny* to America seemed like a logical next step.

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<sup>408</sup> "Foes of German Jazz Opera Employ Sabotage in Theatre," *New York Times*, Jan 8, 1928, 55.

Gatti-Casazza developed the promotion for the January 19, 1929 premier during the last six months of 1928. Promotion for the opera appeared in theater journals such as *Theatre Arts Monthly*, which included in its August 1928 issue, a sketch of the train station to pique the interest of theatergoers.<sup>409</sup> Yet focused on more than the technical innovations that brought a moving train set piece and live radio recordings to the opera stage, American newspapers excitedly dramatized the interracial elements of the opera. The *Daily Boston Globe* paid close attention to the interracial relationship in the production,

An opera which calls for a jazz band on the stage and has a hero & colored man in love with a white girl is to be produced by the Metropolitan Opera Company late in January—thereby stirring up what the critics predict is to be the biggest musical sensation on this side of the Atlantic in years.<sup>410</sup>

Indeed, the *Globe* made the opera appear to center on Jonny's sexual relationships.

The hero is Jonny, a young American colored man, who has conquered Europe with his jazz band. He has not been long in Europe before he discovers that white people there have entirely different ideas about interracial love and courtship than they have in America. He courts a beautiful white opera singer, having as his rivals a composer and a celebrated violin virtuoso, both white.<sup>411</sup>

The *Globe*'s report notably reveals America's obsession with race and sexuality. It decenters Max's story of self-realization to focus on Jonny. Indeed, where Jonny is the model that Max follows to America, the *Globe* suggests that Jonny is Daniello and Max's direct rival. In overemphasizing Jonny's relationship to Anita in its description, the *Globe*

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<sup>409</sup> Under the image ran the caption, "the new jazz-opera which is announced as one of the novelties for the next season at the Metropolitan." Photograph, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, August 1928, Vol XII, Number 8, 604.

<sup>410</sup> "Jazz Opera to Hold Metropolitan Stage" *Daily Boston Globe*, Dec 2, 1928.

<sup>411</sup> "Jazz Opera to Hold Metropolitan Stage" *Daily Boston Globe*, Dec 2, 1928.

also got most of the ending wrong, believing that it is Jonny, not Daniello, who is crushed by the train. *Vogue* directly suggested how the opera would handle race, “It has been predicted that, at the Metropolitan, embarrassing race questions will be side-stepped by turning jazz band Jonny into a ‘black-face’ comedian.”<sup>412</sup> Yet, despite the *Globe*’s misunderstanding of the plot, the American mainstream press brought attention to the central controversy that would matter to American audiences: would it be acceptable to present the opera with its interracial themes intact?

Gatti-Casazza solved this problem through a convoluted whitewashed promotional campaign, giving the impression that the American premier would conform to white America’s racist anxieties over interracial love and miscegenation. Instead of Jonny, the Black musician, he was now a white blackface minstrel, who, to the incredulity of American critics, never took off his painted black mask. As Oscar Thompson stated in the *New York Post*, “Why a black-face comedian, off the job, should still be black wherever he went was beyond conjecture.”<sup>413</sup> Gatti-Casazza’s production decided to turn Jonny into a white man disrupting any suggestion of Black modernity, where Krenek had infused his production with ideas of Black Americans in strong contrast to Europeans. This change altered the central conceit of the opera: the Black American’s dual role as a foreigner and as a modern stood in contrast to the wearisome world the Europeans found themselves in. Now, it was the opera itself that had to be altered toward reimagined *American* roles. Indeed, Gatti-Casazza gave the impression

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<sup>412</sup> Pitts Sanborn, “Metropolitan Novelties and Revivals of 1928-1929,” *Vogue*, October 27, 1928, 104.

<sup>413</sup> Oscar Thompson, *NY Post*, undated, Metropolitan Opera House Archive

that not only had every reference to Jonny's race been removed, but that references to *any* character's race had been excised. To ensure no meddling occurred to this whitewashed version of the opera, the Metropolitan directed interested patrons to the official English-language libretto written by Frederick H. Martens, instead of official copies offered on the street. Yet, this effort to make the opera acceptable to American tastes was complicated by the fact that blackface was so integral to it.

