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IN SEARCH OF RAGTIME: MUSIC, RACE, AND CAPITAL IN THE AMERICAN TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Contents

List of Figures **v**

List of Tables **viii**

Acknowledgments **ix**

Abstract **xii**

Preface **1**

Music 3

Race 4

Capital 5

…in the American Twentieth Century 6

1 "Everybody's Doing It": Ragtime ca. 1900 **7**

1.1 Ways to get to Tony Pastor's 7

1.1.1 From the Balcony to the Stage 10

1.1.2 Space and Time 11

1.1.3 Minstrelsy; Mass Culture; the "Middle Class"; Hegemony 16

1.1.4 Sentimental songs 21

1.1.5 Vaudeville 27

1.2 "Getting More Like the White Folks Everyday" 33
1.2.1 Style and Genre 34
1.2.2 Dominant and Tonic 39
1.2.3 Ragtime and Straight Time 40
1.2.4 Gentleman and Negro 43
1.2.5 The "Cullud" Swell 49
1.2.6 The High-Toned Gal 54
1.2.7 Verse and Chorus 57
1.2.8 Victorians Against Ragtime 61
1.2.9 Elite Syncopations 82
1.2.10 Men Against Women 86
1.2.11 Marriage 88
1.2.12 Divorce 92

2 "The Real American Folk Song Is a Rag": Ragtime ca. 1950 97

2.1 Backgrounds 104
2.1.1 A Study of the Changing American Character 104
2.1.2 From Ragtime to Jazz and Back 111
2.2 Condensations 143
2.2.1 *ragtime = jazz - antiphony = jazz - -piano* or: Men, Masses, and Machines 143
2.2.2 *ragtime = jazz - swing* or: Space Is the Place 161
2.3 The Same Time 167

3 "A Guest of Honor": Ragtime ca. 1970 177

3.1 A letter from Leslie 177
3.2 Ragging the Classics; Classicizing the Rags 183

3.3 Scholarship 190
3.4 Great Black Music 200
3.5 The Entertainers Play "The Entertainer" 205
3.6 Joplin on Stage and Screen 212
3.7 …an analyst would know why 225

4 Towards a Materialist Framework for Music History 228
4.1 Three Typical Mistakes 229
4.2 Historical Materialism to The Rescue 236
4.3 The Logic of the Concepts Themselves 239
4.4 Family, Civil Society, and the State 243
4.4.1 Apology 243
4.4.2 OK. Down to business. 245
4.4.3 Marx's Critique 250
4.5 Music and Race 254
4.6 Wait a minute, pal. 262
4.7 In Search of Ragtime 264

5 Appendix 269

6 Bibliography 293

List of Figures

1.1 A song pluggers evening round c.1896 12

1.2 Hawthorne, 1854, "What Is Home Without A Mother" 23

1.3 Illsley, 1860, "Kiss Me Before I Die, Mother" 23

1.4 War, 1858, "I Cannot Call Her Mother" 24

1.5 Woodbury, 1847, "Be Kind to the Loved Ones at Home" 24

1.6 Dun, 1850, "Annie Laurie" 24

1.7 Harney, 1897, "Rag Time Instructor" 42

1.8 From *The Albuquerque Citizen*, April 18, 1906, Page 7. 67

1.9 The Oklahoma News, March 18, 1912, Page 2. 68

1.10 *The Boston Globe*, November 4, 1906, page 56. 80

1.11 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 25, 1901. 86

2.1 Charles Johnson, 1906, "Dill Pickles Rag" 127

2.2 George Botsford, 1908, "Black and White Rag" 128

2.3 George Lyons, 1910, "Spaghetti Rag" 128

2.4 Wilbur Sweatman, 1911, "Down Home Rag" 129

2.5 Euday Bowman, 1919, "12th Street Rag" 129

2.6 Glenn Miller, "In The Mood" 129

2.7 Glenn Miller, "A String of Pearls" 130

2.8 "A String of Pearls" in 1912 Ragtime Style 130
2.9 Wilbur Sweatman, "Down Home Rag," Second Strain 131
2.10 Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, "Down Home Rag," Second Strain 132
2.11 Larry Clinton Orchestra, "Down Home Rag," Second Strain 133
2.12 The Six Brown Brothers, "Down Home Rag," First Strain 136
2.13 Wilbur Sweatman, "Down Home Rag," First Strain 137
2.14 Larry Clinton Orchestra, "Down Home Rag," First Strain 138
2.15 Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, "Down Home Rag," First Strain 138
2.16 Jo Ann Castle, "Down Home Rag," First Strain 139
2.17 Lu Watters, "Down Home Rag," First Strain 140
2.18 Miles Davis, "Four" 140
2.19 "Big" Tiny Little, *Make Room for Tiny*, 1957 143
2.20 Lawrence Welk Presents Keyboard Kapers 145
2.21 Busby Berkeley, *Gold Diggers of 1935*, "The Words are in My Heart" 147
2.22 Liberace's Magic Piano 151
2.23 Paul Eakins, *Fantastic*, *Honky Tonk Player Barroom Piano* 153

3.1 Genre Distribution of 1970s "The Entertainer" Recordings 206
3.2 "The Entertainer," lyric by John Brimhall, Verse 1 209
3.3 "The Entertainer," lyric by John Brimhall, Verse 2 209
3.4 "The Entertainer," performed by the Ray Coniff Singers 209
3.5 "The Entertainer," performed by Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire 210
3.6 "The Entertainer," performed by Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire 210
3.7 Joplin, "The Entertainer," Third Strain 211
3.8 "The Entertainer," performed by Swingle II 212
3.9 Joplin and Chauvin Meet, *Scott Joplin* 216

3.10 Joplin and Chauvin Again, *Scott Joplin* 217
3.11 The Marriage of Joplin and Chauvin, *Scott Joplin* 219
3.12 Joplin and Stark Meet 220
3.13 Stark Seduces Joplin, *Scott Joplin* 221
3.14 The Unconsummated Relationship, *Scott Joplin* 223

List of Tables

1.1 Myths of Ragtime Origins 44

2.1 Average Beat-Upbeat Ratios (BUR) in Recorded Performances of the "Down Home Rag" 134

5.1 "Coon Songs" Studied 269

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Abstract

This dissertation studies ragtime music and its revivals in order to understand social and cultural currents within 20th-century America. The first three chapters are case studies of ragtime music in three different historical moments. Chapter One analyzes ragtime in its incarnation as a popular music around the year 1900, and argues that the ragtime "coon song" mediated America's transition to Taylorist industrial capitalism. Chapter Two treats two distinct ragtime revivals that emerged around 1950—a "folk" revival spearheaded by Rudi Blesh; and a "folksy" nostalgia product marketed by pianists clustered around Lawrence Welk. It argues that these revivals were reactions to the historical course of jazz music, and thereby also expressive of the dissatisfactions typical of mid-century American Fordism. Chapter Three focuses on the Scott Joplin cult that emerged in the 1970s, and the contradictory attempts to frame his music as an "art music." Finally, the fourth chapter theorizes these three distinctions within the concept of music—folk, popular, art—as intimations of the social forms available under capitalism and offers some grounds for grasping the content of the previous chapters as *necessary* components of the historical phase of capitalism they punctuate. Drawing on ideas from Hegel and Marx, it grounds the findings of the previous chapters as generalizable events in the musical life of a dynamic capitalism.

Because this dissertation regards ragtime as not one music but three, the source-base of this dissertation is varied. Books, newspapers, magazines, films, television, radio interviews,

song-sheets, and recorded music are considered. In addition to making contributions to the history of ragtime revivalism, this dissertation contributes towards the project of a materialist music history and a materialist music analysis.

Preface

This dissertation uses ragtime to study and think about music as a form of historical consciousness. It is interested in how three different (mostly white) audiences have heard a music as both manifestly Black and also their *own*. The use of Black music by white musicians and audiences has recently received much scholarly attention.[1] My study differs by not being particularly scandalized by the phenomenon. Although it ultimately offers an explanation for why Black music would be important to white people, it attempts to ground this explanation in the specificities of particular historical tendencies. It approaches musical "appropriations" as the normal condition of musical practice, and tries to understand the history sedimented in such acts. Furthermore, it does not treat racial determinations—or any determinations, for that matter—as stable designations, but forms of symbolization: semiotic compromise-formations that are not only contestable, but also bear social contest within

[1] For example: Matthew D. Morrison, "Blacksound," in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy*, ed. Tomás McAuley et al., 2020; Matthew D Morrison, *Blacksound: Making Race and Popular Music in the United States* (University of California Press, 2024); Matthew D. Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (December 1, 2019): 781–823; Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Eric Lott, *Black Mirror: The Cultural Contradictions of American Racism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017); James Mcnally, "Azealia Banks's '212': Black Female Identity and the White Gaze in Contemporary Hip-Hop," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10, no. 1 (February 2016): 54–81; lipsitz2019; Ronald Radano, *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Daphne Brooks, "'This Voice Which Is Not One': Amy Winehouse Sings the Ballad of Sonic Blue(S)Face Culture," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20 (March 1, 2010): 37–60.

them.[2]

The first chapter analyzes ragtime in its incarnation as a popular music around the turn of the twentieth century. Tracing transformations of both social structure and musical culture in later 19th-century America, it argues that ragtime represents the earliest appearance of mass popular music in its modern capitalist form. Subsequently, by studying patterns in archives of coon songs and newspaper and magazines, it claims that the ragtime coon song's status as mass culture depended on its ability to mediate the historical experience of various social entities formed and deformed by America's transition to industrial capitalism—not least the so-called "middle class."

The second chapter turns to ragtime revivalist efforts around the middle of the twentieth century. It contrasts the movement spearheaded by Rudi Blesh—which tried to reclaim ragtime as a form of American folk music—with the activity of "folksy" purveyors of honky-tonk ragtime, especially those who clustered around the figure of Lawrence Welk. Attending to their performance practices and writings, I theorize their respective conceptions of ragtime music *vis-a-vis* the historical course of jazz, and ultimately show how the various meanings—both tacit and explicit—reveal the dissatisfactions typical of mid-century Fordist America in general and anticipate the immediate future of American culture.

The third chapter examines the ragtime in the 1970s, and in particular the attempts to frame the ragtime of Scott Joplin and his peers as practitioners of an art music. It narrates these attempts as a series of disputes, by following debates between ragtime revivalists about Joshua Rifkin's "classical" approach to Joplin; debates between music scholars about how to render the "classical" nature of piano ragtime; and debates about the status of Black art music. But it also examines the compromised attempts by mass culture forms—the Easy Listening sector of the music industry and Hollywood—to appropriate the public's fascination with

[2] Stuart Hall, *Essential Essays* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

Joplin. I ultimately argue that Joplin could only fail to fit the demands of his 70s enthusiasts, and that this failure was part of a larger and longer-term social crisis.

The fourth chapter theorizes these three distinctions within the concept of music—folk, popular, art—as intimations of the social forms available under capitalism and offers some grounds for grasping the content of the previous chapters as *necessary* components of the historical phase of capitalism they punctuate. Drawing on ideas from Hegel and Marx, I ground the findings of the previous chapters as generalizable events in the musical life of a dynamic capitalism.

The subtitle of this dissertations is: *Music, Race, and Capital in the American Twentieth Century*. Presumably those are its most important terms—and so I provide, not definitions, but some indications about how I have handled them.

Music

This dissertation approaches music as a "thick" event—in other words, as comprising a practically infinite range of content: the oscillations of air, the means by which these oscillations were produced, or stored, or sensed, or not; the ideas they suggested; the memories they summoned; the arguments they started; the people who argued; the people who didn't; the people who made the music; the people who were presumed to have made the music; the people who heard the music; the people who were presumed to have heard the music; the people who danced; or who were presumed to have danced; the looks on their faces; and so on. It treats music in notated form, in the form of recorded performance, and as an object of discourse. It makes no distinction between "the music itself" on the one hand, and historical/social/what-have-you context on the other. It proceeds on the belief that—just as theory is a form of practice—so is drasticity a form of gnosis.[3] As this dissertation approaches music

[3] Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 505–36.

as a form of consciousness—that is, a way to know the world; and therefore a thing which is always entangled with the world—I have not tried to untangle anything. In fact, I have often tried to trace as many entanglements as possible.

Race

Perhaps surprisingly, this dissertation does not rest on a robust and general theorization of race. This is because I follow Barbara and Karen Fields in thinking that a robust and general theorization of race is impossible.[4] Instead, the chapters below, when they address racism, offer conjunctural analyses rather than "racial-logical" analyses of the kind made recently by scholars like Matthew Morrison, Nina Sun Eidsheim, and Jennifer Lynn Stoever.[5] Instead of advocating a model (like Morrison's "Blacksound," or Stoever's "the Listening Ear") that is meant to reveal the essential structure of racialized music or sound, I attend to much more local transformations of racist folklore and fantasy.

This is to say, again, that this dissertation basically treats racial categories as symbols in need of explanation—that is, as *opacities*, not self-evident, self-identical meanings—rather than as means of analysis. It tries to show how racial symbols organized particular forms of consciousness; how they made specific forms of experience legible; and how they have mutated to accommodate new forms of experience. It is interested, mostly, in how *white* audiences have heard a music that they have taken to be both Black and their own. But it does not conceive of this white audience being self-identical.

It does not spend any time proving the existence of racism, or much time exposing the presence of racist content in the objects it studies. Instead, it addresses a reader who is already aware that American musical culture, being the culture of a racially organized society,

[4] Karen E. Fields and Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2014).

[5] Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse"; Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*; Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*.

is inevitably mired in racism, and is curious about *what* that racism is doing and has done.

Capital

The deployment of this term indicates this dissertation's debt to Marxism. The premise of this mode of analysis, as I see it, lies in grasping reality as *essentially* contradictory, and in assuming that these contradictions can be ultimately traced to contradictions within the movement of capital itself. To speak in a reductive, cartoonish, but not terribly false way, one could characterize these contradictions as follows. Capital requires labor for its own reproduction. But capital also requires the *reduction* of labor for its own reproduction. Managing this basic problem entails constant change in the organs that facilitate production and reproduction in general. (Agricultural production, for example, will be reduced to expand investment in industrial production. The peasants will either find work in the factory or immigrate to the metropole. Later, the factory will also have to be relocated, in search of cheaper labor.) This, in turn, can give everyday reality a dynamism—sometimes frightening; sometimes exhilarating; sometimes devastating—that it wouldn't otherwise have.

I did not think it necessary to offer in advance a recapitulation or reconstruction of Marxist materialism. This dissertation is generally not involved in theoretical disputes. Leaving aside the last chapter, the touchstones for this dissertation are not the theoretical works of the tradition—e.g., *Capital*; Lukacs on class consciousness; Adorno on music and the commodity form; Althusser on ideology—but rather the historical works: e.g., Marx's *18th Brumaire*; Engels's *Peasant Wars*. As I see it, the actual work of Marxist analysis—like any analysis—lies in revealing mediations, not the eternal return of a handful of concepts. In other words: I have *not* tried to prove Marxism, but to demonstrate that themes in Marxist approaches to history can be useful in grasping tendencies in the history of music.

…in the American Twentieth Century

A basic premise of Marxist approaches to history is that "surface" phenomena (like race, or class, or music) are the crystals of forces emanating from the contradictions of capital. A kind of middleground position is occupied by a concrete "mode-of-production", defined as a particular approach to managing the contradictions of capital, or a particular long-term strategy for making and stabilizing a rate of profit. In Marxist historiography, a concrete mode-of-production therefore doubles as a periodization.

This is what I intend by "the American Twentieth Century." I hope that this will become clear enough below, but I'll preview what it means anyway. It is meant to encompass the period bracketed by the destruction of slave-production (after the Civil War) and the onset of (a perhaps terminal) stagnation in the 1970s. Through a combination of class struggle, domination, and hegemonizing, that phase of capital—sometimes fitfully, sometimes stably—reproduced itself through its own growth. This enabled an illusion of historical progress, as more and more people became members of a so-called "middle-class."

Today, we live in the ruins of that world. Its passing is the condition for the research presented below, which shows how people heard themselves and their historical conditions in the music to which they were drawn.

1 "Everybody's Doing It": Ragtime ca. 1900

1.1. Ways to get to Tony Pastor's

> "One of the main difficulties standing in the way of a proper periodization of popular culture is the profound transformation in the culture of the popular classes which occurs between the 1880s and the 1920s. [...] The more we look at it, the more convinced we become that somewhere in this period lies the matrix of factors and problems from which our history—and our peculiar dilemmas–arise."
>
> Stuart Hall

The ragtime era began on Monday, January 27th, 1896, when Ben Harney, traveling from St. Louis, performed at Tony Pastor's Theatre on 14th Street in Manhattan.

Now, it is definitely true, as later writers would discover, that something like ragtime music existed as a folk practice among Southern Black musicians long before Ben Harney appeared at Tony Pastor's—long before it became, for roughly twenty years, synonymous with popular music itself. But this later discovery of the folk tradition constituted a revision of what most people had understood by the word "ragtime." And it is *their* understanding of ragtime—the

one referred to by mass consciousness around the turn of the twentieth century—that is the subject of this chapter. And the story of *this* mass consciousness begins with Ben Harney's act at Tony Pastor's Theatre on Monday, January 27th, 1896.

In the act (which he, like every vaudevillian of the time, would repeat in town after town) Harney was a pianist, a singer, and a dancer.[1] And in each of these roles, he acted as a "delineator"—in more modern terminology, an *impressionist*—of what was, according to Harney, a new form of music practiced by "Southern negroes." An impressionist of a putative black culture, but apparently one very different in nature from the burlesques of blackface. His presentation was professorial enough that one critic lamented that Dr. Dvořák had not been in attendance. "This is real American music," the critic proclaimed. "Not of the highest order, but genuine."[2]

Real American music; not of the highest order, but genuine. Over the next two decades—and then, fitfully, over the next eight—a lot of ink would be spilled litigating what exactly ragtime was. But this early account would continue to stand up, even among ragtime's detractors. Either with pride or shame, most people would come to agree that the music was undeniably American. And, perhaps more importantly: in an era that saw the emergence of a new consumer culture, and with it, the new infelicities of advertising; an era of widespread racial "passing"; an era of continual disputes over paper money; an era that saw the invention of obscure yet fecund financial operations—ragtime was, to borrow a phrase of its moment, the "genuine article."

But if Ben Harney's ragtime was "genuine Negro" it was not because *he* was a genuine Negro. Although the Black pianists Willie the Lion Smith and Eubie Blake would later insist

[1] Newspapers throughout the country registered the enthusiasm which apparently greeted Ben Harney and his partner everywhere, although it is not always easy to decipher the content of the act. The Springfield Republican of Ohio, for example, noted that Harney had a genius for ragtime music, but also that "[t]he dancing of both was exceedingly clever, and the size and flexibility of the pickaninny's mouth excited wonderment and amusement." "The Vaudeville Show," *Springfield Republican*, September 7, 1897.

[2] "Vaudeville Review," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 6, 1896.

that Harney had been a Black man passing, audiences of the time took him to be definitively white. In fact, Harney's whiteness was a premise of his act, for he was assisted by a Black man named Strap Hill, and apparently sometimes by a black woman as well. Although the extant accounts of the act are short on description, it seems as if Strap Hill began disguised as a member of the audience seated in the theatre's balcony—the natural place for a black audience member to be found—and was probably "induced" into singing by the power of Harney on the piano.[3] (A pervasive sterotype then, and probably now, being that black people were irresistibly driven to movement by hearing their music.)[4] From the balcony Hill would descend to the stage and take the lead, the substance of the act being Harney's skillful imitations of Hill.

From one angle, then, Harney's ragtime performance was simply joining a long and stable tradition of white performers imitating Black culture. But from another angle, an important wrinkle was being introduced. Unlike minstrelsy, which had had a much more ambivalent and, frankly, irreducibly *weird* relation to blackness, the excitement of Harney's act *depended* on the correspondence of the white copy to the black original. Furthermore: that Harney paired his imitations with disquisitions on musical features like syncopation asserted a value in Black American musical culture which had until then been reserved for the Negro spiritual. The unanimous enthusiasm that met Harney's act all over the vaudeville circuit he traveled

[3] "The Meteors Special Company," *Evening Star*, February 10, 1897; "Haymarket," *The Chicago Inter Ocean*, January 24, 1897; "Haymarket Notice," *The Inter Ocean*, March 28, 1897; "Vaudeville Notice," *Logansport Pharos-Tribune*, November 11, 1897; "The Blind Woman's Tin Cup," *Galena Daily Republican*, November 13, 1897; "Vaudeville Review," *St. Joseph Herald*, February 6, 1898. Edward Marks would recall that the act was Ben Harney pounding out ragtime "while a tiny Negro known as Strap Heel danced the buck-and-wing, 'that bastard dance.'," and that the "big punch of the act" was Harney imitating "Strap Heel." Edward Marks, *They All Sang: From Tony Pastor to Rudy Vallée* (New York: Viking Press, 1934), 71.