In altering the opera, the Metropolitan expanded on Krenek's already complex use of race. Krenek's use of blackface derived from his experience of Black performance and his desire to create German art from Black modernity. He hoped to represent a culture unfamiliar to Germany, not to present the authentic Black performer for his audience. This is not to suggest that Krenek's use of blackface was not racist, but instead to highlight how Krenek's use of blackface defined modernity in ways that complicated the trope's long history in the United States. The fixation on the interracial sexual desire that Krenek thematizes briefly in the first act became the focus of the American press and indeed the primary element in the promotion of the opera. Replicating America's anxiety over miscegenation, the American production built the narrative of its production around this singular moment of interracial sexuality. In Gatti-Casazza's urging that the American production of *Jonny spielt auf* would remove the Black presence wholesale, the production located its rationale for keeping the blackface [Image 6.4]. Indeed, Krenek seemed intent on keeping the visual aesthetic of a black mask intact. It speaks to the power of *American* conceptions of race and importantly blackface's place in popular culture, that the American production felt beholden to "masking" Jonny. Hiding Jonny

suggests that Americans believed in the power of blackface to represent the authentic Black person. Like the Nazis who responded to Jonny as if he *were* a Black man on the stage, the American production, similarly created a rationale for the fictional portrayal of interracial desire.

Still, some American opera critics understood that this invocation of Blackness was peculiar. As critics aware of the traditions of opera, especially as a European performance form, they were in a position to criticize the opera for bowing to American popular cultural tastes. America's visceral attachment to blackface was so entrenched—at best—as a nineteenth-century *white* American practice, that the opera's repeated claims about Black modernism made no difference to either Gatti-Casazza or most of the press. All of these alleged changes to the opera, even as they appeared in the official published American libretto, were untrue. Gatti-Casazza had purposefully organized the promotion of the opera to take advantage of American racism. It led American newspapers to report on the alleged changes and made the promotion of Krenek's opera an element of spectacle all its own. Gatti-Casazza's choice was a provocative strategy that played on the racially charged times and the nature of the production. He believed the sudden revelation when Jonny finally gets his hands on Daniello's violin and exclaims "And praise Jehovah, who created men black," would be a surprise on top of an opera already built on race, music, and modernity.

Reporting for *Crisis*, the official publication of the NAACP, Harry S. Keelan evokes the method in which Giulio Gatti-Casazza's production promoted its altered production in accord with American racial anxieties. Starting with the *dramatis personae*

in the original libretto, Keelan notes the change from “der Neger Jonny, Jazzbandgeiger” (the Negro Jonny, Jazzband Violinist) to the American production’s “Jazz-band Violinist.” Yet the referencing in the opera did more than remove references to Jonny’s race, it did the same to Anita as well. Jonny’s exclamation, “Oh, by Jove, the white woman is beautiful!” is truncated into “the woman is beautiful!” Further, in the shortened exclamation, it effaces Jonny’s familiarity with high culture. Similarly, the line “I know all you white women” was changed to “I know all you *singers*.”<sup>414</sup> With centuries-old racial anxiety, the possibility of interracial desire appeared to be an irreconcilable element to keep in the opera. These slight changes to the libretto reveal how strongly the opera needed to be “translated” into American racial logics.

Despite the alleged attempt by Gatti-Casazza to deracialize the opera, there were times when race was still obviously legible. In Daniello’s interaction with Jonny, instead of the original insults of “beast” and “nègrillon,” Jonny is referred to as a “masher”<sup>415</sup> and “gorilla,” respectively. Although “gorilla” is an obvious insult to Black people, it may not have been understood by Martens in his version of the libretto. However, without a doubt, calling a Black man a gorilla would have been an obvious insult that would be familiar to many in America.<sup>416</sup> Finally, perhaps the opera’s most triumphant call for Black modernity was the moment when Jonny claims ownership of the violin, and thus ownership over Western culture.