[4] A 1901 item in Kansas's *Larned Chronoscope* claims that Bert Howard, a pianist, was paid a "unique and sincere compliment" when he was asked by the head waiter at an Atlantic City hotel to save his ragtime for after dinner: "The guests is all in here waitin' for their dinner and everyone of my waiters is out in the hall doin' cake-walks and buck dances. I just can't do anything with 'em, and I thought maybe you'd save me my job, sah, by playin' when them niggers ain't got no orders to serve." A newspaper item like this reminds us how much the period's racist folklore was *not* confined to the vaudeville stage. "Had All The Waiters Dancing," *Larned Chronoscope*, January 4, 1901.

testifies to the fact that something new in culture—Black culture; white culture; the common culture— was being articulated.

1.1.1. From the Balcony to the Stage

Strap Hill's travel from the balcony to the stage; Harney's travel from St. Louis to New York City; Harney's and Hill's travel from city to city—we can regard these all as symbols and tokens of the transformation that was occurring in America at the end of the nineteenth century, and for which ragtime was the underscore. To claim that America itself was in the midst of moving from the balcony to the stage is not only to torture a metaphor. The country's history as an empire was being consolidated with its 1898 conquests in the Caribbean, when newspapers ecstatically relayed that the invasion of Cuba was accompanied by military bands blaring out ragtime hits.[5] America's new imperial holdings, which included vast new resources of cheap Filipino labor—crowned a period of incredibly rapid industrialization. While small agricultural towns had still been the geographic norm in the 1870s, the 1880s saw as much as 40 percent of their population disappear.[6] For Harney's audiences in northeastern cities, his St. Louis, being both a "South" and a "West" represented a rapidly disappearing quasi-feudal, quasi-wild form of life; a reminder of the closing frontier; the end of Jeffersonian dreams of citizen farmers. The countryside was quickly becoming a "market colony" to the new industrial cities that now headquartered more than nine tenths of

[5] "Will Warm The Old Town," *Daily Times*, June 24, 1898.

[6] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 1–3; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 114. See also Thomas C. Cochran, *The Age of Enterprise; a Social History of Industrial America*, PublisherHarper (New York, 1961); Allan Pred, *The Spatial Dynamics of U.S. Urban-Industrial Growth, 1800-1914: Interpretive and Theoretical Essays*, 6 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966); Carl N. Degler, *The Age of the Economic Revolution, 1876-1900* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1976); Richard Franklin Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the "Gilded Age," 1865-1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1989): 120–44.

all manufacturing, eliminating the home handicraft that had formerly characterized American culture.[7] These cities sent out webs of electrified rail systems, gathering smaller settlements into clusters of suburban commuter districts, drawing masses of people to congest the city centers.[8] In short, America was transitioning from a collection of island cultures into a "tightly structured society," subsumed increasingly to the imperatives of large capital.[9] The temples of the age were not only the new neoclassical bank buildings and stock exchanges, but also the equally grand railroad stations erected in the hearts of cities, "emblem[s] of the immense fact that 'distance' had become a matter of time rather than space, that (after 1883) all times were now one." [10]

1.1.2. Space and Time

It is a suggestive irony that a syncopated music would accompany this moment of increasing coordination and synchronization. But in truth, the music trade was revolutionized like all others by these conversions of space into time. They were the condition, in fact, for the existence of the "song plugger"—the emissary of the music publishing firm charged with cajoling musicians into performing their wares. Figure 1.1 shows a typical evening's travel around lower Manhattan by the song plugger Edward Marks in the 1890s, around the time of Ben Harney's performance.[11]

Let's follow along with him. We leave the office after eight, hungry for a meal, but with no time to spare. It's not just Marks and us, either—the "indispensable" Louis the Whistler

[7] Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).
[8] Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 114.
[9] Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 3.
[10] Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 120.
[11] This scene is based on Marks, *They All Sang*, 1–4.

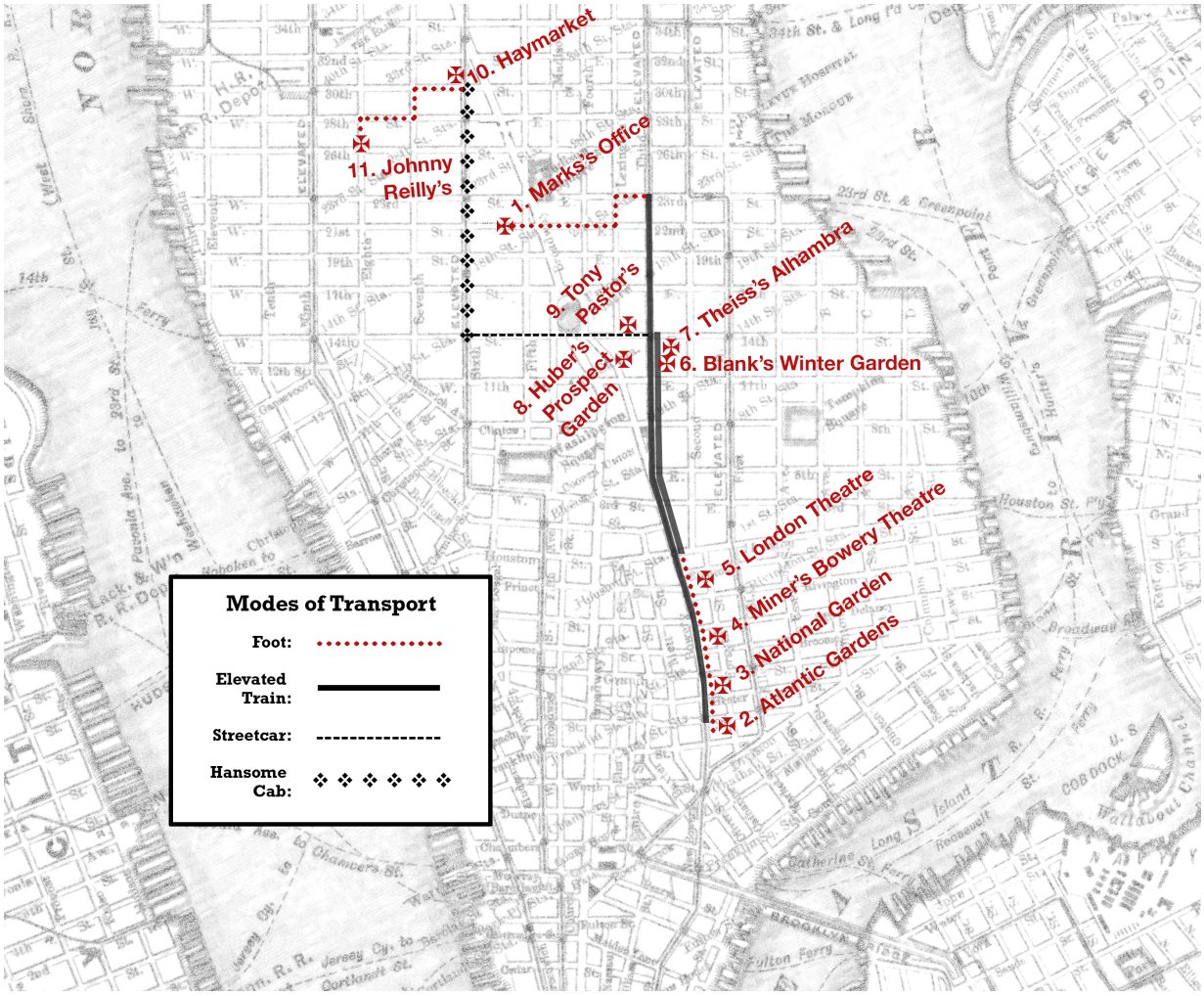


Figure 1.1: A song pluggers evening round c.1896

is in tow. His job is to use his superior whistling skills to induce a good singer to do a second, or even third chorus of one of our songs. (He's also ready with a stack of "chorus slips" which we'll drop on tables so the audience might join in the singing.) Our first stop is the Atlantic Garden on the Bowery, a beer garden and music hall just south of Canal Street. We can get practically to the door by hopping on the steam-powered Third Avenue Elevated train. We've got to make it in time to reach the "family crowd"—the mostly recent-German immigrants who will shortly disperse to put their children to bed. Everything is "quiet and gemütlich." The ladies orchestra is playing one of our competitors tunes, the house arranger having interpolated four bars of rest in every phrase so the women behind the brass instruments can catch their breath. While Marks is ingratiating himself to potentially useful figures ("twenty-one beers at a nickel" for the orchestra; "a ten-cent cigar for the comedian who had promised to sing 'You're Not the Only Pebble on the Beach"') Louis is "accidentally" replacing other chorus slips with our "Elsie From Chelsea." Our work pays off. Jennie Lindsay's performance is a hit—when Louis whistles the second refrain, "a fair number of the men in the crowd whistled with him." We can be certain that some of the women will "want it for their pianos tomorrow."

Finished there, we have to hustle. Between Canal Street and Houston Street lay three important venues—The National Garden (or the "Nash"); Miner's Bowery Theater (which was supposedly the first to yank bad performers from the stage with a hook); and the London Theater. The managers at these latter two venues are stiff-necked; it's hard to get backstage, and once we get there no act is interested in our songs. Time to catch the "El" at Houston and hit up the houses around 13th Street. Blank's Winter Garden—a "family resort" for not the "first families"—is a good place for a plug, although we'll first have to buy off the fearsome bouncer with two whiskeys for a quarter. Across the street, Theiss's Alhambra Music Hall is a very different scene. Beer drinkers here are "non grata": we'll have to buy

wine for the orchestra, twenty-six men strong. But our investment may pay off big. This is a tourist destination, and it means a lot to have "our numbers carried out to the sticks in the subconsciousness of a tipsy country cousin."[12] Slightly further south we duck into George Huber's Prospect Garden—an attempt at an English-style music hall, despite the staff being "entirely Germanic." There we listen to a few bawdy tunes and receive word that the house tenor has declined our latest vocal arrangement—even though we put his face on the cover! We'd like to drown our sorrows in steak and beers at Luchow's next door, but we don't have time. We'll take the crosstown streetcar on 14th Street to Sixth Avenue, where we can get a horse-drawn hansom cab on the corner to rush us sixteen blocks north to the racy Haymarket Theater.[13] But not, of course, before a requisite stop at Tony Pastor's!

Our night ends in the Abbey, Johnny Reilly's saloon on Eighth Avenue between 26th and 27th, where the West Side's "boiled and belated spenders" come to lend moral and vocal support to the girl singers at two or three in the morning. Hearing "two or three dozen choruses" of our song "Rosie O'Grady" is a happy way to end our rounds. "There is no surer way of starting a song off to popularity than to get it sung as loudly as possible in the city's lowest dives."[14]

> […] with its initial break in the beer hall, a song might work up to the smaller variety houses, and finally to Tony Pastor's […] whence some British singer might carry it home to London. If it scored there, it might come back here as a society sensation. And the whole process, from bottom to top, might take several years […][15]

[12] "The train of association whereby "Annie Rooney" eventually appeared on the piano in a small town banker's house would have shocked many a fine community." Marks, *They All Sang*, 18.

[13] "The Haymarket was the most famous dance hall of the Tenderloin. Originally a variety theatre, the Haymarket served as a dance hall from 1878 until reformers closed its doors in 1913 […] Featuring one of the better bands in town, the wall attracted a large number of big spenders and fancy women. Slummers, visiting firemen, and men out on the town took in the Haymarket as one of their necessary stops. […] Along the balcony, couples could repair to boxes and tables, while behind the boxes stood special enclosed cubicles featuring sexual exhibitions […]" Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 22.

[14] Marks, *They All Sang*, 3.

[15] Marks, *They All Sang*, 3.

As our night out with Marks suggests, the song plugger was one of the first personas to become fluent in the group unconscious of consumer society. Every calculated act made to boost a song was effective to the extent that it was invisible to the audience.[16] And these calculations were valid on the basis of extensive practical knowledge of the divisions within the audience. It was figures like Marks who (along with his merchandise) circulated between seedy joints like the Haymarket and cozier halls like the Atlantic Gardens—not their respective patrons. And therefore it was figures like Marks who helped coordinate the effect that many would find so mysterious—that there were songs, and even whole new styles of music, that seemed to come from everywhere at once, hummed and whistled by everyoned at once, without anyone knowing where they came from.

And the song-plugger was not alone. Another important figure in the dispersal of popular music was the organ-grinder, whose business—like the song-plugger's—was also a matter of practical geography:

> The particular tunes which are chosen for any one [hand-organ] depend on the quarter of the city through which lies the beat of the man who turns the crank. Every city organ-grinder has a definite beat […] If the beat lies through the German or Italian quarter, then German or Italian national characteristic airs are added to the repertoire of the organ. If the organ is to travel through upper Fifth avenue in the region of the Fifties […] some opera airs and a 'romance' are used. In the Bowery region it is rag-time and waltzes that bring in the most money."[17]

In his memoir, Marks reflected that the song plugger, "[i]n his wanderings […] saw as broad a cross-section of New York as any man," and he might have included the organ grinder.[18]

[16] Composers would ultimately recognize this for themselves. Here is Abe Holzman, revealing how he made "Smoky-Moke" a hit: "I correspond with all of the leading opera house orchestra leaders in the country and get them to play my pieces. Now, with 'Smoky-Moke' I got the leaders to play the piece just after the last act and while the people were going out. You think that strange? Well, you see I have figured this thing out. While the people are going out they will naturally begin to keep step to rag-time: then begin unconsciously to hum it, or the boys in the gallery to whistle it and thuse the tune is impressed on their minds in the most natural and effective manner." "He Believes In Ragtime," *St. Joseph News-Press*, May 25, 1901.

[17] "Cost of Hand Organs," *Buffalo Commercial*, February 28, 1901.

[18] "[…] even broader than a wine agent's, because the song plugger hit spots where champagne would have

For now, let us note, while consulting my map, that this perspective would have been impossible without the forms of mechanized movement that converted the topos of the city into its own diagram. As Benedict Anderson famously argued, any imagined community depends on a shared intuition of simultaneity: of a mutual *now*-ness; and this is conditioned ultimately by the velocity of possible movement.[19] The sheer possibility of Marks's routine trip—the diversity of space and audience compressed into a graspable temporal unit of experience—was the condition for the emergence of what would be so difficult for contemporaries to decipher: *mass popular music*. And it was ragtime that would first pose this problem.

1.1.3. Minstrelsy; Mass Culture; the "Middle Class"; Hegemony

Now, to claim that ragtime was the first form of mass popular music is to contest a common view that 19th-century blackface minstrelsy constituted its origin.[20] But I do not deny that minstrelsy substantially directed the emergence of American mass culture. As Richard Crawford observed, minstrelsy was the "first musical genre to reverse the east-to-west transatlantic flow of professional performers"; and it was moreover responsible for "deskilling" professional music making.[21] There is also no doubt that—despite (indeed, *because* of) its Southern, rural subject matter—minstrelsy accompanied the emergence of northern industrial cities.[22] Ragtime, at least in part, must be understood as a *transformation* of materials

been considered an effeminate affectation." Marks, *They All Sang*, 3–4.

[19] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 22–36.

[20] This view is perhaps most famously rendered by Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007); Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse."

[21] "A minstrel's apprenticeship involved no particular pedigree or formal training." Richard Crawford, *The American Musical Landscape: The Business of Musicianship from Billings to Gershwin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 76. See also Dale. Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[22] "Typical purveyors of minstrelsy, then, were Northern and urban; they were neither New Englanders nor Southerner." Alexander Saxton, "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology," *American Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1975): 7.

developed and worked over by the minstrel tradition. But the question of its being "mass culture" depends on determining what "mass culture" is. And on this point a number of socio-historical niceties are necessary if we want to use the concept with precision.

If "mass culture" is not to be synonymous with "popular culture," or "low culture," or "lowbrow culture" (or even "middle brow" culture), it can only be because there is something distinctive about the "mass" as an audience. On this point, it seems to me that one of the requirements of a "mass" form is that it *not* bear a strong class referent.[23] While the "mass" public is certainly not an elite one, this fact does not entail its being a low one; or at least, the lowest one, or indeed any *kind* of one at all, for the making of a mass is really the "grinding down of age, sex, regional, rural-urban, economic, and status differences."[24] The rabble who had flocked to the minstrel shows (and who had rioted at the Astor Place Theater when the Shakespeare was too English) were overwhelmingly male and working-class—they were essentially too visible to count as a mass.[25] The true mass audience, as Irving Howe put it on the eve of the 1950s, is an "anonymous audience." Or as Dwight Macdonald wrote at around the same moment: a "large quantity of people unable to express their human qualities because they are related to each other neither as individuals nor as members of a community."[26]

Furthermore: for the culture consumed by this atomized, anonymous audience to be truly *mass* culture it must "not subvert the basic patterns of industrial life. […] It must provide relief from work monotony without making the return to work too unbearable."[27] Mass culture is *not* a carnivalesque discharge of affect: it is the *management* of leisure time. It is

[23] In Marxese, masses are vegetal conglomerations—sackfuls of potatoes—of individuals lacking the self-conciousness a class can possess. The canonical text is "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," found in Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings*, ed. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2010). and elsewhere.

[24] Harold M. Hodges, *Social Stratification; Class in America* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1964), 6.

[25] On the maleness of minstrelsy, see Erenberg, *Steppin' out*, 19–20.

[26] Irving Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," *Politics*, 1948, 120; Dwight Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult: Essays against the American Grain* (New York: New York Review Books, 2011), 8.

[27] Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," 120. For Howe, it was the mark of *art* that it made the return to work unbearable.

therefore probably most useful to think through its construction as the construction of a *hegemony*, as in the tradition of Antonio Gramsci and his readers: that is, as a "synthesis of consent and coercion." Mass culture *qua* hegemony prevails as a stabilized conception of the world recognized by the mass audience as *theirs*. Within this conception fall a diversity of standpoints and sometimes even forms of apparent social struggle. What is crucial is that the "perspective" it renders is not a parochial or residual one but a manifestly *general* one.

On this point, the concept of hegemony can play a clarifying role in the casual historiography of American culture. For it is a good candidate to supplement the social character known as the "middle class," which one frequently finds in possession of an agency and ubiquity disproportionate to its specificity. In many accounts the "middle class" apparently rules by fiat. In classic works, like Kathy Peiss's *Cheap Amusements* it played the disciplining foil to the working class women whose lives the book documented.[28] In more recent texts, like Dean Hubbs's *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*, it is invested with the power to be the "narrating class."[29] In other accounts the middle class appears as a quasi-natural force. Russell B. Nye's account of popular culture traces it to the "appearance of a predominantly middle-class civilization in the Western world"—an increase in urban populations and leisure which seems to have occurred with the historicity of a shifting tectonic plate.[30] But when (as frequently) the class is given the role of historical subject, a barber-pole vision of progress results: as Ellen Meiksens Wood quipped, history becomes "the perennial rise of the middle classes."[31] In some accounts, it can be difficult to find anyone who *isn't* middle class. In Nicholas Tawa's *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans*—which I quote from below—it can refer, in the same sentence, to the comfortable professionals of New England and also to "most Americans."[32]

[28] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).
[29] Nadine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
[30] Russel B. Nye, *The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America*, (New York: Dial Press, 1970).
[31] Actually, Wood is repeating an unnamed someone else's quip. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2017), 14.
[32] Nicholas E. Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans: The Parlor Song in America, 1790-1860* (Bowling Green,

This constant toggling between nature and history; potency and averageness *is* the discursive role played by the concept in historical explanation and in contemporary public discourse. And this is precisely what recommends it as a hegemonic construction *par excellence*. It is significant that although it sometimes faces off against a "working class," the class above it is seldom named.[33] (In fact, the upper limit of the "middle class" seems most often to be an internal one—the *upper* middle class.) By taking oneself to belong to a middle class—which is probably what most people who encounter the concept immediately do—one takes oneself to belong to the group which mysteriously both rules and is ruled. The very concept itself synthesizes consent and coercion.[34]

This is not necessarily an argument against the existence of the middle class. Like any good ideologeme, it mediates reality; makes it knowable, and to that extent it exists. But the composition and articulation of the middle class—which is to say, the consistency of the masses; which is also to say, the construction of a particular instance of hegemony—is a historical process, and not one that yields a coherent group of people whose collective journey through history can be traced.

Michael Denning has put this in very useful terms:

> The building of hegemonic formations is not only a matter of "ideas," of winning hearts and minds, but also an issue of participation, in the sense of involving people both in cultural institutions—schools, churches, sporting events—and in

Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980).

[33] Martin Nunlee, *When Did We All Become Middle Class? /* (Routledge, 2017).

[34] The apparent existence of a large "middle class" in the societies of advanced capitalism seemed to discredit Marx's prophecy that the world would birfucate into capitalists and workers. And when Marxists like Nicos Poulantzas and Erik Olin Wright attempted a theoretical account of the class, they would tend to emphasize ideology, culture, and forms of occupation rather than economic function—a departure from the traditional Marxist deployment of class. But one doesn't need to be a Marxist to be befuddled by the concept. As a report issued by the Obama White House admitted, although "economists, policy makers, and just about everyone else talk about the middle class, no standard definition exists." And moreover: "Middle-class families are defined by their aspirations more than their income." How those values are formed, satisfied, or revised is—as always—much less clear.Nicos Poulantzas, "On Social Classes," *New Left Review*, April 1, 1973, 27–54; Erik Olin Olin Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: Verso Books, 1985); Joe Biden, "Annual Report of the White House Task Force on the Middle Class," 2010, 10.