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<sup>414</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>415</sup> A man who makes unwelcome sexual advances, often in public places and typically to women he does not know.

<sup>416</sup> Perhaps one of the oldest American examples of this, would be Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

And praise Jehovah, who created men black!  
 To me belongs all that is good in the world;  
 The Old World has produced it, but she does not know what else to do with it.  
 Then the New World comes traveling across the sea in splendor,  
 And takes the heritage of Old Europe by means of the dance.

However, as Keelan notes, this moment of Black triumph was altered in the libretto to “And praise Jehovah who created violins for jazz-violinists.” Keelan’s disdain was clear for Gatti-Casazza clearly upset Keelan. He accused the manager of wanting “to guard against those who might buy their own libretti from vendors on the streets and be shocked by what they read therein.” In promoting these changes to the opera, Keelan saw Gatti-Casazza not only bending to an *assumed* public will, but also insisting on the opera upholding a sense of sexual propriety around race and gender.

A similar feature in the National Urban League’s journal, *Opportunity*, registered a similar sense of outrage.<sup>417</sup> “Krenek wished to portray through the medium of the operatic form the capitulation of Europe and the world to the machine and the triumph of American jazz over the more classics[sic] musical idioms of Europe.”<sup>418</sup> Yet *Opportunity* warns that, “Krenek evidently failed to consider its possible presentation in America... Where he was ignorant of American attitudes or whether he felt that in the lofty realms of art prejudice had no place cannot be ascertained.”<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> *Opportunity* was instrumental in promoting many artists of the New Negro Renaissance, including Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, and Claude McKay.

<sup>418</sup> *Opportunity*, February 1929, 32.

<sup>419</sup> *Opportunity*, February 1929, 32.

Both Keelan and the writer for *Opportunity* were excited about an opera that placed a Black man at the center of their narratives.<sup>420</sup> Neither article suggests a problem with using blackface in the opera in its portrayal of Black people. Instead, it was the problem of whiteness *in* the opera, not the opera itself. Both writers appear aware that the opera was meant to present Black modernity and not use tried tropes of nineteenth-century minstrelsy. The idea that *within* the opera's story that Jonny was a white man was the main issue of contention. This problem of representation suggests that there was a major difference for them between a white actor in blackface and the white actor *playing* the white blackface minstrel. They recognized that Krenek's opera openly suggested the superiority of Black modernity. They were deeply disappointed in American racist anxieties and their purported attempts to assuage white audiences through erasing Krenek's Jonny.

Although Krenek may not have known that the standard spelling of "Johnny" included an "h," he had chosen the name "Jonny" because of its clear Anglophonic—and hence American—quality. Yet, unbeknownst to Krenek, "John" held incredible significance in Black American folklore, an important foundation for 1920s Harlem culture. Americanist Rudolph P. Byrd states, "In tales of John we encounter a slave who bodies forth power, resourcefulness, and resilience."<sup>421</sup> This is especially true, Byrd suggests, in Zora Neale Hurston's "High John De Conquer," a celebration of John "as a

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<sup>420</sup> James Walden Johnson also voiced his displeasure in the *New York Graphic*. Wipplinger "Performing Race in *Jonny spielt auf*," fn 55, 256.

<sup>421</sup> Byrd, "The Tradition of John: A Mode of Black Masculinity," 3.

redemptive and transgressive figure.”<sup>422</sup> Further Byrd states, “In the tradition of John, there is a value placed upon motherwit, laughter, courage, hope, as well as the regenerative power of song, love, and the spirit” that offers a different form of Black masculinity that values “the development of inner strength and inner resources.”<sup>423</sup> Indeed it is this Black masculinity that places Krenek’s Jonny not only as a trickster, but a character with a strong sense of self that is unrivaled by Daniello or Max. Thus, the opera can be seen arguing for not only a cultural force in the United States that is at once dominant and worthy of imitation, but one that is also *stronger* than the European cultural tradition.