> long-term historic projects—waging wars, establishing colonies, gentrifying a city, developing a regional economy. […] The power of this conception for the analysis of popular cultural artifacts is that it provides the necessary complement to the analysis of the social construction of cultural value. If that work establishes that there are no intrinsic values in cultural objects, and no natural or expressive relation between classes and cultural practices, a theory of hegemony provides the framework by which we may examine the *historical articulations of class formations and commodity forms.*[35]

Class formations and commodity forms. My largest claim is that it is only beginning with ragtime that we have a form of music which actually had access to these real abstractions and could knit them together. The capitalist hegemony that is hard-won by the post-war era—and which is the topic of the next chapter—took its initial steps in the age of ragtime. As I will argue below, hegemony requires the elaboration of generalities, and culture follows suit. By contrast, the music of the minstrel stage was not generally embraced as authentic music by patrician audiences, who tended to view it as a travesty of the genuine Negro music for which they had already developed a taste.[36] They probably would have agreed with Frederick Douglass's judgment that the performers represented the "filthy scum of white society."[37] And they were also too much the butt of the jokes onstage to be truly comfortable in the seats.[38] Moreover, American patricians did not yet necessarily confront their plebian others as members of an antagonistic class requiring discipline. Although these American Victorians were enthusiastic evangelists of their *Bildung* culture, to speak of a single American culture in this period is especially false: the "high" and "low" cultures 19th-century America

[35] Michael Denning, "The Ends of Ending Mass Culture," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 38 (1990): 14. My emphasis.

[36] "Songs of the Blacks," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, November 15, 1856.. "Many middle-class Americans of the mid-nineteenth century objected to the kind of speech that came from the mouths of blackfaced minstrel singers." Tawa, *Sweet Songs*, 89.

[37] Frederick Douglass, "The Hutchinson Family," *North Star*, October 27, 1848.

[38] Edward Marks would later insist that the minstrel show declined because its actual object of ridicule—the mannered world of the old American Victorian bourgeois—disappeared. This historical theory is completely consonant with the account I will unfold later in this chapter.

were parallel formations.[39] They did *intersect* in the theaters, where Shakespeare was happily laced with "jugglers, acrobats, comics, trained animals, singers, dancers, and other variety acts"—and so a *common culture* without hierarchical divisions could be said to exist—but this encounter cannot be described as a stable unity.[40]

Furthermore, commodity circulation was not dominant in minstrelsy, where music was still the music of the *stage*, and not generally objectified in printed or recorded form. While the genteel owners of pianos might slum occasionally with a song-sheet of "Long Tail Blue," the tune's origin and spirit lay in the masculinist carnival atmosphere of the traveling troupe, not the domestic living room. Ragtime would be the first to simultaneously occupy both of these spaces, and more.

1.1.4. Sentimental songs

But the song-*qua*-commodity-form by which ragtime insinuated itself already existed. It was essentially the stock of "sentimental" or "parlor" songs furnished by 19th-century music publishers for the respectable markets. The native-born patrician men and women who clustered near their pianos in their parlors—not living rooms!—were of eminently Anglo-Victorian sensibilities. They believed in propriety, regularity, the patriarchal family, the noble necessity of self-repression, and the infinite road of self-improvement.[41] Lessons and practice at the piano were perfect expressions of Victorian sensibility.[42] And their Victorian sensibilities were confirmed by the amateur songs that their genteel daughters learned to

[39] Daniel Walker Howe, "American Victorianism as a Culture," *American Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (1975): 510.

[40] Robert C. Toll, *The Entertainment Machine: American Show Business in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 5; Peter Buckley, "Paratheatricals and Popular Stage Entertainment," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre: Volume 1: Beginnings to 1870*, ed. Christopher Bigsby and Don B. Wilmeth, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 424–81. See also, of course: Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[41] Erenberg, *Steppin' out*, 7.

[42] "Music was considered a necessary component of a genteel education." Tawa, *Sweet Songs*, 44.

play.[43]

Perhaps the Victorian preference for self-repression precluded "any subtle probing of an individualized experience"—at any rate this American *lieder* had no whiff of Schubertian psychology.[44] As Nicholas Tawa has observed, the principal themes of the parlor songs were home and the bonds of family.[45] And songwriters measured these values by obsessively contemplating their loss. "I'm Lonely Since My Mother Died," H.M. Thompson forthrightly declared.[46] "I've No Mother Now, I'm Weeping" concurred Tip Smith.[47] "What is home without a mother?" wondered the pseudonymous Alice Hawthorne.[48] In fact, an endless quantum of mothers lay buried under "hazel dells," mourned by an equally endless procession of sons and daughters and widowers. Sons and daughters also died, presumably with "Kiss Me Before I Die, Mother" on their lips.[49] Sometimes sons died without their mothers near, in which case another mother might step in to "Kiss Him for His Mother."[50] And of course, every living father or mother or sister or brother was in principle only a future *dead* father or mother or sister or brother:

> Be kind to thy father–for when thou wert young
> Who loved thee so fondly as he?
> He caught the first accents that fell from thy tongue,
> And joined in thy innocent glee.
> Be kind to thy father, for now he is old
> His locks intermingled with gray
> His footsteps are feeble, once fearless and bold,

[43] "Songs were […] expected to illustrate the principles of social relationships that society found essential. An indispensable function of parlor song was the reflection and reinforcement of values shared by most Americans, values centered on concepts of propriety, morality and the idealization of emotion." Tawa, *Sweet Songs*, 38.

[44] "Any subtle probing of an individualized experience is absent […]" Tawa, *Sweet Songs*, 158.

[45] "By far the most popular theme in the parlor ballads is affection, either love that is usually tender and sometimes passionate for the person of the opposite sex, or devotion to parents, siblings, children and friends, or attachment to an inanimate object associated with one or more loved persons." Tawa, *Sweet Songs*, 123.

[46] H.M. Thompson, *I'm Lonely since My Mother Died* (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1863).

[47] Tip Smith, *I've No Mother Now, I'm Weeping* (Baltimore: William C. Miller, 1865).

[48] Alice Hawthorne, *What Is Home without a Mother* (Philadelphia: Lee & Walker, 1854).

[49] E. Clarke Illsley, *Kiss Me before I Die Mother* (Augusta, GA: Blackmar and Brother, 1860).

[50] John Pond Ordway, *Let Me Kiss Him for His Mother* (Augusta, GA: Blackmar and Brother, 1860).

Thy father is passing away.[51]

The crucial musical device of the Victorian parlor song—the true crux of its affective form—was what Brad Osborn has recently called the "subdominant tritone": a marked suspension of the diatonic leading tone over a subdominant chord. Figures 1.2 through 1.6 are typical.

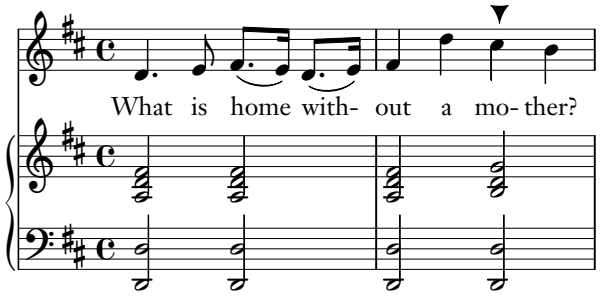


Figure 1.2: Hawthorne, 1854, "What Is Home Without A Mother"



Figure 1.3: Illsley, 1860, "Kiss Me Before I Die, Mother"

Brad Osborn writes:

> In its scalar magnetism—its desire to resolve upward to the tonic—it signifies longing and striving—but a longing for something that is in the opposite direction from the target of its contrapuntal *obligations*, the perfect musical accompaniment to *unrequited love*.[52]

As all American Victorian obligations were very deeply felt, and all American Victorian love

[56] I.B. Woodbury, *Be Kind to the Loved Ones at Home* (Boston: A. & J. Ordway, 1847).

[52] Brad Osborn, "The Subdominant Tritone in Film and Television Music," *Current Musicology* 107 (2020): 64. My emphasis.

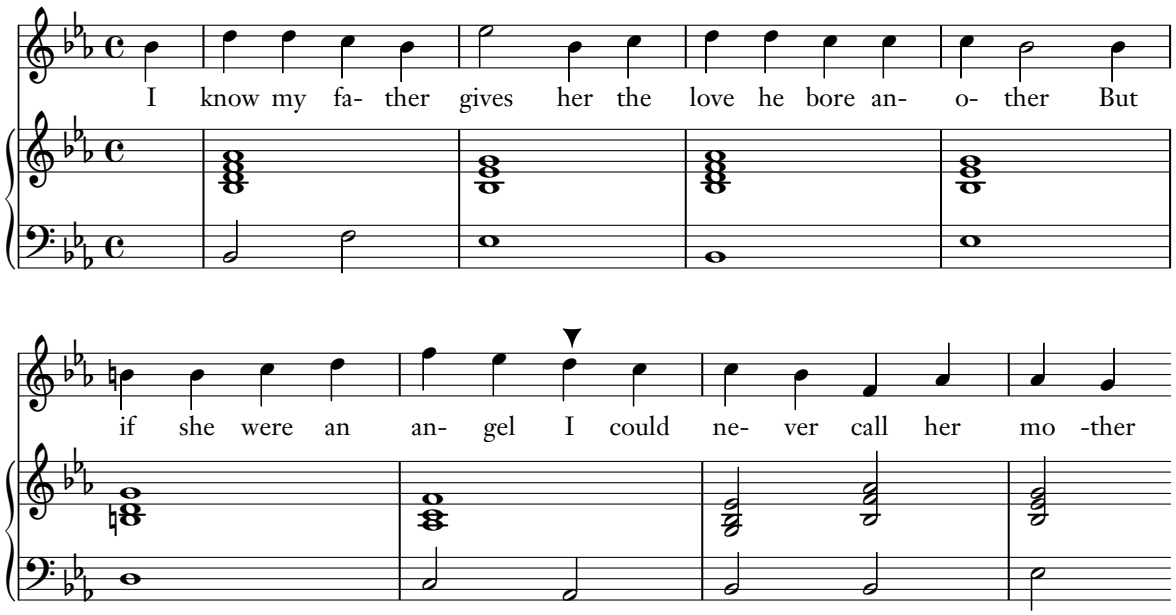


Figure 1.4: War, 1858, "I Cannot Call Her Mother"



Figure 1.5: Woodbury, 1847, "Be Kind to the Loved Ones at Home"



Figure 1.6: Dun, 1850, "Annie Laurie"

was—at least, somehow, in principal—*structurally* unrequited, the subdominant tritone was the perfect encapsulation of the Victorian *mentalité*.

Truthfully, I am being a bit flippant. Despite the irreducibly maudlin effects of the parlor songs, they do—despite themselves—reveal a critical sticking point of 19th-century genteel conciousness. American Victorians believed both in Providence and the sacred duty of motherhood.[53] But they also frequently faced the deaths of mothers and children in childbirth. (And there was also the matter of the American Civil War.) This basic incompatibility between official belief and real experience—aurally symbolized by the gap between the subdominant tritone's contrapuntal obligations and its actual conduct—was tragic, in Hegel's sense of testifying to fundamentally incompatible systems of value. But despite all the dead brothers, no Antigone emerged. The parlor song was unable to *stage* the tragedy; it could only render it in feeling.[54]

Against this excruciatingly humorless backdrop, it is not difficult to discern the appeal of minstrelsy. As ugly and despicable as its racial representations were, it also offered a vitality and a sense of reality that the parlor song repertory very clearly lacked. It is significant that most historians of "American popular song" choose to hurry past the avalanche of dead mothers in order to enthusiastically greet—as did his contemporary audiences—the arrival of Stephen Foster.[55] For Foster's genius lay in his combining the tropes of the minstrel stage

[53] "The high esteem accorded the status of motherhood in Victorian culture was a logical consequence of the importance assigned the mother as an agent of cultural transmission. The mother was an acknowledged guardian of moral, religious, and other cultural values among American Victorians, and the home was her sphere of influence. She was expected to operate to a large extent through emotional conditioning, conceding to her husband superiority in the ultimately more important domain of reason. What was innovative in Victorian culture, however, was not the final supremacy of the father in the family, for that had characterized Western civilization since time out of mind; it was the new importance accorded the mother's position." Howe, "American Victorianism as a Culture," 530.

[54] The letters and journals of bereaved 19th-century Americans are often heartbreaking in the plain way in which they reckon their pain. On these themes, see Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience. 1: Education of the Senses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 243–55.

[55] Charles Hamm and Wolfgang Laade, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America*, Wolfgang Laade Music of Man Archive (New York: Norton, 1983).

with the pseudo-emotion of the parlor song. His songs therefore attained a depth that was missing in each. Simply by being an elderly slave on a southern plantation—a stereotype developed and elaborated in blackface—Foster's "Old Black Joe" possessed a concreteness and individuality that the Victorian "Father" never could. That the freed slave might pine for "the old folks at home" was clearly more deserving of the pathos of the subdominant tritone. Even more than minstrelsy, Foster's songs "touched the central chords of white consciousness—the place left behind and the endless outward journey."[56] In their growing sense of dislocation and anxiety over traditional patterns of life, the genteel strata of 19th-century America were feeling the emergence of industrial capitalism as much as anyone.[57] But they lacked—as ruling strata tend to lack—self-representations that could adequately express their inner feelings. While Northern working-men thronged theaters in order to see white men in racial drag spoof their social betters, their social betters applied an invisible layer of burnt cork at their pianos and sighed.[58] It was "not until the 1890s that a new musical culture came into view."[59] And it came into view in vaudeville theaters like Tony Pastor's.

[56] Saxton, "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology," 28.

[57] "[T]he rush of modernization was evident in nearly every facet of Victorian society, rural and urban, agricultural and industrial. Manifestations of the broad involvement in the modern personality abound, whehter one looks at common working people or the wealthy and educated elite. Indeed it may well be that the most traditional-seeming aspects of Victorian culture, the patriarchalism and the misty-eyed idealization of the past, were actually self-conscious attempts to soften the hard edges of modernization, to reduce its psychological stresses." Richard D. Brown, "Modernization: A Victorian Climax," *American Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (December 1975): 535.

[58] "Minstrelsy gave America its own Eden and, at the same time, allowed it to evade the crushing shame of reality." Sam Dennison, *Scandalize My Name: Black Imagery in American Popular Music /* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 92.

[59] Nicholas Gebhardt, *Vaudeville Melodies: Popular Musicians and Mass Entertainment in American Culture, 1870-1929* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1.

1.1.5. Vaudeville

The arrival of mass popular music had to await the arrival of urban masses, and the cultural venues to form them. Cue immigrants. Cue the "great migration" of Southern African Americans. Cue railroads. Cue factories and workers and growing ranks of "white collar" mental workers—the so-called new "middle class." Cue urban transport systems. Cue railroad suburbs. Cue slums. The curtain rises: it is the curtain of the vaudeville theater.

What was vaudeville? In the most concrete terms, it was "a series of individual acts strung together to produce a complete bill of entertainment." In other words, it was simply variety theater—a kind of entertainment that had long existed in saloon environments; and in the middle "olio" section of minstrel shows, and which we would have encountered in our evening with Edwark Marks. The "turns" of solo monologists were followed by bird acts; or magicians; or acrobats; even miniature operettas; and so on. The word "vaudeville" had also already existed for some time, both in France and America, denoting urban folksongs—as in *voix de ville*, "voice of the city." "But vaudeville, as turn-of-the-century Americans understood it, was variety theatre that entrepreneurs made tasteful for middle-class women and men and their families by removing the smoky, boozy, licentious male atmosphere."[60]

Easily accessible entertainment for the broadest swathe of people possible. It was Tony Pastor himself who had pioneered this format by removing liquor from his theater and aggressively courting aspirational working-class people away from more pretentious forms of entertainment. He also cast a wide net. With his programs he included a map showing his

[60] Robert W. Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12. See also: David Nasaw, *Going out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 18–33; Albert F. McLean, *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965); Mark Hodin, "Class, Consumption, and Ethnic Performance in Vaudeville," *Prospects* 22 (October 1997): 193–210; Geoffrey Hilsabeck and Luc Sante, *American Vaudeville* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2021); M. Alison Kibler, *Censoring Racial Ridicule: Irish, Jewish, and African American Struggles over Race and Representation, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

theater's proximity to streetcar lines, elevated trains, and trollies to ferries.[61] By the turn of the century, other and bigger fish had entered the market and consolidated theaters across the country into the national "circuits" through which travelled the vaudeville entertainers. A handful of outfits would ultimately control the entire industry—the Keith-Albee firm alone controlled more than 400 houses across the country by the 1920s.[62] Now thoroughly rationalized, replete with standardized contract practices, labor struggles, and worker-led social security schemes, vaudeville represented in the world of amusement what Ivory soap and Gillette razors represented in the realm of personal hygiene: a standardized, efficiently produced—and inexpensive—commodity for the new urban consumer.[63]

It's probably best to conceive of vaudeville as the direct ancestor of radio, television, or the internet. It was both an apparatus for the distribution of entertainment and a place for audiences to discover what was *new*—"up to date." In place of fiber optic cables, or satellite transmitters, vaudevillian entertainers travelled the rails like human radio waves, beaming the latest comic routines, dances, and hit songs around the country. But from the beginning, vaudeville bosses exercised a kind of self-conscious control over the constitution of their audiences that radio and television executives could never dream of. The making of the mass audience—the "grinding down of age, sex, regional, rural-urban, economic, and status differences"—the disciplining of the rabble; the assertion of average and general values; these were basically manifest projects of the vaudeville industry. Minstrel show entertainers might well have been the "scum of white society." Tony Pastor posted signs backstage reminding performers not to swear on the premises.

Respectability was in fact the order of the day. Along these lines, a 1918 manual for vaudeville theater operators assembled the best practices from a generation's worth of ex-

[61] Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 21.
[62] Toll, *The Entertainment Machine*, 11.
[63] Toll, *The Entertainment Machine*, 11.

perience:

- "The general appearance of all box-office employees is important; clean shaved, clean hands, well-kept nails, clean linen are essential. […] At night performances the ticket-seller should wear dinner dress, and at no time should he work in shirt-sleeves. Heat comes with the summer, it is true, but this does not justify a coatless ticket seller."[64]
- "If the ticket-seller is a woman, she should be attractive but not too pretty, unless she is one of those rare exceptions who does not unduly value her good looks. Peroxide blondes have no use for other women, and too much attraction for young men."[65]
- The maid of the ladies room "should preferably be white, about thirty-five years of age"[66]
- "Sobriety in the orchestra should be an absolute requirement."[67]
- "A drunken man or woman should be absolutely refused a ticket."[68]
- In attracting people from the neighborhoods, avoid side street locations. "Passes which call for seats in the best sections should not be issued to individuals who are likely to smell "garlicky" or be poorly dressed."[69]

Clean; attractive but not too pretty; mature but not aged; sober; *white*; *assimilated*. These were the dream features of everyone who stood outside the perimeter of the vaudeville stage. But within it, the values were almost completely reversed. Not only the clowns but the

[64] Edward Renton, *The Vaudeville Theatre*, *Building*, *Operation*, *Management* (New York: Gotham Press, 1918), 136–37.
[65] Renton, *Vaudeville Theatre*, 137.
[66] Renton, *Vaudeville Theatre*, 158.
[67] Renton, *Vaudeville Theatre*, 296.
[68] Renton, *Vaudeville Theatre*, 134.
[69] Renton, *Vaudeville Theatre*, 239.

dancers might dress like tramps; the women were either beautiful or ugly; the performers were of all ages. And (as we know from Ben Harney's appearance with Strap Hill) the vaudeville stage was not inhospitable to depictions of ethnic difference. The "Irishman," the "Sheeny Jew," the Italian, the "Chinaman"—not to mention the "Negro"—all found "representation" in vaudeville.

It is at this point that we re-encounter one of the recurring problems of American popular culture—namely, the fundamental semiological status of the ethnic stereotype, and the sociological wrinkle it introduces in mass culture forms. For there is no doubt that the Irish, or Jewish, or Slavic immigrants who made careers burlesquing their respective peoples did it for audiences who laughed with *and* at them; who were mocking the others *and* themselves; who both identified with *and* ridiculed the outsider. Although this ambivalent structure of reception is well known from studies of blackface minstrelsy, it definitely predates it, and it definitely perdures today. It goes without saying that so long as any forms of difference attain representation in a social form structured by inequality, any representation is a site of (more-or-less conscious) contest. The vaudeville stage (like any analogous cultural space since) was a site where conceptions of what could count (in the semiotic codes of mass culture) as Irish or Jewish or Negro were solidified and refined.[70] But it must be remembered that the system of symbols that resulted were, as V.N. Voloshinov would say, "multi-accentual." The cultural messages exchanged were both sent and received in ways that evade stable definition.[71]

Nevertheless, it is possible to discern a general semiotic shift that occurred with the transfer of energies from the minstrel to the vaudeville stage, and which is evident in other aspects of the contemporary American culture: namely, a shift to the aesthetic values of realism—Auerbach's "serious treatment of everyday reality."[72] Ben Harney's professorial account of

[70] Nasaw, *Going out*, 47–61; Mark Hodin, "The Disavowal of Ethnicity: Legitimate Theatre and the Social Construction of Literary Value in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 2 (2000): 211–26.

[71] Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*.

[72] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univer-

ragtime music—and the way the effect of his act depended on his faithful reproductions of "genuine Negro music"—was not unique: the vaudevillians who specialized in ethnic caricature worked from real life. Here is an account, again from song-plugger Edward Marks, again of an act at Tony Pastors:

> What old-timer can ever forget Frank Bush at Pastor's? He was a light-haired German, yet he imitated an East Side Hebrew of the nineties to perfection. With his long, tapering black beard, his spectacles, and Prince Albert coat, he looked, talked, and acted the part flawlessly. It was a studied mimicry. On Grand Street, near Pitt, there was a pawn broker called Old Man Nelson. This was the character that Frank Bush studied. He watched him wait on customers day after day for years. As people came into the dingy hock shop to pawn their belongings, Bush absorbed every story, every jest, every bit of kindly and witty philosophy, and every mannerism of the Old Man. Bush hung around the shop hours on end […t]hen he brought to the variety stage the pulsating and kaleidoscopic story of the East Side, taken right from life, with a power of mimicry that was uncanny. With his perfect delineation of the humorous, kindly, philosophical old East Side Hebrew, he could stay on Pastor's stage half an hour, entertain any audience, and leave them applauding for more.[73]

It is no surprise, then, that sociologists at the University of Chicago would class the vaudeville performer alongside the ward boss and the shop girl as one of the "characteristic products of city life."[74] Each of these figures performed crucial pedagogical functions in the incredible making-workers-out-of-immigrants machine that was the turn-of-the-century American industrial city.[75] "The city," wrote Adna Weber in 1899, "is the spectroscope of society; it analyzes and sifts the population, separating and classifying the diverse elements."[76] These elements would find their homes in the Italian "colonies," the

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sity Press, 2013).

[73] Marks, *They All Sang*, 14–15.

[74] Robert Ezra Park, E. W. Burgess, and Robert J. Sampson, *The City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 14.

[75] Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[76] Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century. A Study in Statistics* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 442.

Jewish "ghettos," the black "tenderloins."[77] There they would be greeted by the local emissary of the Democratic machine, who "could tell them how to fill out their papers, how to pay their taxes, how to get a license"—so long as at the ballot box they remembered who helped them.[78] In their leisure time they could lose themselves in the aisles of the department stores, where glittering displays tutored their domestic desires; and where newly invented installment plans could help them secure otherwise unattainable goods—like pianos or Victor Talking Machines on which to play ragtime.[79] And at the vaudeville theater they could see depictions of all of this experience and more, stereotyped song and movement which clarified for them who the strange people they saw were; and how they themselves were strange to others—although perhaps if they could shed the strange habits spoofed by the delineator onstage they might be otherwise. The institutions of the department store, the vaudeville theater, the urban machine—each "managed in immigrant-choked cities to fashion a cacophony of concrete, parochial demands into a system of rule that was at once reasonably effective and legitimate."[80]

This cacophonous world was the world that ragtime would seem to animate, the world it would seem to be the cacophony *of*; the world it entered on January 27th, 1896, when Ben Harney, traveling from St. Louis, performed at Tony Pastor's Theatre on 14th Street in Manhattan, in a building which coincidentally happened to house Tammany Hall.

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[77] Giorgio Ciucci, ed., *The American City: From the Civil War to the New Deal* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1979).

[78] Mike Royko, *Boss: Richard J. Daley of Chicago* (New York: Plume, 1988), 68. See also M. Craig Brown and Charles N. Halaby, "Machine Politics in America, 1870-1945," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17, no. 3 (1987): 587.

[79] A 1908 Victor ad declared: "Your Victor goes home with you after one payment. And you pay the balance in comfortable instalments that never bother you. Thus we solve with credit to both, the problem of a grand opera taste on a ragtime income." "Victor Advertisement," *Daily Chattanoogan*, October 14, 1908; Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Simon J Bronner, *Consuming Visions : Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920* (New York : Norton, 1989); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

[80] James C. Scott, "Corruption, Machine Politics, and Political Change," *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (1969): 143.

1.2. "Getting More Like the White Folks Everyday"

> There is in the first place a dualism which is projected on to succesive planes, as in a hall of mirrors [...] But these oppositions are only perceived retrospectively; they are static in character; the dynamic movement of the art, that is the way in which the motifs are imagined and carried out, intersects the basic duality at all levels: the primary themes are first decomposed, then reconstituted as secondary themes which use fragments taken from the first as elements of a provisional unity, and then these secondary themes are juxtaposed in such a way that the original unity re-emerges as if it had been conjured back into existence.
>
> Claude Levi-Strauss

Culture, as Raymond Williams never tired of reminding his readers, is one of the keywords of our era: a word that makes the world legible without itself being particularly legible. Frequently the concept of culture requires some sort of foil— what is cultural is distinguished from what is "natural"; even more tenuously, what is cultural is distinguished from what is "social." Anthropology is generally the laboratory for working out possible meanings of "culture," but a stable consensus has not yet emerged. And of course it won't ever, for the simple reason that the very notion of culture is itself cultural, and there is no form of social life which can possess the *concept* of its own culture without being engaged in a struggle over what its culture *should* be—which is a struggle, of course, about what culture *is*.

I raise these issues because any attempt to describe ragtime at the turn of the century must indicate the extent to which it would be constituted as a struggle within American culture. Even the most cursory trawl through media coverage of the time will reveal the

grave stakes that were apparently involved.[81] But I also raise these issues because I wish to refer to that image of culture worked out most rigorously by Claude Lévi-Strauss and his school of structuralist anthropology—the image of culture as a formal system of *mythology*, and furthermore, as a system that deals ultimately with dualities. Whether or not this image can stand as a valid model for *all* culture is of course highly suspect. But it can plausibly stand as a model for the culture that emerged with and struggled through ragtime. Like the Caduveo body ornament described by Lévi-Strauss in the epigraph, the ragtime moment appears—retrospectively—as a weave of dualities, each intersecting and ramifying the other; a unity that is always ready to be split in two and joined in a new duality on a higher level.

Moreover: the oppositions do still seem to possess a living charge, even if the relative strengths of their magnetic fields have altered. After all, the entire structure of feeling announced by ragtime still prevails, and we might even conceive that the current state of popular music and popular culture is actually a branch of a large tree called ragtime. Let us follow the binary oppositions that mapped ragtime circa 1900.

1.2.1. Style and Genre

One opposition: style and genre. Another: music and language. For although Harney brought a new musical style called ragtime to New York City, the formal conveyor of the style was an already established genre of song. This fact is perhaps surprising. Later revisions of ragtime have so foregrounded the characteristic piano pieces of composerly figures like Scott Joplin that it is tempting to overlook the fact that for the mass audience circa 1900—as for mass audiences always—the world of music was generally a world of *songs*.[82]

[81] This glance can now be, luckily for me, greatly facilated by searches in digital archives already sifted by optical character recognition. Much of the research in this chapter would be unthinkable without the ability to quickly trawl the dense archive of this period's mass media.

[82] For more on this historical moment of the music industry, see Isaac Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley: A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket* (New York: The John Day Company, 1930); Maxwell F. Marcuse, *Tin Pan Alley in Gaslight; a Saga of the Songs That Made the Gray Nineties "Gay."* (Watkins Glen, NY: Century

Leaving aside the handful of melodies that were known primarily in instrumental form—"Maple Leaf Rag"; "Georgia Camp Meeting"—the ragtime melodies that were heard in the vaudeville shows, whistled on the street, and played at home were carriers of *words*.[83]

Particularly loathsome words, as it turns out, for the specific song genre that ragtime invaded and redefined was the "coon song." Although ragtime would outlive the craze for coon songs—enthusiasm for them seemed to peter out around the early 1910s—for most of its early life, the two were recognized as practically "synonymous terms."[84] Together, they were a powerful force in the 1890s. It would be hard to overstate their command, although the media would certainly try:

> During the closing years of the nineteenth century, there are not wanting indications that a most virulent form of coon fever broke out all over the United States. […] The age of the "Hottest Coon in Dixie" had come, and the glory of Wagner had departed forever. […]
>
> Twenty years before the close of the century what is known as nigger minstrelsy was popular. White men blackened their faces with cork and sang negro melodies. But the closing years saw a change. *The zeitgeist demanded realism, and the zeitgeist, as usual, had its own way.* White men with burnt cork faces no longer

House, 1959); Charles Hamm, *Irving Berlin: Songs from the Melting Pot: The Formative Years, 1907-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Leslie C. Gay, "Before the Deluge: The Technoculture of Song-Sheet Publishing Viewed from Late Nineteenth-Century Galveston," *American Music* 17, no. 4 (1999): 396–421; David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Leslie C. Gay, "Shadows of Black and White: Materialities and Medialities in May Irwin's 'Frog Song'," in *Audible Infrastructures: Music, Sound, Media*, ed. Kyle Devine and Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Daniel Goldmark, "'Making Songs Pay': Tin Pan Alley's Formula for Success," *The Musical Quarterly* 98, no. 1 (2015): 3–28; Gebhardt, *Vaudeville Melodies*.

[83] Early genteel advocates of ragtime like Rupert Hughes and Hiram Moderwell exclusively referred to songs in their appraisals. Rupert Hughes, "A Eulogy of Rag-Time," *Musical Record*, 1899; Hiram K. Moderwell, "Ragtime," *New Republic* 4, no. 50 (October 16, 1915): 284–86. Early recordings of instrumental ragtime—like the banjoist Vess Ossman's "Rag Time Medley" (Berliner 467, 1897)—were frequently renditions of vocal tunes. Even Rudi Blesh—who, as we'll see, did more than anyone to raise the profile of instrumental piano ragtime—was sharp enough to observe that ragtime rhythms were "projected […] into the public consciousness through the medium of the coon songs." Rudi Blesh and Harriet Grossman Janis, *They All Played Ragtime* (New York: Knopf, 1950), 13 see also p. 93. But ragtime revivalism had no use for coon songs: when Edward Berlin uncovered the preponderance of songs over piano music in the ragtime age, his finding was controversial and largely ignored. Edward Alan Berlin, "Piano Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural Study" (City University of New York, 1976), 2–4.

[84] "[P]opular usage has made "coon song," "rag-time" and "syncopation" synonymous terms." "A Symposium on Coon Songs," *Democrat and Chronicle*, March 26, 1901.

> could win the plaudits of the crowd. The "cullud" swells […] monopolized the stage.[85]

We will return to the theme of the "cullud swell." For now, it is necessary to note how the coon song was recognized as *displacing* minstrelsy, and not—as we often tend to think today—as its noxious hangover. Moreover: the suggestion here is that the coon song displaced minstrelsy because it was more *realistic*. This was first of all because of a coterie of black entertainers who suddenly commanded the esteem of white audiences—and who brought a verisimilitude to their roles, just as women did when they displaced male impersonators in the *commedia*.[86] Black performers and song-writers like Ernest Hogan, Bob Cole, Irving Jones, Bert Williams and George Walker were permitted both success and acclaim in this nascent music industry, and their output was recognized by the more sophisticated observers of the period as the authorities in the genre.[87] When the genteel Rupert Hughes wrote one of the earliest positive appraisals of ragtime, Hogan and Jones's coon songs were center-stage.[88] "Let Hogan write the nation's coon songs," raved the *San Francisco Call*'s Ashton Stevens, "and he need not care who compiles the American symphonies."[89]

As many writers have observed, that these songwriters were Black did not mean that their racist songs were any less ugly. But it is also probably true that their efforts represented a recognizable strand of Black humor that depended on the ambivalent mobilizations of stereotype. Jones produced some interesting variations on the form—his "St. Patrick's Day is a Bad Day for Coons" is a perplexing depiction of racial violence.[90] And Ernest Hogan

[85] "Confused," *Evening Star*, February 4, 1899. My emphasis.

[86] These quoted lines come from a review of Will Marion Cook and Paul Laurence Dunbar's show *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cakewalk*. On the women in the *commedia*, see Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia Dell'arte* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 34.

[87] Thomas Laurence Riis, *Just before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890-1915* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); David W. Gilbert, *The Product of Our Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[88] Hughes, "A Eulogy of Rag-Time."

[89] Ashton Stevens, "The Good Coon Song, The Bad Coon Singer, And An Emotional Comedian," *San Francisco Call*, February 13, 1898.

[90] It may also complicate James Dorman's claim that depiction was of whites in the coon song was disallowed,

did clearly have a genius for putting stereotypes to surprising new ends, in songs like "The Phrenologist Coon":

> Of all the men of history,'tis said I'se the mystery!
> As conjerman I'se the King!
>
> For I'se well versed in psychology, knows all about phrenology,
> In ethnology I'se the thing;
>
> I can tell you what you are by the feeling of your bump,
> And in the myst'ries of the future I can certainly make you jump;
>
> When I has an inspirtation, all the future I can see,
> I can tell you what you are, and wus, and what you're gwine to be,
>
> Dat's the reason why they call me the phrenologist coon![91]

Like so much racial humor, this song is profoundly ambivalent. The audience could laugh at the ridiculous pretenses of the race scientist, as revealed through analogy with the ridiculous pretenses of the coon. But, of course—and it was this that apparently drove Hogan to suicide—the audience could simply laugh at the ridiculous pretenses of the coon.

The fact that actual black men were taking the place of white men in racial drag was only one aspect of the perceived realism. For although the lyric of the coon song was often rendered in the first-person voice of a black man, the songs were frequently performed by white singers, the most famous of whom were women like May Irwin and Fay Templeton—performers who did not wear burnt cork.[92] In fact, in the eyes of critics like Charles Reginald Sherlock, May Irwin—"in rouge and rice-powder"–could give a better imitation, precisely it was not skin-deep.[93] Ragtime rhythms took over the role of burnt cork as the authenticator of blackness. With the "advent of rag-time":

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for to "involve whites would eliminate the comic veneer altogether, and one simply did not write or perform comic songs about race riots." James H. Dormon, "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The 'Coon Song' Phenomenon of the Gilded Age," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1988): 460.

[97] Ernest Hogan and Will Accooe, *The Phrenologist Coon*, 1901.

[92] Sharon Ammen, *May Irwin: Singing, Shouting, and the Shadow of Minstrelsy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

[93] Charles Reginald Sherlock, "From Breakdown to Rag-Time," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1901.

> […] the stage copy of the genuine Negro is to-day nearer the original in essential characteristics than anything that has gone before, for we have him in the modern form as New York knows him on Thompson Street, and as he disports himself in the colored colonies of other cities.[94]

This was the first role for which ragtime was conscripted. "In the vernacular of the profession," wrote one observer, "coon songs are generally written in 'rag' time." Others referred to "coon songs à la ragtime."[95] In other words, ragtime was initially a distinct *dialect* of music. Not a content, but a style; a black style: "a peculiar rhythm […] supposed to identify it with the darky character of music."[96] American music had of course already known musical style, and even styles identified with racial or ethnic groups.[97] Leaving aside minstrelsy—for it is questionable how much audiences recognized the music of the minstrel stage as *Black* music—polkas and Irish airs were reliable songsheet genres—not to mention the prestige that Louis Gottschalk and Antonin Dvořák and the repertoire of "negro spirituals" commanded. But the former were ultimately dance forms, and the latter were concert hall presentations of the folk peoples of the New World. Unlike all of the above, the coon songs clearly came from the city; were generally sung from the supposed perspective of the (newly) urbanized black person; and were *accompanied* by ragtime—the idiomatic music of the urban black people who now resided in the Tenderloin districts of industrializing cities.[98]

America already knew of black musical idiomatic music, of course—the various Jubilee singing groups had done their tours. But ragtime—precisely because it was a style and not a habituated voice or a sedimented repertory—was alienable from performance and could be rendered in the medium of notation and applied to the production of new music. Cer-

[94] Sherlock, "From Breakdown to Rag-Time."

[95] Philip Greely in John A. O'Shea et al., "Is The Popular Song Degenerating?," *Boston Globe*, October 16, 1898.

[96] P.J. Meahl, "The Popular Song," *Inter Ocean*, October 11, 1896.

[97] In the argot of the 19th-century, of course, these two terms—along with "national"—are not always conceptually distinct.

[98] Our song-plugger friend Edward Marks had stayed at the rim of New York's Tenderloin.

tainly banjo figures had appeared in songs, but they *symbolized* the plantation. If a songwriter wanted a Black ambience, linguistic dialect would be applied. But a stabilized Black *musical* dialect did not really exist in published music until ragtime.[99]

1.2.2. Dominant and Tonic

It is correct to call ragtime a dialect because—beyond the new rhythms on its surface—its tonal grammar was entirely of a piece with what Stephen Banfield has called "bourgeois tonality": that self-evidently coherent system of "keys and cadences, expressive and unified calibration of major and minor scales, directional harmony, exquisite manners of voice-leading, and quadratic frameworks […] of metre, phrase, and period […] that gave tonal music a vital overlap with the other performance arts."[100]

These were comic songs. A typical song would consist of a 16-bar verse (made of four four-bar phrases) followed by a 16-bar chorus (made of four four-bar phrases), although this four-square form could be elongated by an extra introductory phrase before the chorus. They consisted of setups, punchlines, and narrative twists, and not, for example, the representation of any subjective emotional state. And so, unlike the sophisticated chord changes of Tin Pan Alley's later golden age—the era of what will become "The Great American Songbook"—the harmonic action of the coon song was generally characterized by applied dominants, with thirds raised like eyebrows.

Take "He Ain't No Relation of Mine," by Ned Wayburn, in which an abusive man is sent to jail after his battered wife refuses to vouch for their marital status—domestic violence being, of course, both legal and humorous. The third verse finds the scenario repeating at

[99] One of the tendencies of the nineteenth century's particularly "evolutionist" racism was to not make too fine distinctions between the non-white cultures of the world. As late as 1896, Alfred Marks's "Sambo at the Cakewalk" trafficked in melodic types that seem more Orientalist than African-American.

[100] Stephen Banfield, "Music, Text and Stage: The Tradition of Bourgeois Tonality to the Second World War," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91.

the pearly gates.

I
I dreamt dat I to heav'n had been
I
Dat old St. Peter wouldn't let me in
V
When I axed him to decide my fate
V
He brought mah new wife to fe gate
I
Said he to her it rests wid you
V7/ii
Ef you say "yes" I'll let him through
V7/V
He axed her dere, was she mah wife,
V7
An' She said "No not on your life."[101]

Notice how the chromaticism at the end of the verse correlates to the conditional statement in the lyric ("Ef you say yes"), and how the chain of dominants that follow (and ultimately escort us to the chorus) confirm that the ensuing chain of events pursue a logical comic narrative structure.

1.2.3. Ragtime and Straight Time

Being a new style, ragtime required extra concern for the amateur musician. Early ragtime coon songs like "She's Ma Wahm Baby," "I've Got Him Dead," and "The Belle of Honolulu" provided ragtime accompaniments but urged the pianist to simply double the vocal melody if the ragtime rhythm proved too difficult.[102] Others took a more directly pedagogical approach. Ned Wayburn and Stanley Whiting's "Syncopated Sandy"—which advertised itself

[107] Ned Wayburn, *He Ain't No Relation O' Mine* (New York: Howley, Haviland, & Co., 1898).
[102] James O'Dea, *She's Mah' Wah'm Baby* (Chicago: Sol Bloom, 1897); Arthur Dunn, *I've Got Him Dead* (New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1898); Lee Johnson, *The Belle of Honolulu* (San Francisco: Sherman, Clay & Co., 1898).

as "The First & Only Genuine 'Rag Time' Song"—included a special note to the pianist:

> The authors and publishers in presenting "Syncopated Sandy" to the public, have succeeded in illustrating for the first time the absolute theory of the now famous "RAG-TIME" music, which originated with the negroes and is characteristic of their people. The negroe [sic] in playing the piano, strikes the keys with the same time and measure that he taps the floor with his heels and toes in dancing, thereby obtaining a peculiarly accented time effect which he terms "RAG-TIME."