Further, John’s form of Black masculinity was based on Black forms of knowing, “a knowledge of actualities and potentialities which he [John] combined in his struggle against the sweeping powers of ‘Old Massa.’”<sup>424</sup> This too is visible within the opera, in which the primary struggle is Max’s need to overcome his inhibitions. In comparison, Jonny is uninhibited to the extreme. This appears in the aggressive and unrestrained method in Jonny’s seduction of Anita and in his theft of the violin. Yet, by the end of the opera, he not only goes unpunished, but appears triumphant on top of a globe. The opera suggests that Jonny is indeed capable of making the world what he wants of it, including making Max see *him* as the model of modernity.

Yet Gatti-Casazza had performed a major publicity coup in promoting the opera as an appropriate Jim Crow-ed interpretation of the opera. Through the controversy over

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<sup>422</sup> Byrd, “The Tradition of John: A Mode of Black Masculinity,” 4.

<sup>423</sup> Byrd, “The Tradition of John: A Mode of Black Masculinity,” 5.

<sup>424</sup> Byrd, “The Tradition of John: A Mode of Black Masculinity,” 6.

the changes, the opera became the focus of the season's productions. Despite all the promises to alter the libretto, the night that audiences saw *Jonny spielt auf*, they were surprised to learn the production stuck to Krenek's original libretto. When Jonny exclaims "And praise Jehovah, who created men black!" Keelan notes the excitement around this volte-face,

the whole Metropolitan caste[sic] went on the stage and said to Anita, "I know you white women, etc." They applauded when he got on the piano and praised Jehovah for creating him black! Gatti-Casazza knew his people. How he must have smiled to hear the singers on the stage shouting across the footlights all the objectionable lines which he had taken great pains to change in the librettos!<sup>425</sup>

Where the Metropolitan had promoted the opera in its racial conformity, the *actual* production stuck to Krenek's original. In effect, Gatti-Casazza had used the promotion of the opera to set expectations that the opera would be a rather conservative production in relation to Krenek's original. Yet by going against these whitewashed expectations, the moment in which Jonny reveals his race becomes a triumph for the white audience in seeing the racial boundary transgressed at the last possible moment.

In his autobiography, *The Big Sea*, Langston Hughes suggests that the "Negro Vogue" was centered not on the works of talented Black, but on the stories that white people *told themselves* about Black people. Gatti-Casazza's campaign speaks to how the vogue operated. Indeed, the suggestion that the production would at first replicate American racial anxieties around interracial love played upon notions of returning the modern opera stage to its premodern—pre-*Shuffle Along*—roots. Yet, in subverting that

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<sup>425</sup> Keelan, "Jonny Tunes Up," *The Crisis* 36, June 1929, 209.

expectation, by having the white opera singer—Michael Bohnen—reveal his *true* identity as a Black man, the American production relies on shocking the audience not through the narrative within the opera, but via the narrative around the production. Thus, Gatti-Casazza's manipulation makes Jonny's revelation that he was Black all along a hollow victory in which the story of the opera is disrupted and overturned by the story of the production.

*Jonny spielt auf* must be seen as at once an important mode of recognizing Black modernity in Germany, while simultaneously being as a regressive placement of race for white American audiences. The focus on interracial desire turns the opera away from its central conceit that Europeans can learn from Black Americans, to the fetishization and taboo of interracial sex and a return to nineteenth-century minstrelsy. Although the original German libretto was used, the staging of the conclusion—Jonny astride a globe, claiming ownership of the modern world—was uprooted. Instead of the literal signs of modernity that adorned the stage for the central Europe productions, the finale was replaced with a chorus line of blackface Uncle Sams with Jonny overshadowed by the Statue of Liberty [Image 6.5].

If Black American journalists were angered and frustrated over the apparent deception in the production, white American critics were likewise annoyed by the removal of what the opera had presented as modern. The musicologist and music critic, Olin Downes, was quite aware that the American production had missed the point.