Wayburn and Whiting supplied two sets of parallel piano braces, one bearing "straight accompaniment" in "the usual form"; the other, the "rag-time accompaniment." This was not only to leave the unseasoned interpreter with options:

> The object in printing both accompaniments, either of which may be used with the voice, is to demonstrate the difference between the two. Careful attention to the accent marks, thus, > will enable the performer to obtain perfect "RAG-TIME" and give the basic principles whereby any music ever written can be arranged and played in "RAG-TIME," the Musical Rage of the Century.[103]

Ben Harney, of course, had already recognized that an explicitly didactic approach could be a winner on the marketplace, and when he visited New York in 1896 he carried the manuscript of his "Rag Time Instructor," published shortly by Sol Bloom's house.[104] It consisted of a self-consciously highbrow preface ("Rag time […] originally takes its initiative steps from Spanish music, or rather from Mexico, where it is known under the head and names of Habanara [sic], Danza, Seguidilla, etc., being nothing but consecutive music, either in the treble or bass, followed by regular time in one hand") followed by a series of graduated exercises for the pianist, elaborating again how—as Wayburn and Whiting had said—"any music ever written can be arranged and played in 'RAG-TIME'."[105] Harney, al-

[103] Ned Wayburn and Stanley Whiting, *Syncopated Sandy* (New York: Broder & Schlam, 1897).

[104] Ben Harney, *Ben Harney's Ragtime Instructor* (Chicago: Sol Bloom, 1897). Let's take a moment to think about Sol Bloom, one of the few men who were party to both the invention of coon songs and the United Nations. Sol Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom.* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1948).

[105] Harney's intellectualist style did not charm everyone. An item found in Lexington's *Morning Herald* complains of his cold and scornful tone: "In spite of his undoubted effort to make it such as 'he who runs may read,'

ways interested in dignifying ragtime, began his primer by demonstrating how to rag two august hymns and the almost equally august sentimental ballad, "Annie Laurie" (Figure 1.7).



Figure 1.7: Harney, 1897, "Rag Time Instructor"

This latter selection posed what would be a typical problem for any piano ragger, a problem often solved (in Harney's view) by doubling the bar in the "rag time part" in order to "carry the melody and rhythm correctly."[106] What was the problem? In short, a confrontation between Victorian and ragtime syncopation. The application of ragtime to a pre-existent melody (at least as theorized by Harney, Wayburn, and Whiting) consisted essentially of juxtaposing a march-style left-hand (what Harney was calling "regular time"; what Wayburn and Whiting were calling "straight time") with a right-hand melody delayed by half of the tactus (what Harney called, confusingly, "consecutive music.") But some melodies—especially those that, like "Annie Laurie," possessed subdominant tritones—resolved their dissonances on weak beats, which, when reversed by a typical ragtime procedure, would distort the melodic sense. Hence the metrical surgery required. Here, in these molecules of musical discourse, in the compromises forced by the characteristic sentimental melodic trope, we can glimpse what will become a signal cultural problem of the era: the disparity between the Victorian sensibility and the emergent "popular" one.

and so to free himself from further persecution, there are a good many of us who after reading it still have a sneaking sense of unenlightenment." "Popular Passion for Ragtime Music," *Lexington Herald*, May 21, 1899.

[106] Harney, *Ben Harney's Ragtime Instructor*, 4.

1.2.4. Gentleman and Negro

This was not yet apparent in the late 1890s, when ragtime was still a mere style of music, and not yet a shorthand for the new culture of the new industrial order. In fact, the earliest ideologists of ragtime typically presented themselves as mediators between the world of the "Southern negro" and the world of white mass audiences. We have already met Ben Harney, Ned Wayburn, and Stanley Whiting. Each of them—along with Charles Trevathan, the composer of one of May Irwin's smash hits—would claim to have invented ragtime by transforming a naive folk practice into a self-conscious form. In a handful of interviews each would tell their tale, and they were remarkably similar. Make no mistake: their accounts cannot be understood as simple statements of fact. They must be approached as mythological, and the fact that they follow such similar patterns only corroborates this: they resemble the Bororo tales collected by Levi-Strauss, in which the invention of fire is rendered as a theft from the jaguar.

In accordance with Levi-Strauss's procedures, I have broken these tales into their mythemes, altering their diachronic presentation when necessary. Table 1.1 summarizes the origin stories of ragtime. The top row is my language; each of the following rows quote from accounts of Harney, Wayburn, et al.[107]

There are three patterns that I want to note now. First: the "inventor" always portrayed himself as a discoverer, but not an explorer. They *happen* to hear; they *over-hear*; they *idly* eavesdrop—and this was meant, of course, to shore up the authenticity of their product. Second: the "Negro" musicians they imitate do not recognize the imitation. ("Marsa Ben,

[107] My sources are: "Origin of Rag Time," *Chattanooga News*, July 6, 1901. A much later account, in which Harney is made the grandfather of jazz, is completely different. At that point, the musical milieu is a Kentucky mining town where Harney has a job at the post office. As it represents a refashioning of the myth for a different era, I do not include it here. Henry K. Burton, "Ben R. Harney, 'Jazz' Originator, Tells About Its Introduction," *Indianapolis Star*, January 22, 1928. "Amusements," *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 8, 1899; Anna E. Pratt, "Modern Syncopated: 'Rag Time' Songs as Compared with Old Plantation Melody," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 5, 1899; "Charles E. Trevathan," *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record*, November 11, 1899.

Table 1.1: Myths of Ragtime Origins

A white man,	a real *bon vivant*
"A young fellow named Ben Harney"	"clothes were neat and fitted him well."
"His name is Stanley Whiting"	"a big, round faced jolly chap [...]"
"On the other bank lolled Ned Wayburn"	"a grown lad, lazy in his own comfortable, white way."
"A certain brainy individual, named Ned Wayburn"	"his father at the time, being Governor of Georgia"
"Charles E. Trevathan [...a] Southerner by birth	

With musical culture,	was in the South
	"[...] a party given by colored folks in a suburb of Louisville."
"[...] is a trained musician. He studied under Prof. J. K. Paine, now instructor at Harvard university, and at one time he was a member of the Boston Symphony orchestra."	"It was down Mobile way"
"[...] unusual ear and musical ability inherited from his talented mother [...]"	"The banks of a stream near Magnolia Springs, Ala."
"a natural born musician"	"though born in Pittsburgh, moved at an early age to the South"
"musical by education and inclination"	"on the plantation"

Table 1.1 Continued

among black people	who were making music
"two darkies, who were experts on the banjo"	"While they were playing, Harney noticed that the rhythm produced by the two banjos was peculiar but very catchy."
"one of the roustabouts that abound there"	"tried it, and never in your life did you hear Mendelssohn played as that negro did it."
"a 'Brer Bones' darky"	"[...] he managed to balance a bamboo pole and a drifting line and at the same time strum the wierd melody of a buck dance on a sweet toned old banjo."
"where upon his father's plantation, he was brought more or less in contact with the genuine Southern negro. in front of the 'niggers' quarters'"	"the exact heel-and-toe 'taps' that the negro used in his 'buck' or 'rag' dancing" "For years he had heard it banjoed"

that the white man feels compelled to reproduce
"[...] when called upon to play something, Harney ran his fingers carelessly over the keys of the piano and tried to imitate the time made by the two banjos."
"Thus interested I began to look into the theory and execution of ragtime."
"When young Wayburn reached home, he sat at the piano, and [...] soon found his fingers tangled up in elaboration of what he heard."
"began to experiment with his nimble fingers and the piano in an endeavour to rhythmically reproduce upon that instrument"
"When he attempted to get it into a musical score"

Table 1.1 Continued

He struggles to master it,	but he succeeds.
"At first he failed	...but before the night had passed he had acquired the time and kept the crowd entertained."
"It took me several days to discover this, but when I did, I had this secret."	"I watched this negro, and I found that he required two bars to complete a movement that has only one in the musical score as written."
	"After the darky had caught Trevathan's music by ear and had played it several times"
The black folks are surprised and do not immediately recognize what they hear from the white man.	
"One of the darkies who had performed on the banjo became suddenly interested in Harney's playing [...] "Marsa Ben, wha 'am yo' playin' dar? Dat am de funniest kin' ob tune I'se ebber heerd."	
"[The black man] has looked at himself in this new mirror and is genuinely pleased. In turn he makes himself in the image of his pale brother. The colored man did not know that his music and his antics were so interesting and graceful."	

Table 1.1 Continued

The white man takes the music to the city,	where he faces a new struggle with the market
"Harney came east [and] introduced it in New York"	
"I took it to Frisco"	They don't have many negroes out there—all Chinese—so they did not undestand what I was giving them. (a "frost" for a week)
"[...] Wayburn took himself and his unclassified music to the metropolis.	He went to all the publishers, but none of them wanted this strange child from the South. Those who took enough interest to investigate said that it was not possible to write what Wayburn played, so that no one could read, let alone play it."
"the very first to introduce it to the stage"	
"He took one his first songs to Englander	"However, he met with difficulty [...] the composer could make nothing out of it. Trevathan sung it over to him a number of times, but Englander swore such music could never be set to musical notation."

Table 1.1 Continued

A solution is found and	success is achieved.
	and it soon was the rage all over the country.
A newspaper man came to me and said he had been sent to find out what I was driving at, that no one knew. I explained it to him, and he gave a quarter of a page to it.	The rest of my engagement was to packed houses.
[...] Wayburn found a man who could interpret in simpler notes what he played without destroying the spirit of the composition.“	“And then it was done by a San Francisco house with an office in New York.
	the combination of Mr. Wayburn's “rag-time” and Miss Irwin's songs actually started the “coon” song craze in New York, until it has invaded almost every quarter of the globe.“
“Then Trevathan went forth and dragged a banjo player out of a Bowery music hall and made him play ‘ragtime’ for the composer [...] Englander succeeded in writing it out,	and the first piece of syncopated music ever written in note form was ready for the publisher.

wha 'am yo' playin' dar?") This element of the origin myth is presented as proof that their interlocutors are naifs; that they lack a self-consciousness. (But: if there is any empirical truth in these tales, it seems just as likely that they might not have recognized the imitations because they were *bad*!) And third: ragtime's initial audiences were *also* perplexed. In these tales, which transcribe ragtime's mythical moment of origin, the music is already a hybrid form, incomprehensible and fascinating to white and black listeners alike—a manifestly *new* music: a music that required revised ears, minds, and bodies.

1.2.5. The "Cullud" Swell

> [...] the primary themes are first decomposed, then reconstituted as secondary themes which use fragments taken from the first as elements of a provisional unity, and then these secondary themes are juxtaposed in such a way that the original unity re-emerges as if it had been conjured back into existence [...]
>
> Claude Levi-Strauss

In their myths of origin, the white "inventors" of ragtime married the Negro to the white sophisticate, and married their rural ragtime child to the urban audience. But this complex of marriages also existed as a unity in the titular figure of the coon song—the "loudly dressed," "preposterous citified dandy"; "that hybrid nondescript thing of no race or nationality called a 'coon.'"[108]

The coon caricature, of course, was a retention and transformation of material developed on the minstrel stage. He was the descendent of the "Zip Coon" character, the flashy, slick,

[108] "Charles E. Trevathan"; J. Stanley Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920," *American Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (1977): 102; "The Vaudeville Stage," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, February 25, 1899.

and urbane counterpart to the bumbling country oaf, Jim Crow.[109] As Eric Lott famously emphasized, the ambivalence of this stereotype was its semantic power, for "Zip Coon" permitted both the ridicule of the uppity Negro *as well as* the elite culture he aspired to.[110] The coon would continue to play this role, and others, in the era of the coon song. But his true historical meaning must be measured by the relative decline of the Jim Crow archetype as his necessary foil.

Part of this process, of course, was the rapid urbanization of black Americans, already underway. As the white perspective on the black was conditioned more and more by actual and conflictual proximity in the metropolis—and less by gauzy fantasies of a distant fairy-tale south—the country-bumpkin Jim Crow was perhaps somewhat vividly out of step with reality. Moreover, it bears mention that the archetypal-duo didn't disappear outright—it was carried over into the comic duo "skinny-fat" duo of vaudeville: acts like Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, and so on are in their way the descendants of Coon and Crow. Furthermore, the most celebrated black comedic duo—Williams and Walker—stuck fairly conventionally to the form.

What seems to have happened, maybe even by way of the coon song, was that—in the official register of stereotypes—the "coon" became synecdochic of black life in general. (In fact, it seems clear that the term did not even function as a general slur until the 1880s.)[111] Furthermore, because the coon was by nature hybrid—never simply a denizen of the city, but always "citified"—he could assimilate the country Jim Crow as his biographical past. Certainly many coon songs—particularly those which depicted romantic rivalry—ascribed a Southern origin to the antagonist. But in contrast to the "carry-me-back" genre, of which

[109] Dormon, "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks," 451.
[110] Lott, *Love and Theft*, 92–111.
[111] "Nonetheless, the term 'coon' as a nominative designation for 'black' did not come into widespread use until the early 1880s. Rather, it would appear that the usage was introduced and rendered pervasive by way of the songs that came to be called "coon songs," even as, reciprocally, blacks became 'coons'." Dormon, "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks," 452.

the South was particularly and unsurprisingly fond, the coon was not prone to nostalgia: he usually lived by his wits in the metropolis.

This obviously entailed some additions to the stereotype, the most marked of which was a new propensity for violence. May Irwin's "Bully Song" was grisly but typical:

> I's gwine down the street with my ax in my hand
> I'm lookin' for dat bully and I'll sweep him off dis land
> […]
> I'll take 'long my razor, I'se gwine to carve him deep,
> And when I see dat bully, I'll lay him down to sleep.[112]

The new coon was not only often violent, he was frequently a natty dresser as well—although his flashy clothes disguised superficial pockets:

> There's a hightone colored gent,
> A coon without a cent,
> His cash for clothes he spent
> To outshine all coons he meant
> He's the swellest thing that walks Broadway[113]

Despite the fact that the coon type was so clearly defined, a common conceit of the repertory was the confusion and alarm provoked in "ev'ry coon in Coontown" by the arrival of such a figure:

> There's some kind of mystery attached to him
> Kase he always dresses so neat and trim
> With his patent leather shoes and diamonds all over his silk cravat
> Has a face like a preacher he never smiles
> Tho he's all dressed up in the gambler style.
> […]
> I wonder what is that coon's game[114]

[121] Charles Trevathan, "*Bully*" *Song* (Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing, 1896). As with any hit, dozens of shameless imitations followed. "I carved him long/I carved him deep/Yes I done him/Does you Believe me/And I put that coon to sleep," wrote Theo Metz; "I'm a-gwine to tell him fair/For to meet his Lord prepare/Den I'm gwine to spill him/Carve him till I kill him," added J. Frank Walsh. (And this is only to quote to songsheets most ready-to-hand!) Theo Metz, *Do Your Honey Do* (Philadelphia: Supplement to Philadelphia Press, 1897); J. Frank Walsh, *I Aint 'bliged to Stan' No Nigger Foolin'* (Boston: G.W.Setchell, 1897).

[122] Wayburn and Whiting, *Syncopated Sandy*.

The question that apparently haunted everyone was how the ostentatiously dressed coon acquired his money, and, as in the song above, gambling was often the answer. But there was typically no mystery about what he spent his money on, and for what purpose. In the economy of the coon song, the coon who spends the money on the flashy clothes will get the girl, and many of the songs are sung from the perspective of a man whose mate has just been "stolen" by such a figure. (This is when the razors tend to come out.) And so, as the coon song viciously slurred black Americans, it also expressed distinct anxieties about the forms of inequality that the emerging consumer society was inducing, as well as an implicit rejection of old Victorian pieties about thrift and abstemiousness. However much the coon song expressed displeasure with the social menace of the flashy coon, there is no flicker of a *moral* vision. It was taken as an unchallenged fact that a man's worth to a woman was his capacity to purchase her things. In fact, according to the coon song, money tended to trump even the other value scale: color.

> I've had more trouble in the last three years,
> Than any colored person could use.
> I fell in love with two real coons
> And I didn't know which to choose.
>
> One of them was a pretty yaller man,
> And he certn'ly looked good to me
> The other was a rale headed ankle faced freak
> And was as black as he could be.
>
> The yaller man I thought was the best,
> But I know now he cant stand the test
> Cause this black man he has commenced
> To pay all my expense.
>
> […]
>
> No coon can come too black for me.[115]

[123] Bob Cole and Billy Johnson, *I Wonder What Is That Coon's Game* (New York: Howley, Haviland & Co., 1893).

[124] George Williams and Walter Smart, *No Coon Can Come Too Black for Me*, 1898.

But perhaps even more radically, the coon song suggested that a man didn't need a woman as a mirror or trophy to measure his worth. Frequently the coon was a big spender and conspicuous dresser for sheer public display. In other words, he was a species of *dandy*: a "Clothes-wearing man"—that consummate figure of modern urbanity, the determinate negation of the bourgeois, "the parallel and related [development] of the big city."[116] Like the dandy described by Baudelaire and others, the dandy coon represented an immediate critique—in fact, a perverted critique—of a market society's utilitarian values. As stabilized types—whether real or imaginary—both the European dandy and the dandy coon performed a "superficial elegance" which, in its elevation of personal taste, exaltation of artifice, and unambiguous rejection of any principle of depth, represented a rejection of bourgeois pretensions like privacy, truth, equality, and freedom.[117] For this reason, as Ellen Moers noted long ago, the image of the dandy tends to recur and "figure in an ambiguous social situation in a revolutionary climate."[118] But unlike the actual revolutionary, who sacrifices themself in the name of a cause, the dandy's achievement—and the dandy coon's achievement—is "simply to be himself."[119]

To be one's self, and to reject the values of the marketplace, is also to be, in some way, ridiculous. The Count D'Orsay is said to have lit a banknote on fire in order to help a financier find a dropped coin in the dark, and it is very easy to imagine this scene portrayed by Williams and Walker on the vaudeville stage.[120]

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[116] Thomas Carlyle, quoted in Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking, 1960), 31; Sima Godfrey, "The Dandy as Ironic Figure," *Substance* 11, no. 3 (1982): 24.

[117] Godfrey, "The Dandy as Ironic Figure," 25.

[118] Moers, *The Dandy*, 11.

[119] Moers, *The Dandy*, 18.

[120] Barbara Webb has argued Walker's dandyism—onstage and off—represented a deliberate political strategy: "Instead of satirizing his character, […] Walker emphasized the dandy's point of view. He sought to fuse everyday life and performance in a way that staked out a dandyist claim for the dignity and humanity of African Americans. Walker lived out this claim at a time when performing a dandy in everyday life was still sometimes risky, even dangerous, for a black man." Barbara Webb, "The Black Dandyism of George Walker: A Case Study of Genealogical Method," *Tdr: The Drama Review* 45 (December 1, 2001): 15.

1.2.6. The High-Toned Gal

The feminine counterpart to the dandy coon was not as interesting a type, and the compound of racism and sexism prohibited the appearance of a black woman star on the level of May Irwin, Sophie Tucker, or Fanny Brice.[121] In contrast to minstrel depictions of the black woman, the coon song tended not to explicitly challenge her femininity. Instead, it either winkingly suggested that womanly beauty and dark skin added up to a contradiction in terms—leaving room, of course, for exoticist fetishizing—or identified the former with whiteness itself:

> My gal is a high born lady,
> She's black, but not too shady,
> Feathered like a peacock, just as gay,
> She is not colored, she was born that way,
> I'm proud of my black Venus,
> No Coon can come between us[122]

> Oh! Ambolena Snow, the boys all love her so
> Sweet Ambolena, Oh! Have you seen her?
> At ev'ry dress parade, you'll hear the Black Brigade
> Cheer for Miss Ambolena Philipena Snow[123]

> They shout hurrah, for Lady Africa
> She is de Queen of color'd high society,
> They shout hurrah, for Lady Africa
> For she's de perfect essence of propriety
> Around de town
> She makes an awful stir
> She is a colored Venus and wifout a par,
> De coon aristocrats, must all take of their hats
> When they salam to Lady Africa[124]

[121] Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1–17.
[131] Barney Fagan, *My Gal Is a High-Born Lady* (New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1896).
[132] George Maywood, *Ambolena Snow* (Chicago: S. Brainard's Sons, 1896).

The idea of coon aristocrats paying "salam" perfectly summarizes the contortions of American racial stereotype in the era of the coon song. Because America's path to an industrial economy did not entail subduing an aristocracy or colonial exploit in the East—as it did, say, in France or England—America's emergent popular culture was less richly endowed with materials suggesting never-world alternatives to everyday life. And so Black America—figured now as "Coontown" and not "Dixie"—was conscripted to play the doubly ambivalent role of both Orient *and* powdered-wig society.

My emphasis here on the *mediating* aspects of the coon song stereotypes might seem to be in conflict with more typical accounts, and in some ways I do want to draw a sharp contrast. I am skeptical, for example, of James Dormon's claim that coon songs represented "a manifestation of something that lay buried […] deeply in the collective psyche of white bourgeois America;" that they "gained and maintained their inordinate popularity" by "fulfilling the need for rationalization on the part of the dominant population." In Dormon's view, the coon song, by propagandizing the view of black men and women as essentially deviant, provided a justification for racial segregation, subordination, and any form of violence.[125] Similarly, I cannot endorse Janet Brown's claim that the coon song audience, being "culturally conditioned to impose feared qualities of sexuality, emotion and materialism onto women and all persons of color," were being provided "convenient scapegoat[s] for self-hatred."[126]

My skepticism rests on themes I have already touched on. For one, it is simply unclear that there existed such a thing as a "collective psyche of white bourgeois America," or if it did, that it would be serviced by the vaudeville theater. Moreover, as I have already emphasized, we must regard any mass audience as being beset by—and mediating—social contradictions. To

[133] Dave Reed, *Lady Africa* (New York: Howley, Haviland, and Co., 1897).

[125] Dormon, "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks," 454–55; Dormon, "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks," 466.

[126] Janet Brown, "The 'Coon-Singer' and the 'Coon-Song': A Case Study of the Performer-Character Relationship," *The Journal of American Culture* 7, no. 12 (1984): 7–8.

expect it to serve one clearly defined ideological purpose is to grossly simplify reality. Furthermore, accounts like these depend on arbitrary divisions within culture—the idea that the coon song provided a cultural alibi for a problematically racist or materialist society forces a question about where the putatively original aversion to racism or materialism would be located.[127] These accounts also overstate this aversion. There were certainly many who professed disdain for materialist values and open display of sexuality. But there were obviously many—probably many *more*—who were enjoying the experiences the emerging consumer society was providing.

That mass culture depended on and mediated contradiction was a fact known to the performers themselves. An interesting debate on the nature of racial stereotypes appeared in the pages of *Variety*. The participants were Williams and Walker on the one hand, and Albert Ross, a professor of business at Western University, a black institution in Kansas City, on the other. The topic was the profligacy of the dandy coon. "It is not all of life to live," declared the professor. "Making money is not the greatest thing!" And he took the duo to task for endlessly portraying the "'good time' Negro"—the "curse of the day"—rather than upright characters like Alain Locke (at that point, still a "Negro student at Oxford").[128] In their reply, Williams and Walker maintained that figures like Locke were simply not yet general enough to permit stylization on the stage. "We must draw from the mass," they wrote. "And not from the few; such characters as you mention are worthy examples, but in a public sense they are obscure and surely away from the type and consequently would prove uninteresting."

But they also justified their act by referring to the contradictory needs of their audience:

> Our task was no easy one, but rather difficult, because the colored theatre "goer," taken collectively, only wants to see when he attends a negro show such characters as remind him of "white folks," while on the other hand the white patrons

[127] And the former would represent an instance of Barbara and Karen Fields's racecraft, as it assumes a basic an unproblematized existence of racial struggle. Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*.

[128] William Pickens and Roscoe Conkling Bruce are also mentioned by the professor.

> only want to see him portray the antebellum "darkey"; but our aim is to average and simply use characters most familiar to-day […][129]

In other words, the men and women of "Coontown," by being either dandy "cullud" swells or "high-toned" gals were both white and black for their respective racial opposites in the audience. The making of the mass audience—the "grinding down of age, sex, regional, rural-urban, economic, and status differences"—produced its inversion onstage: "that hybrid non-descript thing of no race or nationality called a 'coon'."[130]

1.2.7. Verse and Chorus

The circuitous forms of identification entailed by the ragtime coon song did not go unnoticed. A comical newspaper item in 1899 portrayed Irish saloon-goers reacting to the new musical craze:

> "'Phwat kind of music do ye call that, I dinnaw?' sez I. 'Ragtime,' sez the jude.
> "'Shure it sounds purty ragged,' sez I. 'An' phwat do be the name av the piece?'
> 'I want a Real Coon,' sez he. Jist then the ould man came in with the ber.
> "'Ye want a rale coon, do ye, ye spalpeen,' sez he. 'Do ye think this is Rat row, that ye come lookin; fur coons?'
> "'D'ye mane to insult me?' sez the jude.
> "'Insult nawthin',' sez Jerry. 'Sit down an' play the pianny, an' don't be sayin' we're coons.'
> "The jude commenced to play agin.
> "Phwat's the name of that? sez I.
> "I Don't like No Cheap Man,' said he.
> "'The divil, ye don't!' sez Jerry.[131]

In fact, the coon song tended to tangled forms of identification within itself. While the verse typically consisted of first-person or third-person narration, the chorus frequently shifted to the reported speech of a character within the song. (A later reminiscence would

[129] Albert Ross, Bert Williams, and George Walker, "The Stage Negro," *Variety*, December 14, 1907.
[130] "The Vaudeville Stage."
[140] "Rag Time Music," *Fair Play*, March 10, 1899.

recall when every song chorus began with "and then the girl did say.") And because the chorus was—more so than in the salon ballad—the "catch" of the song, the perspectival shift was coordinated (ideally) with the entrance of the audience singing along.[132] (Recall our friend Louis the Whistler tossing out chorus slips!) While the verses of the coon song said variously *I*, *he*, *she*, or *they*, the choruses inevitably said *we*—even when this involved inhabiting the perspective of a black woman.

Ernest Hogan's "All Coons Look Alike to Me" offers a perfect example. To this day it remains a shining example of the depravity and sadism of the genre. James Weldon Johnson would later recall that white men looking for fights would whistle the chorus at black men on the street, and his brother reported that he had seen two white men tossed from the Staten Island ferry for this initiative.[133] And yet a closer look at the lyric reveals some interesting and frequently overlooked aspects of the genre.

> Talk about a coon a having trouble,
> I think I have enough of ma own,
> Its all about ma Lucy Janey Stubbles,
> And she has caused my heart to mourn,
>
> Thar's another coon barber from Virginia,
> In soci'ty he's the leader of the day,
> And now ma honey gal is gwine to quit me,
> yes she's gone and drove this coon away,
>
> She'd no excuse
> To turn me loose
> I've been abused
> I'm all confused
> Cause these words she did say:
>
> *All coons look alike to me*,
> *I've got another beau*, *you see*,

[132] The word "catchy" did not yet exist to describe the new earwormy effects of the popular song, and it is fun to find writers of the period struggle to find words fit for purpose as they account for the diabolism. One young victim of a ragtime earworm. "The curious melody had an irresistible fascination for the lad and he whistled it continually […] The demented boy was taken to the Pennsylvania Hospital, dancing and singing as he went." "Rag-Time Tunes Made This School Boy Insane," *Philadelphia Times*, December 25, 1899.

[133] Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920," 107.

And he's just as good to me as you, nig! ever tried to be
He spends his money free,
I know we can't agree,
So I don't like you nohow, all coons look alike to me.[134]

Notice the shift to reported speech in the chorus, and reflect on the criss-crossing affiliations the song involves its listeners in—how the invitation to sing along involves singing the words of a black woman showing her lover—the onstage singer—the door. This exact scenario was depicted in countless coon songs. "I Don't Like No Cheap Man"; "Take Your Clothes and Go"; "I Want Dem Presents Back"; and its unofficial sequel, "Just Come Up and Take Your Presents Back"—these are only a few examples of coon songs which used a woman's perspective to weigh the worth of a man against the material goods he could provide.[135] To be sure, songs like these partook of the ugly, and already established stereotype of the lazy, shiftless Black man, especially when they narrated the perspective of the woman. But just as frequently they were narrated—as is "All Coons," above—from the perspective of the man who has just been displaced by another. In other words, one thing that the coon song made possible was a musical discourse around the heterosexual couple—that foundational binary opposition—that wasn't saturated with a sentimental halo. Compare the lines above with Chas Moreland's "Divorce," a sentimental song from 1893 that treated more or less the same scenario:

Temptation has succeeded well, two loving hearts are sad
Another wife has left a happy home,
Nor more she'll greet her friends within, as oft she'd done before;
A husband sits distracted and alone
It was her fault, she knows too late, for now they're far apart

[143] Ernest Hogan, *All Coons Look Alike to Me* (New York: M. Witmark and Sons, 1896).

[135] If you were inclined to cynicism, you might think of more recent hits like Beyoncé's "Irreplaceable" ("To the left, to the left/Everything you own in the box to the left/In the closet, that's my stuff/Yes, if I bought it, nigga, please don't touch"); or TLC's "No Scrubs" ("No, I don't want no scrub/A scrub is a guy that can't get no love from me/Hangin' out the passenger side of his best friend's ride/Trying to holla at me")—both of which portray the same scenario in much the same terms.

> Was not content to be a loving wife;
> So Hymen's knot is severed and the vows once made recalled
> As strangers they now wander on through life
> *Divorced, now forever* […][136]

As Norma Basch has written, marriage, for the American bourgeois, was a "metonym for the social order"; and divorce therefore always threatened social collapse.[137] Perhaps for this reason, Victorian depictions like this could only be written in a third-person omniscient voice. We don't and won't hear, for example, the adulterous wife express her unhappiness with *her* husband. In the coon song—and practically nowhere else in American culture—men and women formed and dissolved couples without ceremony, and also sang about their reasons why. That these reasons typically centered on how much of a good time could be purchased with the other's coin only underlined the point that there might be reasons to get together beyond the reproduction of the family unit. No longer was sexuality "separate from romance."[138]

There was simply no ready-to-hand song genre that expressed dissatisfaction between the sexes: the coon song answered this need. And it was a real one. Over the course of the ragtime era the divorce rate increased from 9 to 58 divorces for every hundred marriage licenses issued.[139] As the Lynds would discover in their famous study, the average working-class marriage was deeply unhappy:

> The husband must "support" his family, but […] recurrent "hard times" make support of their families periodically impossible for many workers; the wife must make a home for her husband and care for her children, but she is increasingly spending her days in gainful employment outside the home; husband and wife

[145] Chas Moreland, *Divorced* (Chicago: Will Rossiter, 1893).
[137] Norma Basch, *Framing American Divorce: From the Revolutionary Generation to the Victorians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3.
[138] Erenberg, *Steppin' out*, 7.
[139] Robert Lynd and Helen Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956).; see also , Stanley Coben, "The Assault on Victorianism in the Twentieth Century," *American Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (1975): 609.

> must cleave to each other in the sex relation, but fear of pregnancy frequently makes this relation a dread for one or both of them; affection between the two is regarded as the basis of marriage, but sometimes in the day-after-day struggle this seems to be a memory rather than a present help. Not one of the sixty-eight working class wives mentioned her husband in answering the question as to the things that give her "courage to go on when thoroughly discouraged." More than one wife seems to think of her husband less as an individual than as a focus of problems and fears—anxiety about loss of job, disappointment over failure in promotion, fear of conception—-the center of a whole complex of things to be avoided.[140]

While actually-existing marriages were frequently composed of "things to be avoided" and a characterized by a "lack of frankness"—especially around money!—the men and women in coon songs told each other off, and kicked each other to the curb. By way of their vicious stereotypes, the coon songs authorized a quasi-utopian vision of realistic honesty between the sexes, not to mention a frankness *about* the sexes themselves.[141] What Santayana said of William James could be said of Ernest Hogan and company: "An honest man has spoken, and the cant of the genteel tradition has become harder for young lips to repeat."[142] And so another binary opposition of the ragtime revolution comes into view. The coon song's desacralization of heterosexual romance and the marriage cult represented above all an attack on the Genteel tradition of American music.

1.2.8. Victorians Against Ragtime

Just as the newspapers delighted at imagining ragtime disrupting the Irish saloon, so did they enjoy the prospect of ragtime disrupting the genteel parlor. Here is a humorous item

[140] Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 129.

[141] The newspapers loved scenes of men and women communicating to each other through coon songs. The Rossville Reporter relayed the story of an organ grinder who, finding his wife too flirtatious with the customers, churned out a roll of "Why Don't You Get A Lady of Your Own" to let her know. "Organ Grinders Hint," *Rossville Reporter*, January 4, 1907.

[142] George Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 18.

published in *The North Alabamian* in 1899, depicting the troubles a "popular young lady" found herself in:

> Recently her best beau came to see her and asked her to sing for him. She complied, and he seemed delighted with "The Warmest Baby in Town," and other colored gems. Finally, however, she says she sang, "I Don't Want No Cheap Man," and when she finished she noticed a strained expression on his face, and a shade of coolness in his tones. She went on with "Take Your Clothes and Go," and there still seemed to be a decided frost in the atmosphere, and when she wound up with "I Don't Keer if You Nevah Comes Back," he got up and got his hat, and said he supposed he could take a hint, and slammed the front gate after him. And, adds the girl, that ended my singing of coon songs. Hereafter my repertoire includes nothing but "O, Promise Me."[143]

But the conflict between Victorian values and ragtime was not a laughing matter for long. Initially, the native-born Anglo bourgeois was likely to regard ragtime as a mere passing fad: something to ritually bemoan, but also a necessary complement to the higher, timeless values they guarded. "A rag-time song catches the popular fancy," wrote one newspaper editorialist. "It is hummed and whistled and sung everywhere and by almost everybody. Then it is relegated. […T]here are rag-time ideals also—ideas that are false and fleeting."[144] Thinking of suffragettes, a Dr. Jordan admonished that the future would "demand mothers and wives who [were] above their ragtime measure and […] give preference to women of high ideals."[145]

But the ragtime fad didn't seem to pass by itself. Tougher measures were required. In 1901, the Chicago Federation of Musicians began refusing to supply ragtime music, a decision that was hailed throughout the country.[146] It was no use. Ragtime was rapidly displacing the sentimental parlor song—one writer mourned that "[t]he songs about 'Break the Ice for

[143] "What Rag-Time Is," *Buffalo Evening News*, March 16, 1899.
[144] "Rag-Time Ideals," *Albion News*, August 14, 1903.
[145] "Dr. Jordan's Ideal," *Oregon Daily Journal*, November 7, 1903.
[146] "Ragtime Music Is Denounced," *Hanford Kings County Sentinel*, November 28, 1901; "Musicians Officially Denounce 'Rag Time' as 'Rot'," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 15, 1901.

Mother' […] had passed unnoticed in the plethora of the rag-times."[147] For another, it was even worse: ragtime was also replacing the "old Negro melodies of the minstrel days."[148] For many angry observers at the turn of the century, the deluge of coon songs had "put to sleep all compositions with merit in them."[149] And so the battle flag was raised:

> [Ragtime] has raged with equal violence in dance halls and beer gardens and in the drawing rooms of fashionable society. As a matter of fact it completely monopolized the popular ear […] It has its place and its proper sphere of influence, but it seems high time that the monopoly which has driven out the higher and better class of music which educates the ear and refines the taste, should be broken, and that the former standards should be restored.[150]

The restoration did not go smoothly; nor did it succeed. But for roughly two decades the major organs of American culture fought a series of battles over the status of ragtime. There is something uncanny about revisiting these battle sites, at least as they appeared in the pages of the print media. On the one hand, they only resemble every subsequent confrontation and moral panic that popular music had produced. (It is fairly easy to recognize the ragtime antecedents of Elvis's censored hips; or of Tipper Gore's crusade against hair metal.) But on the other hand, the parties involved, being engaged in the first and foundational struggle over popular music, are not in a position to possess a historical consciousness. It is almost touching to watch, from the distance of the present, the self-appointed stewards of culture at the turn of the century flail against a force they have not yet encountered—the plebian hands of a mass public grappling for the wheel.

The ragtime age, was also, as William James said, the age of "newspaperism."[151] To consult these sources is therefore, of course, not to consult a transparent chronicle of events.

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[147] "Miss Woolf's Concert a Success," *Sacramento Bee*, March 1, 1899.
[148] O'Shea et al., "Is The Popular Song Degenerating?"
[149] "Miss Woolf's Concert a Success."
[150] "Decline Of Rag Time Music," *Muscatine News-Tribune*, July 6, 1900.
[151] Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 147–48.

In fact, it is their very prejudicial nature that is useful—for the media system, then as now, constructs a *hypothetical* view of what *counts* as event. For example: the very fact that ragtime music—the sound of the street—could appear in the drawing rooms of the "four hundred" was newsy, or at least so the media system believed. Taking these as two relatively independent overlays—the register of ragtime controversies; the media registration of ragtime controversies—produces a sonogram of a culture in transition.

Church

Above all, ragtime enthusiasm challenged the Victorian concept of culture as a practice of self-improvement, and so it is no surprise that the most intense battles involved churches and schools. Preachers inveighed against "ragtime life" as "the laughter of devils, the derision of angels, the grief of heaven."[152] It was generally agreed that ragtime and church were antithetical. In Danville, Illinois, the first evidence of a woman's insanity was her singing ragtime ditties in church. When a church on Chicago's South Side began playing ragtime during services, the fact was reported in Gastonia, North Carolina.[153] Scandal attached to a "young man and a young woman who insisted at their wedding that ragtime be substituted for the traditional march." The "ragtime wedding" was a sign of "a sad misconceptions of the tremendous seriousness of marriage"—a "lack of respect for the marriage vow, and none for the church that sanctions it."[154] All new music could be suspect—the revivalist hymns of Ira

[152] "Time to Change the Tune," *Nebraska State Journal*, August 27, 1907.

[153] The item in Oklahoma's *Enid Daily Eagle* is a masterpiece of midwestern deadpan humor. "During the next day she was seen by a neighbor carrying a pig under her arm, which she declared that she was going to give as a burnt offering to the Lord. She also attempted to kill members of her family with a hatchet." "Sings 'Ragtime' in Church," *Enid Daily Eagle*, January 25, 1909. Alongside the coon song "My Kongo Lady," the congregants apparently also sang the ragtime selection: "How much would could a woodchuck chuck if a wooodchuck could chuck wood?" "Church That Likes Ragtime," *Gastonia Gazette*, November 13, 1903.

[154] "Ragtime and Gin-Rickey Weddings," *Parsons Independent*, July 13, 1906. The editorial made the rounds again a year later. "A Sensible Parson," *Rutland Daily Herald*, November 22, 1907. There were similar scandals about ragtime music played during funeral services. "Village Wrought up over Ragtime during Funeral," *Buffalo Morning Express and Illustrated Buffalo Express*, April 8, 1905.

Sankey and Dwight Moody were slurred by their opponents as "ragtime hymns." But, as with all fronts in the ragtime culture war, the ragtime advocates were just as enthusiastic as their opponents. On the singing of "ragtime" in church, an editorialist in St. Louis demanded:

> Well, what of it? Why should not ragtime be made to serve the ends of righteousness? Is the devil to be given a monopoly of all the good things in these days of anti-trust wars? […] If the devil has been using ragtime music to serve his purpose, it is time to infringe his copyrights.

School

The question of ragtime's pedagogical value was also litigated in the country's school systems. Few went as far as the supervisor of music in public schools in Moline, Illinois, who advocated the burning of ragtime sheet music.[155] But many districts imposed some form of control. The Indiana state superintendent argued that ragtime should be barred from music instruction in the state's schools, as did members of the Wisconsin Teacher's Association.[156] Miss Winifred Shunway, director of music for Houston's public schools, installed phonographs in the classrooms in 1911 but banned ragtime in order to "cultivate the tastes of the children for the higher classics instead of guter [sic] ragtime melodies")[157] (Meanwhile, San Francisco pedagogues, entertaining more progressive approaches, were urged to purchase ragtime on phonograph record in order to stimulate a taste for musical arts.)[158] In a high school in neighboring Alameda, the ragtime piano stylings of an "attractive high school miss" prompted a swift ban.[159] It seems that this particular school was especially prone to outbreaks of ragtime—newspapers reported that two months prior "a gay assemblage of […] dancers locked themselves in the banquet room and 'ragged' until angry mothers and

[155] "Favors Burning of All Rag-Time Songs," *Dispatch*, March 10, 1913.
[156] "Social Side," *Call-Leader*, August 13, 1908; "Attacks Are Useless," *Yonkers Statesman*, November 12, 1909.
[157] "Sousa in Favor of Ragtime," *Greenwood Gazette*, November 2, 1911.
[158] "Interpretive Recitals Needed in the Schools," *San Francisco Examiner*, January 17, 1909.
[159] "Ragtime Barred from Alameda Curriculum," *Oakland Tribune*, February 14, 1912.

chaperons threatened to have the door forced if the 'ragging' was not discontinued." The offending students escaped by leaping from the windows.[160]

Not all of the youth embraced ragtime. In 1906, twelve girls at the Enna Conservatory of Music in Des Moines organized a society to eliminate "trashy" ragtime from their midst; according to the press, they "patronizingly intimated that the pro-rags might better have gone to a business college and acquired stenography."[161] For their part, the pro-rags claimed that ragtime was, in fact, "classical"—and even that "one of Paderewski's minuets that everyone plays in big concerts is ragtime."[162]

One resolution to dilemmas like these was to devise special educational institutions set aside for ragtime instruction. By 1908, an enterprising Axel Christensen was claiming to preside over fifty such schools nationwide.[163] Christensen avowed a "mathematical rule which can be thoroughly understood by any person in a few weeks"[164] Other similar institutions made less high-minded promises. A Cincinnati "rag-time college" promised, in twenty lessons, to turn the "hundreds of persons […] who are bores to their friends and nuisances to themselves" into "social lions," and even displace Paderewski himself.[165] (An Edward Mellinger in St. Louis claimed similar results in a mere ten lessons!)[166] Christensen's relative success probably depended on his wrapping ragtime instruction in Victorian values. In the first issue of his *Ragtime Review*—a periodical meant to promote his various initiatives—Christensen painted a picture of how facility in ragtime piano could form the basis of family handicraft, and be both a solid financial investment and provide continuity of tradition across generations:

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[160] "Ragtime Stars a Musical Hot Time," *San Francisco Call*, February 14, 1912.
[161] "A Ragtime Fight," *St. Joseph Gazette*, April 25, 1906.
[162] "Will and Won't Ragtime Clubs," *Herald and Review*, April 30, 1906.
[163] "Rag Time Popular," *The Chat*, September 5, 1908.
[164] "Rag Time Popular."
[165] "Become Ragtime Virtuoso in 20 Lessons; Helps You in Love," *Oklahoma News*, March 18, 1912.
[166] "Two Schools Turning out Rag-Time Players so Fast Musicians Are Shocked," *St. Louis Star and Times*, April 24, 1910.