The local production gives hardly a hint of the exhilarating speed and the kaleidoscopic fantasy of the original...Krenek did not dream of American flags, or Statues of Liberty, or pickaninny dancers, or any of the effects gratuitously wished upon him in the final scene at the Metropolitan. He is

parodying *his* civilization, not ours, save inasmuch as both now form part of a modern universe which is, as he professes to see it, a conglomeration of sensuality and materialism, with jazz as one of its hall-marks.<sup>426</sup>

Downes gave his readers an understanding of the “kaleidoscopic fantasy” that one would have seen in Leipzig premier,

An automobile whirls through the streets of a delirious city; a train appears far away, its headlights approaching and most plausibly following winding tracks till it is almost at the rim of the stage; and there is the last grand transformation, as Jonny leaps from a high scaffolding, lands on the station clock, which becomes in apotheosis a huge, whirling globe, Jonny atop of it, the clouds about his head, the planets at his back, and a *bachanale[sic]*, not of coon babies, but a motley crowd in every variety of modern dress, giddy, debauched, circling about the base of his stellar throne.<sup>427</sup>

Yet the production reveled in the American history of minstrelsy. Al Jolson even gave suggestions to Michael Bohnen on how to perform his role better. The popularity of the production can be seen from the March 24, 1929 *Brooklyn Eagle*, which included in its weekly trivia contest, the question, “What new opera at the Metropolitan calls for a black face?”<sup>428</sup>

The interest in blackface is once more telling in the history of blackface at the Metropolitan. Since the American premier of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Otello* in 1891 until the 2015 production, *Otello* had been played in Blackface.<sup>429</sup> And despite the knowledge that *Otello* is a Moor, it was the promotion of *Jonny* as a new *contemporary* production that drew attention for its depiction of interracial desire. Henry Casson Becker had made that

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<sup>426</sup> Olin Downs, “‘Jonny Spielt Auf’ Again,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1929, 26.

<sup>427</sup> Olin Downes, “Jonny spielt auf Again,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1929.

<sup>428</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 24, 1929, 30.

<sup>429</sup> Michael Cooper, “An ‘Otello’ Without Blackface Highlights an Enduring Tradition in Opera.” *New York Times*, September 17, 2015. Online.

very case when explaining *Jonny spielt auf* in 1929 to an unnamed but well-respected member of New York's opera,

that I should be ashamed of myself for having sat through such an opera. I was dumbfounded...I made stammering references to *Aida*, *Otello*, *L'Africana* and other opera but to no avail. He told me that in these cases the circumstances of color were not offensive. But Jonny is different!<sup>430</sup>

### **Conclusion**

"Jonny," the opera and the character, represent how extensively Black American modernism could influence German arts. The opera's origins in *The Chocolate Kiddies* and its premier in Germany suggests that the opera was especially evocative of Krenek's experiences not only as a Czech outsider, but as an observer of interwar Germany. The response to the opera, coming after the German-wide tours of *The Chocolate Kiddies* and Louis Douglas, suggests that German interest in Black modernity was only growing, moving beyond a simple fad. Even though Krenek espoused an indifference to German politics, it is clear from his own words about *Jonny spielt auf* that the opera and the character were a cure to the cultural malaise of Central Europe in the interwar period.

At the end of Olin Down's review, he raised the question of the longevity of Krenek's opera. "Whether anyone will know of his opera five years from now will be known in five years. But the piece is alive, and far more alive than one may guess who observes it on the stage of our famous lyric theatre."<sup>431</sup> *Jonny*, indeed, continued to live on in German culture. Yet, it was neither as the positive symbol of modernity that Krenek had hoped, nor as the reemergence of American minstrel traditions. Instead, Jonny

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<sup>430</sup> Henry Casson Becker, *Musical Review*, February 28, 1928, Quoted in Harry S. Keelan, *The Crisis*, June 1929.

<sup>431</sup> Olin Downes, "Jonny spielt auf Again," January 29, 1929, *New York Times*.

experienced a strange afterlife as the symbol of the cultural decline of the Weimar era. For Nazis, Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* was the realization of the worst possible outcome from Black American music's influence on Germany.

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