Figure 1.8: From *The Albuquerque Citizen*, April 18, 1906, Page 7.



ıey get rid of them.
"Now then, what I do is to ıake a personality out of you. I ıke you in hand and in 20 days ou become a social lion. Instead sitting in a far-off corner at the ırty, you become the piece de re-stance—the main squeeze.
"You understand?"
"I gotcha," we replied.
"Are you a married man?" the rofessor asked. We sighed.
"Well, if that's the case, rag-ıme as a bachelor's asset will not ppeal to you, but I hardly need ell you the advantage that a oung man who can play rag-time as over one in whose soul there no music.
"Rag-time takes temperament.



Figure 1.9: The Oklahoma News, March 18, 1912, Page 2.

> What is the fate of the average music student who takes the orthodox course in music (not ragtime or popular music)? Father spends lots of money on his daughter's musical education […] and daughter studies hard and faithfully and learns to play well. Just about this time, along comes an ordinary man and marries her, and there's the end of a musical career, nine times out of ten.
>
> The lady in question begins then to neglect her practice on account of the more important household duties, and ten years later, when her daughter is old enough to take lessons the same story is repeated: Father has to cough up for an expensive musical education, because mother doesn't remember enough about her's to teach the daughter—man comes along, marries daughter, etc., etc.[167]

Who knows how effective appeals like this were. Nevertheless, by the early 1910s, the nation's educators were coming around to ragtime's potential. In 1913, a convention of Minnesota music teachers agreed that "ragtime may yet become the real American music, and that there [was] hope for its reformation."[168] A year later, the musical supervisor of public schools in Hartford, Connecticut was claiming that ragtime music did not, in fact, "injure the musical mind of the public school child."[169] The state superintendent of Utah went even further, urging his music teachers to teach "stuff with a swing and a tune to it"; claiming that "a good ragtime song would more appeal to students than some slow, timeless and tuneless hymn."[170]

Military

It was, of course, rarely denied that ragtime was appealing. What was at issue was whether or not it was always *appropriate* to be appealing. Like churches and schools, the organs of patriotic and military pageantry were reflexively hostile to ragtime. This conflict was particularly sharp because the military band was then America's most vital musical form. No musician did more to improve ragtime's reputation than John Philip Sousa, who toured Europe with

[167] Axel Christensen, "Ragtime Review," 1914.
[168] "The Ragtime Finds Favor," *Williston Graphic*, July 17, 1913.
[169] "Ragtime Good for Children," *Rockford Chronicle*, May 29, 1914.
[170] "Teachers Must Learn Music, Says Gowans," *Salt Lake Telegram*, June 28, 1915.

ragtime arrangements and brought back news that the original aristocrats enjoyed the syncopations.[171] (And it also can't be overlooked that ragtime instrumental compositions—like those of Scott Joplin—were generally patterned on marches.) Nevertheless, the programming of ragtime music in military marches produced recurring scandals. In Washington D.C. in 1902, a military parade of Grand Army veterans was to have an occasional burst of ragtime melody, but "the women of the various auxiliary organizations held meetings and protested against the ragtime proposition."[172] Steps were taken to ensure hygiene. The "Star Spangled Banner"—not yet the national anthem—was forbidden by the War Department to be introduced into any "ragtime cocktail" by any military band. (The St. Louis Dispatch clarified that "All Coons Look Alike to Me" could be played, just not on the same program as the "Star.")[173] But the contradictions could not be stifled. America's imperial ambitions meant that the military could no longer be a family affair—the masses of armed forces would have to be managed just like the masses at the vaudeville theater. And so the military bands blared out ragtime tunes during the conquests in the Caribbean and used the music as a tool of conscription.[174] Ragtime's international reputation made it useful in peaceful operations as well. When the bandmaster on a U.S. training ship encountered a ship from Santo Domingo but lacked the Santo Domingo anthem, he advertised his friendliness with a "ragtime air." It apparently worked.[175]

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[171] "Sousa and Ragtime," *The Saint Paul Globe*, September 28, 1903; "Sousa in Favor of Ragtime," *The Greenwood Gazette*, November 2, 1911; "Sousa on Ragtime Music," *The Lima Morning Star and Republican-Gazette*, September 21, 1913. See also Paul E. Bierley, *The Incredible Band of John Philip Sousa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Patrick Warfield, *Making the March King: John Philip Sousa's Washington Years, 1854-1893* (Urbana: University Of Illinois Press, 2013).

[172] "Veterans Taboo Ragtime Music," *Salt Lake Telegram*, August 27, 1902.

[173] "Must Not Tamper with U.S. Anthem," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 1, 1907.

[174] "Ragtime Lures 50 Negroes into Army," *Rock Island Argus*, April 16, 1917.

[175] "Must Not Tamper with U.S. Anthem."

Court

The juxtaposition of grave state affairs with ragtime's bounce was irresistible for the daily papers, who were equally amused by the appearance of ragtime in the courts. Noise complaints involving ragtime were especially newsy–particularly if they involved the great *querelle* between ragtime and the classics. A dispute between neighbors over competing phonograph repertoire received both an illustration and original comical verse in addition to reportage.[176] Some divorce cases involved disagreements about ragtime, and these were eagerly reported.[177] Better still was the divorce of one Anna Keesler in Salt Lake City, whose lawyers submitted her affidavit in the form of a coon song.[178] But the cream of the ragtime-in-court genre were stories in which judges might need pass judgment on the aesthetic value of ragtime itself. A "learned city judge will be forced to acknowledge that it is no longer 'all coons look alike to me,' but 'all coons sound alike to me,"' raved the Austin Statesman, imagining the "learned judge studying the latest fads and fancies of the hour and burning midnight oil to get at the fact whether "Good Morning, Carrie," is an infringement on "It's Up to You, Babe."[179]

A particularly exciting case involved the composer A.B. Sloane, who was brought to court by his publisher, M. Witmark and Sons, with whom he had an exclusive contract. Witmark alleged that Sloane had violated this contract by publishing a song with a rival publisher under his wife's name. Witmark contended that it would have been impossible for Mrs. Sloane

[176] "Classics and Ragtime in Police Court Clash," *Washington Times*, January 17, 1906.

[177] Newspapers in 19019 carried the news of one such divorce: "The husband had a longing for Wagnerian operas and the wife's tastes was for "raggy" music. Of course they quarreled and parted. The husband went back to Germany to shed a few tears at the birthplace of Wagner and the wife remained in Chicago, where 'ragtime' music is made to order without anyone claiming special credit for it." "Wagner Vs. Ragtime," *Wichita Eagle*, May 18, 1909. In 1912, a Jessie Koenig of St. Louis filed suit for divorce from her husband, City Forester Julius Koenig, claiming that his job title had caused him to suffer from "highbrowism." "I still love Julius, but I'd rather live without him than without ragtime." "Ragtime Had No Charms," *Day Book*, August 28, 1912.

[178] "Lawyer Springs Ragtime," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 17, 1906.

[179] "New York City News of a Day," *Times*, February 18, 1902.

to have composed the song because she was "unskilled in musical composition." Excerpts from Judge Bischoff's opinion were published in newspapers nationwide:

> According to the plaintiff's contention, Mr. Sloane is possessed of marked individuality as the composer of ragtime or 'coon' songs, and this particular song is claimed to be distinguished by characteristics peculiarly his own. Hence the plaintiff's suspicion of conviction that his was the master hand. Expert opinion upon the subject of uniformity in musical composition has been afforded by affidavits of well-known composers of light opera, and the weight of opinion seems to be that composers generally have their own characteristics, but that the 'coon' song has an individuality of its own which obliterates the personality of genius.[180]

Determining which elements of a conventionalized musical discourse form communal property and which are individuated enough to bear copyright is a dilemma which continues to bedevil the law. But it was frequently argued that "all coon songs are ragtime melodies are cribbed […]"

> If the composers have not cribbed from one another, they have cribbed from the darky in the South who first sang the plaintive airs. And the Southern darky received the airs from his African ancestors who sang the songs while they worked, hunted, fought or feasted. There were not so many of these airs to begin with, but using them for a foundation, composers have been able to build up a surprisingly large number of so-called "popular songs" […][181]

And it was not uncommon to continue this line of thinking as follows:

> And […] it may as well be said, flat-footed, that none but a negro can do downright, absolute, full justice to a "ragtime," and the blacker he is the better the song. A negro is ragtime through and through. He feels it and acts it. 'White trash' only give imitations, denuded, weak, entirely lacking in the right flavor, swing, cadence.[182]

[180] "There is some dispute as to whether Mrs. Sloane has enjoyed a musical education, but in view of the plaintiff's assertion that Mrs. Sloane cannot read music the point is not important, for it appears that while coon songs may be composed despite musical training, the training is not an incident to an enduring success." "Ragtime Not An Art," *Evening Times*, August 9, 1901; "Bischoff on Ragtime," *Brooklyn Citizen*, August 9, 1901. Almost ten years later, Bischoff would decide again in a similar case of musical plagiarism, but was sadly unable to draw on his competency in ragtime composition. "Ragtime His Long Suit," *New York Tribune*, July 15, 1909.

[181] "The Genesis of Ragtime," *Saint Paul Globe*, June 22, 1903.

[182] "Rag Time Songs," *Austin American-Statesman*, July 10, 1903.

I quote these lines to emphasize the perhaps surprising way that elite reception of ragtime music was racialized. Just as 19th-century patrician audiences had despised minstrelsy for its *inauthenticity*, so did their 20th-century counterparts tend to exempt black musicians from the crimes of ragtime. When the well-heeled defenders of ragtime pled their case, it was typically the behavior of low-class whites that had to be excused, and not ragtime's association with black life. Being a period of essentially undisguised racism and effective enforcement (both legal and extra-legal) of racial boundaries, there was little need for coded speech and less fear of racial contamination. American elites tended not to fear that their musical culture was becoming blacker—in fact, because they usually assumed that their poor Anglo counterparts lacked a folk music, they embraced it.[183] Then, as now, black culture was an element in a struggle between American elites and the rabble. But as far as these elite were concerned, the rabble was white.

Street

In fact, during this moment of immigration, there were many shades of white, and the elite custodians of culture were happy to enter into confederation with those who might share their interests in musical hygiene. The Irish worker, already a familiar joke on and off the vaudeville stage, would not play this role; nor would the more recent Eastern European immigrants, among whom the Polish were already giving the Irish a run for their money in the stereotypical role of comical oaf. But the Germans and Italians could be conscripted as a musical model minority, for it was well-known that they respectively carried the noble

[183] That Black Americans possessed a "genius" for music was neither controversial nor subject to critique. Even more interestingly, the idea that America's *popular* music would be the music *of* Black Americans also approached a commonplace, at least for white society. The wrinkle was in the genitive: whites did not draw particularly fine distinctions between the fund of "Negro melodies," Stephen Foster's *Ethiopian Melodies*, and the coon songs of white composers. For an example of this tendency, see May Irwin's contribution in James McLaughlin et al., "What Are The Cause and the Effect of the So-Called Coon Song," *Boston Globe*, March 24, 1901.

traditions of symphony and opera in their blood.

The Italians also tended to operate the street organ trade, and were therefore in a powerful position to regulate the airwaves in major cities. In 1904, the organ-grinders of Philadelphia formed "The United and Amalgamated Order of Street Organ and Hurdy-Gurdy Players of Philadelphia, Camden, Norristown and Vicinity," and elected an important ambassador of the city's Italian "colony," Antonio Amodel, as censor. In fact, Amodel had more discerning tastes than most of his native-born musical crusaders: ragtime was banned, but so were "cheap sentimental ballads."[184] The movement was ecumenical, inviting "all piano players, cornet blowers and all other music lovers of the city to give their hearty approval."[185]

The newspapers ate it up, translating the Order's first proclamation from its original Italian:

> All hail the beautiful spring! Knights of the Hurdy-Gurdy greet with smiles the joyful time of the year when the little children play upon the streets, and the man of music gathers the coins of the multitude into his expectant pocket. Knights, prepare for the fray, wherein you may conquer much wealth and win fame and renown for your talents with the organ.
>
> […]
>
> But it is a duty, remember, that you owe to the genius of the great composers, that you elevate the present poor taste of the people of this city. […] While the time is not ripe as yet for the knights to lay down an iron-clad law that no ragtime selections must be rendered, yet, as the censor, and in the name of high art, I demand that you play as little rag-time as you can during the present season.[186]

The phenomenon of the gentleman organ-grinder was known outside of Philadelphia. Melcher Wildeman, thought to have been the "richest organ grinder in the world" was remembered for ignoring the pleas for ragtime over the rolls of hymns he preferred to play.

[184] "Organ Grinders Blacklist Tunes," *Washington Times*, December 14, 1904. This would not be the last time that genteel Americans found the censor's stamp to be a blunt instrument. When ragtime was banned by the London Park Committee, many were shocked to discover that their favored ballads were also disallowed."The London Park Committee Has Prohibited," *Nashville Banner*, May 29, 1909.

[185] "Old Oaken Bucket on the Blacklist," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 13, 1904.

[186] "Hurdy Gurdy Men Must Dress Neatly," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 19, 1905.

(Although it was probably a Victorian fantasy that a man who so bucked popular taste could have collected "$50,000 to $75,000 in nickles [sic] and pennies.")[187] In general, however, the hurdy-gurdy industry's efforts at self-regulation proved unsuccessful, and municipal powers were called upon. Staten Islanders beseeched the Commissioner of Docks and Ferries to eliminate the ragtime organ grinders from their commute.[188] Other cities attempted to bring their street music under control by issuing licenses, with ragtime always singled out as a particular nuisance alongside immigrant street musicians. The problem was not only moral but financial. The mayor of Schenectady declared it a waste of money to "teach the school children the heavenly gift of song and have a pleuro-pneumonia organ assault their ears in the streets with a battered ragtime air."[189]

Park

Innocent ears were assaulted in the streets, but also, far more insidiously, in the parks. Venomous fights about the programs at summertime public concerts erupted in every American city. In 1902, the New York City Dock Department banned ragtime from the summer concerts on the piers, apparently agreeing with the *New York Tribune* that there was "no reason why the music played [..] for folk of the tenement house district should tend to deliberate debauching and deterioration of their taste."[190] The folk of the tenement house district disagreed. Three children wrote letters in protest, and Commissioner McDougall Hawks heard their pleas. The previous order was blamed on a subordinate. "I do not believe in keeping away from the people the tunes they like best," he declared.[191]

Instead, leaning again on the belief in musical model minorities, he offered a plan to "lo-

[187] "Richest Organ Grinder in the World Dies," *Knoxville Sentinel*, August 24, 1906.
[188] "Staten Islanders Take a Just Pride in the Municipal Ferry Service," *New York Tribune*, July 9, 1907.
[189] "No More Ragtime in This City's Streets," *Reading Times*, March 31, 1906.
[190] "Music on the Recreation Piers," *New York Tribune*, May 25, 1902. Another editorial on this page inveighs against the noise and speed of the new "offensive automobiles."
[191] "Must Play Ragtime," *The Saint Paul Globe*, May 27, 1902.

calize" the music—to employ their thirty-five different bands to "give Italian airs in Italian quarters and German airs in German quarters." Apparently ignoring the fact that his petitioners were themselves Italian immigrants, he reminded the press that, "in some of these sections […] what we know as the classical airs are the most popular." Despite this classically genteel sentiment, Hawks was surprisingly hip, predicting that "what the people want will be the tunes we hear every day on the streets." While approving of the objective to improve the "popular taste," he claimed to stand with "the music of the people."[192]

The music of the people meant ragtime and more ragtime. Over protests from their local musical custodians, the people demanded more ragtime from their summer band in Fort Wayne, Indiana.[193] The people demanded ragtime in Jefferson City, Missouri, even as their betters worried about music's classical function to instruct and purify the soul. ("[N]either Plutarch nor Pythagoras had heard a modern band play, on a Sunday evening: 'Oh, fa-a-a-a-ndle me!'")[194] But more and more were growing skeptical about the pearl-clutchers. When the ragtime band in Louisville's Jockey Club Park drew large crowds in poor weather, a local reporter wrote that "although there are some so highly educated musically that they claim ragtime has no charm for them, these same people always fall into line and keep time with hands or feet to the rhythmic music."[195] Even the most stubborn classicists were defeated. A bandmaster in Topeka took a public stand against ragtime, but finally relented. "In spite of his screams," the Topeka State Journal reported, "the leader will wave his wand in harmony with the syncopated time of the music on the stands."[196]

By 1906, all of the bands engaged to play at Washington, D.C.'s Luna Park summer con-

[192] "Must Play Ragtime."
[193] "Ragtime Concerts at the Park," *The Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, August 11, 1905.
[194] "Plutarch and Ragtime," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 11, 1905.
[195] "Jockey Club Park," *Kentucky Irish American*, July 29, 1905.
[196] With a sleight of hand a few other staunch classicists would employ, the conductor actually programmed sprightly overtures and called them ragtime! "Innes Gives up," *Topeka State Journal*, July 19, 1905.

certs were enthusiastically supplying ragtime in defiance of the critics.[197] The next few years saw renewed efforts to bring the hammer down once again—ragtime was off the program in Rochester and Newark.[198] By then, however, even supporters of music education were tempering their appeals. "Give us Wagner," wrote one, "In large allopathetic doses, but don't cut out our ragtime altogether."[199] Meanwhile, the advocates of the popular sensibility had mastered new forms of justification. "Folks who do a hard day's work," wrote one, "don't go to the concerts to be lulled into aesthetic dreams, but to have their senses revivified. So long as the ragtime is harmonious and in good taste there should be no grumbling, and by the way, all popular music must be harmonious and pretty or it would not be popular."[200]

The disputes were not limited to the editorial pages. The classical concerts in Highland Park, on the border of Queens and Brooklyn, were disrupted by "powerful-lunged youths, equipped with cardboard megaphones" who aimed to "drown out the strains of the band" by singing ragtime. (The police, taken by the earnest concert-goers to be in favor of ragtime, apparently would not intervene.)[201] Generally, these municipal struggles over ragtime matched the political divisions of the period. When the high-minded reformist mayor William Jay Gaynor turned his back on the Democratic machine in New York City, his park commissioner decided that "the $80,000 appropriated each year for park music in Manhattan must […] buy music of higher quality than [was] the rule under the Tammany administration."[202] The situation was similar in San Francisco, where the resident highbrow bandleader cried out for public funding: "Art is begging […] while ragtime thrives," he pleaded. "It is

[197] "Ragtime Band Music Stirs up the Critics," *Washington Times*, May 23, 1906.
[198] "Classic versus Ragtime," *Bangor Daily News*, September 21, 1908.
[199] "A Place for Ragtime," *Streator Free Press*, September 3, 1908.
[200] "Some Folks Complain," *Berkshire Eagle*, June 23, 1908.
[201] "Cops with Trained Ears Wanted in Highland Park," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 16, 1909. In testament to the much wider range of "ragtime," one of the "choice selections" preferred by the youths was "Take Me Out to the Ball-Game." (The other one named was a coon song.)
[202] "Ragtime Music Banished," *Los Gatos Mail*, March 3, 1910. Urban reform politics, predictably, remained anti-ragtime. Seven years later, New York City mayor John Puroy Mitchel banned the playing of any national anthem to ragtime rhythms. "Anthems and Ragtime," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, May 16, 1917.

time the people had an opportunity to hear the music of the masters."[203] But the people, in general, were not interested in the music of the masters. When "high class" music was tendered during the summer season in St. Joseph, Missouri, the park board was telephoned with complaints about the absence of "understandable" ragtime.[204]

There were apparently outliers—the Socialist mayor of Milwaukee's plea for more ragtime was overruled by a popular vote.[205] But by the end of the ragtime era, it is clear that there existed at least a plurality of Americans who understood that *their* music was a *popular* music and not a "classical" one, and that *ragtime was* this popular music. The sentiment was perhaps best articulated by a member of the "polloi," who was quoted—or maybe fabricated—by *The Washington Herald*, schooling a high-minded musician on the meaning of ragtime. "Ragtime," he intoned, "I tell you ragtime is the music of nature…"

> This old world of ours beats along at a ragtime gait. Every sound that you hear on the city streets is part of the ragtime hum of that city that the buzzards hear as they float along in the sky. The beat of the street-car wheels. the jangle of the bells, the rattle of the wagons, the shuffling feet of the crowds are all one grand ragtime chorus. That's why real ragtime is the natural music of the negroes–children of nature. Every pickaninny bootblack flips his cloth over your shoes with a ragtime beat. It's the rhythmically arranged beat of the universe. I have heard ragtime piano players who could make a wooden Indian dance."[206]

Dancefloor

But whether or not ragtime musicians *should be allowed* to make *anyone* dance was also a question for the Victorians, and one which they had the best chance of deciding. In the churches where shepherds tended to their flocks; in the new public schools where skilled workers were being formed; in the new standing armies required by empire; in the streets

[203] "Mozart Outraged; 'Rag' Substituted at Church Service," *San Francisco Call*, December 19, 1908.
[204] "Many at Smith Park Concert," *St. Joseph Gazette*, June 24, 1911.
[205] "Turn down Ragtime," *Bennington Banner*, March 21, 1911.
[206] "Ragtime Wrangles," *Washington Herald*, June 8, 1907.

and parks of the new cities that housed them all, the elite struggle against ragtime was a struggle with a popular element that they were also more and more bound to. (This is, after all, the distinction between a society regulated by class and one composed of orders.) But the ballroom dancefloor of high society was a residual zone of American society where the patrician element could assert its authority without frustration. To be sure, drastic efforts were made to govern the social dancing of the lower ranks. This was a time of vice squads raiding saloons in defense of public morals—which is how the patricians learned that "the 'whites' [could] outdo the negroes […] in crudity and sensuality."[207] But it was also a time when the affairs of ballroom dancing within the country's Forbidden City was guarded not by arcane tradition but by policy. Because the social dancing of high society was so stringently regulated, efforts to root out ragtime from the ballroom could be successfully implemented. Or so they believed.

In 1904, the American Society of Professors of Dancing set out to abolish the two-step in favor of the waltz, or other similar dances where "graceful movement predominates."[208] The heavy hand seemed not to have worked. Two years later, the "choreographical authorities" decreed that the coming season's dances would be "of a more graceful and refined nature," with "no more jerky ragtime movements." A full-page spread in the *Boston Globe* (Figure 1.10) featured members of New England society proving that, as the headline announced, "Modern Taste Is in Reality Tending Toward the Minuet" with "More Handing About of the Lady, More Saluting, More Gestures." The "pendulum of popular taste" was swinging away from ragtime, wrote the *Globe*, "unless the sense of the authorities is at fault."[209] It turned out that the sense of the authorities was at fault—even more drastic measures were re-

[207] As John Burk wrote in the Harvard Musical Review, ragtime dancing was "a plain example of how the 'whites' can outdo the negroes at times, in crudity and sensuality." John N. Burk, "Ragtime and Its Possibilities," *Harvard Musical Review* 2, no. 4 (1914): 11–13.

[208] "Will Oust Two-Step," *Leavenworth Times*, October 5, 1904.

[209] "New Dances to Be Taught This Season," *Boston Globe*, November 4, 1906.



Figure 1.10: *The Boston Globe*, November 4, 1906, page 56.

quired. A 1907 meeting of the International Association of Dancing Masters barred ragtime from the "ballrooms and dancing floors" their members controlled, and denounced Coney Island as "the most flagrant breeding spot of contortion steps." The *Oakland Tribune*, by now well versed in these sorts of stories, bemusedly predicted that "the professors will pass the usual resolutions condemnatory of the two-step."[210] Only a month later, some dancing instructors were declaring victory. One Professor Asher—"the veteran dancing master" of Philadelphia—said: "Between the two-step and rag-time music the average dancers were about demoralized for a time, but society never gave way; it adhered fast to the real dance."[211]

Whether Society ever gave way is questionable. But the "average dancers" evidently remained demoralized, and by the early teens, the two-step was the least of Society's worries. New dances like the "turkey trot," the "bunny hug," and the "grizzly bear" (not to mention the "Texas Tommy" and the "Boston dip") had emerged, developed "among vulgar, common people."[212] A fresh round of condemnations and bans were announced. In Chicago, seventy-two dance halls eliminated ragtime music from their orchestras.[213] By now, most observers tended to be skeptical about such measures. As the Kansas City Journal suggested, it was doubtful that the ragtime dance would "give way to the evolutions of the 'balpoudre.'"[214] And sure enough, the following year newspapers would again be reporting that "the inevitable 'rag'" was rising up "continually like Banquo's ghost," causing "the good patronesses" to attend their dances "in fear and trembling."[215] A Stanford professor suggested that dance music could be "ragtime proof" if it were only *ever* in triple time, and suggested the university ban all duple music.[216] The appearance of such crackpot schemes only revealed the overall

[210] "Ragtime Dance Is Condemned," *Oakland Tribune*, June 14, 1907.
[211] "Waltz Supplanting Two-Step," *Oroville Daily Register*, July 13, 1907.
[212] "Ragtime Dances," *Times-Democrat*, June 21, 1912; "New Dances and the Critics," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 15, 1914.
[213] "No More Ragtime in Chicago Dance Halls," *Huntington Herald*, October 18, 1912.
[214] "Ragtime Dances."
[215] "'Rag' Worries the Patronesses," *Oakland Tribune*, February 16, 1913.
[216] "Events in Society Circles," *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 12, 1912.

failure of the anti-ragtime dance initiatives. Like their counterparts in other fronts of the ragtime war, the crusading priests of Terpsichore lost. When the society pages of the *Oakland Tribune* announced the 1915 winter dancing season, it struck a weary note. "The music will be 'ragtime' of course," it announced dejectedly, but did note that "the waltz continues to be in favor."[217]

1.2.9. Elite Syncopations

The coon song and ragtime knew in advance where the pressure points of Victorian society were, and it had already deployed its fetid tropes there. Churches were played for laughs in songs like "When The Parson Makes Miss Mandy Johnson Mine" and "I've Got Troubles of My Own," not to mention the endless ragging of the Mendelssohn Wedding March.[218] While the schools argued about ragtime, Eva Mudge sang "An Educated Coon Is Best of All."[219] Before veterans were scandalized by ragtime marches, J.W. Wheeler had a hit with "The Famous Black Brigade."[220] Coon songs were in courts before their publishers—when her abusive husband was on trial, Belle Davis told the judge "He Ain't No Relation o' Mine."[221] And they had thoroughly invaded the ballrooms in songs like "The Belle of the Barber's Ball," "The Black Nobility's Ball," "At The High Brown Babies' Ball," and "The Darktown Strutters' Ball," to name very few.[222]

This crushing defeat of the Victorian anti-ragtime crusade—especially on the ballroom

[217] "Winter Dansants Soon to Engage," *Oakland Tribune*, October 31, 1915.
[218] Robert Cone, *When the Parson Makes Miss Mandy Johnson Mine* (New York: Myll Brothers, 1898); Bob Cole, J. Rosamond Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson, *I've Got Troubles of My Own* (New York: Jos Stern, 1900).
[219] Scott Lawrence, *An Educated Coon Is Best of All* (Chicago: Sol Bloom, 1901).
[220] J.W. Wheeler, *The Famous Black Brigade* (New York: James Stillman, 1894).
[221] Wayburn, *He Ain't No Relation O' Mine*.
[222] George M. Cohan, *The Belle of the Barber's Ball* (New York: Shapiro Music Publisher, 1908); Harry S. Miller, *The Black Nobility's Ball* (New York: Gagel Brothers, 1897); Benny Davis, Ernie Erdman, and Sid Erdman, *At the High Brown Babies' Ball* (New York: Leo Feist, 1919); Shelton Brooks, *The Darktown Strutters' Ball* (New York: Leo Feist, 1917).

dance floor, their home turf—proved that the culture war was not just inter- but also intra-class. For even the most vituperative of elite critics would admit that ragtime was "rhythmical and often tuneful, and [..] dangerously attractive for these reasons."[223] As a Chicago journalist observed as early as 1899, popular music had never before crowded out the classics, suggesting that "at least some of the people who formerly devoted their time to the classics are now interested in the other type of music.[224] The evident fact of elite preference for ragtime exerted a definite fascination over the public. Not only did dandy coons wish to be aristocrats, but apparently aristocrats wished to be dandy coons. This happy convergence was itself ripe for coon song humor. A dialect poem which appeared throughout newspapers in 1899 counseled a country pickaninny to stay home and avoid the topsy-turvy world of the city:

> I's met my own relations puttin' on sech gohgeous style
> Dat it made me want to smack 'em. But I had to stop an' smile.
> An' dem high-toned people prances while dey sings de rag-time tune
> De niggers, dey talks white talk an' de white folks, dey talks coon.

While the vaudeville-going population learned their ragtime primarily from the coon song, the patrician classes were also tutored by the ballroom fad of the cakewalk. ("Cake walks, and coon songs are united," the Boston Morning Journal helpfully explained. "Where you find one you are sure to be reminded of the other," especially when "the ragtime music rolls out in great chunks.")[225] Throughout the ragtime era, the press reported with great interest whenever members of the "400" sang or danced ragtime. When reporting on a fire at a fraternity at the University of Chicago, the fact that the brothers were singing ragtime before the conflagration was not overlooked. In 1910, the "news" that Newport society was dancing ragtime reached Omaha.[226] That J. P. Morgan's daughter was "efficient in ragtime"

[223] "The Marine Band's Programmes," *Washington Herald*, June 24, 1907.
[224] "Music in Chicago," *Evening Times*, July 12, 1899.
[225] "Last Night's Cake Walk," *Boston Morning Journal*, March 31, 1898.
[226] "'Ragtime' Dances Rage in Newport," *Omaha Daily News*, September 18, 1910.

required a headline.[227] Vashon College in Seattle dismissed a piano teacher who refused to "impart knowledge in ragtime"—a decision that may not have been news had the students not been "largely sons of well-to-do city residents."[228]

In short, the ragtime war revealed a genuine ideological division within the ranks of the bourgeoisie, and suggested that Victorian ideology could no longer be predominant. Victorianism (especially in its American form) had been most at home among the professionals and shopkeepers of the traditional *petit-bourgeoisie*. But it was decidedly out of step with the requirements of the new industrial bourgeois, who required along with employees the production of new customers—and the valorization of frugality can only impede expanding consumer markets. Victorianism was also decidedly out of step with the broader collection of *nouveau-riches* who, like most bourgeoises anyhow, preferred the idle lifestyle of the aristocrat—and for that matter, of the dandy coon—to the rectitude of the classical bourgeois.

In other words, one aspect of the ragtime culture-war was a pitched battle between Weber's abstemious bourgeois and Veblen's conspicuously consumerist one. For the first time in white American culture—hitherto, in many important ways, relatively insulated from the world market—the values of industry came into contradiction with the values of capital-c Culture, which is also to say, the terms in which public goods had previously been expressed. For a definite contingent of its opponents, ragtime was practically the *sound* of this contradiction between market society and the state. As a Christopher Ruess bemoaned in 1913, the problem was that "ragtime pays"—

> We are living in a passing period of ragtime. […] The question arises, why not provide ragtime playgrounds, ragtime libraries, ragtime education and ragtime religion? The answer is, that we are not conducting our playgrounds, libraries, schools and churches primarily to make money. Does it not appear that the

[227] "J.P. Morgan's Daughter Is Efficient in Ragtime," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, January 11, 1912.
[228] "Because She Wouldn't Teach Ragtime," *Watertown News*, March 22, 1907.

> necessity of making money out of the amusement of the people is what degrades it to ragtime?[229]

But the contradiction between commerce and culture was only one strand of the struggle. Another related one lay within the concept of culture itself: whether it would remain identified with the values of discipline and sobriety, or could permit the entry of enjoyment. In this struggle, as we have already seen, the recurrent charge was hypocrisy. As a cynical editorial in Joplin, Missouri, wrote, the debate hinged on "what you want music for":

> It is a pleasure to hear ragtime music […] It is a pleasure to praise classical music […] We've seen persons enjoy praising music to which they listened with heavy-lidded eyes. The only pleasure they got was in praising it. […] If to listen to it, then ragtime. If to applaud it, order the classical.[230]

One of the most strident debates of this sort occurred in St. Louis, when a genteel Mrs. Blair publicly rued that St. Louis had become a "ragtime city." A Trube "Buck" Pittman—"exponent par excellence of ragtime in St. Louis society circles"—was ready with a reply:

> I doubt if Mrs. Blair and the ladies […] know exactly what ragtime music is […] They seem to class everything that is not Wagnerian or Verdiesque as ragtime. As a matter of fact, ragtime is coon music, pure and simple—the music of the colored race. It is light, airy and pleasing. The people like it. It has been popular for more than five years, and the quality is constantly being improved. It is not a fad. It has become a part of our every-day life and the source of many of our commonest expressions. It will not die out.[231]

The emergence of a definite popular music permitted elites to entitle themselves to a politically neutral form of populism. Pittman, of course, was from the same social stratum as Blair. Nevertheless, his critique of "grand opera" was phrased in a "just folks" prose that emphatically distinguished between the tastes of the high-born and those of "the great mass of people." For these latter—of which Pittman, despite the accident of his birth, was apparently

[229] Christopher Ruess, "Should a Theater Pay?," *Oakland Tribune*, August 1913, 12AD.
[230] "A Ragtime Fight."
[231] "'Ragtime' Is the Music of the Masses," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 25, 1901.

a member—going to the opera was tiresome and tiring. Who wants to get home hungry at 2:30 in the morning? And who could possibly understand what it was all about anyway, even with years of study? As another editorial agreed, the man who goes to the concert hall "stays under compulsion, and when he politely pretends to admire, the pretense is a transparently gauzy deception."[232]

For those low-brows who might chafe at reading these high-brow denunciations of high-brow culture, the newspaper provided a picture (Figure 1.11).

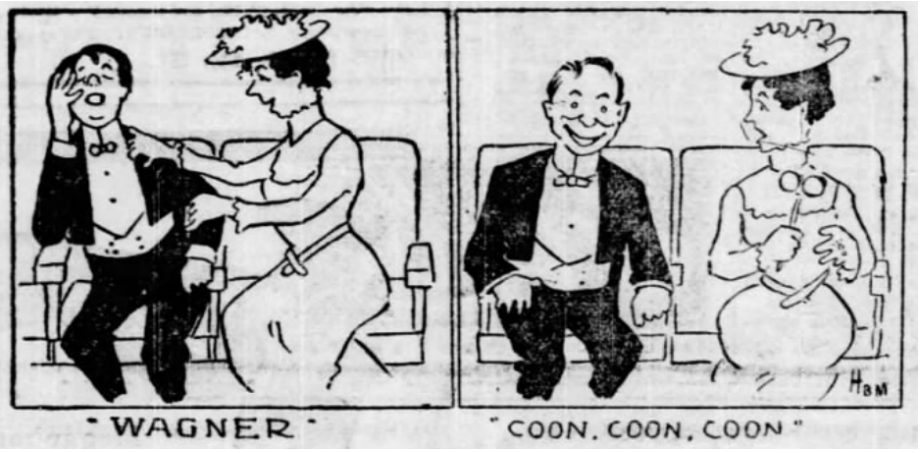


Figure 1.11: *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 25, 1901.

1.2.10. Men Against Women

As this cartoon makes clear, the ragtime war—at least as it was fought amongst the upper classes—was often mapped onto a war between the sexes.

> The men here of late have another fight on their hands, and it is with Daughter's music teacher. Men, having low tastes, like ragtime music, and they buy a piano and hire a teacher, that Daughter in the evening may make them forget the day's worries with ragtime pounded out with enthusiasm. But Daughter isn't allowed to play ragtime; Her teacher, if She is Anybody at All, won't let her touch a ragtime sheet, and Father has to hear music in which there is a whole lot of hang

[232] "Ragtime and the Classic," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, November 24, 1901.

> gymnastics and not a jingle. This is in accord with the plot in which all women are implicated to Uplift Father in spite of his screams.[233]

In a way, this was unavoidable. The family was the quintessential map of social reality for the American bourgeois at the turn of the century, and the inequalities of family life were powerful and ready-to-hand mediations—and justifications—for the empirical inequalities of social life.[234] But there were also specific aspects of the bourgeois family that would tend to force the debate onto gendered lines. The bourgeois husband earned a salary; the bourgeois wife did not. The bourgeois husband had a conscribed leisure time which mass culture products were designed to fill—perhaps by "Daughter in the evening […] with ragtime pounded out with enthusiasm."[235] The bourgeois wife, though she performed supervisory functions, could rely on servant labor for much of the domestic labor. Her leisure time could therefore be devoted to projects of social and cultural "uplift": supporting the local orchestra or opera; organizing the social dancing; devising the music education for the public school; and chairing the various associations to suppress ragtime.[236] This very division of paid labor-time therefore reproduced the cultural struggle between the bourgeois and the aristocrat—the struggle between the sphere of means and the sphere of ends—as a struggle between man

[233] "Uplifting Father," *Herald and Review*, December 2, 1909.

[234] Tamara K. Hareven, "The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective," *Social Research* 58, no. 1 (1991): 253–85.

[235] Although the evening newspaper by the fire was probably the most famous form of male bourgeois leisure.

[236] A melodramatic short story from 1901 depicted the tragic discovery by a genteel school teacher in a charity school that her betrothed was a ragtime enthusiast: "The Italian [organ-grinder] displayed his small, gleaming teeth as he gazed up at the children, crowding upon the fire escape. The teachers in these missions—he had heard of them. They lived on the Avenue. The wore furs and violets, and always they gave their pupils, for the street musicians, a nickel, perhaps even a dime. […] Grace Byrne slipped ten pennies into the hands of as many eager girlies, then leaned over their wriggling, excited little figures to catch a glimpse of the extra attraction. In the center of a gaping circle was a well-built fellow from her own walk of life—a carefully groomed chap, too, he was–clad in the conventional frock coat, gray trousers, silk hat and modish gloves. And he was dancing, actually dancing to that frightful rag-time music […] Grace […] stumbled back to her table, and was sitting there now, with her white face half hidden in her slender hands. […] Again she seemed to hear the ragtime air which to her would henceforth sound like a miserere. Again she saw the outstretched hand of the man who passed the hat, the flushed face of—the man to whom her heart and hand were pledged." Cecily Allen, "Rag-Time Romance," *Minneapolis Journal*, July 11, 1901.

and woman.[237]

But, in fact, the gender positions could be exactly reversed—at least as long as it was still a man being bothered by a woman. A piece in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* recounted a Father's disagreement with his daughter Emmaline.

> Finally Mr. Jenks broke silence through the din. "I wish to goodness," he shouted, "that girl would play something else besides this everlasting ragtime. It wears my nerves to frazzles."
>
> […]
>
> Emmaline stopped and sailed into the room to do battle, "Why, pa-pah," she said in a tone always guaranteed to quell her parent even at his most violent; "why, pa-pah, ragtime is the music of America, the recognized product of native, unaided genius […] If you don't like the gay, spirited music of young America, what do you care for?"
>
> […]
>
> "I want a little something old Americans can listen to with some comfort." retorted Mr. Jenks. "Why can't you play "Seeing Nellie Home" or "Annie Laurie"?
> […]
>
> Emmaline gave a little scream.
>
> "Oh, pa-pah, how bur-joose you are!"[238]

1.2.11. Marriage

Whether figured as husbands and wives, or fathers and daughters, or teachers and students, or classicists and populists, ragtime was the sound of American culture splitting in two. It was time for the old bur-joose to set about to their customary solution to conflict—making a marriage of the warring parties.[239] This project had been underway since the beginning, of

[237] And as a corrollary, the bourgeois husband—because of his need for mass culture—could tend to identify himself with the spirit of the "popular" in general, despite his actual social station. And as a further corollary, the bourgeois man could tend to identify himself with the spirit of progress. As Santayana wrote: "The American Will inhabits the skyscraper; the American Intellect inhabits the colonial mansion. The one is the sphere of the American man; the other, at least predominately, of the American woman. The one is all aggressive enterprise; the other is all genteel tradition." Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy*, 4.

[238] "Mr. Jenks on Ragtime," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 21, 1911.

[239] As Tony Tanner wrote—in the context of a literary history of the novel—bourgeois society is "a society in which marriage *is* the mythology (at least the socially avowed one […] Marriage […] is a means by which

course—as I noted above, the early "inventors" of ragtime hawked their product as a cultural marriage between the rural Negro and the urban sophisticate; and even more dubious genealogies were later advanced that presented ragtime as a "classical product popularized."[240] Even during the most virulent debates over park concerts or school curricula, there were those who claimed a place for "*both* ragtime and classic."[241] But over the course of the 1910s, hopes grew that "the slang of one generation" could become the "current speech of the next", that ragtime tunes might "furnish a future Mendelssohn with material"[242]

American symphonists, anxiously working from European models, had been working under the assumption that a real American art music would be developed from folk sources. This was a bit of a problem, for it had long been a Genteel commonplace that the white people who could count for Euro-America's "indigenous" folk—the rural and small-town Yankee—tended to lack a musical sensibility because they tended to lack feeling itself.[243] As an early Americanist musicologist wrote: "The American farmer, mechanic, journeyman, stage-driver, shepherd, etc., does not sing."[244] This supposed deficiency underlay the earliest critiques of popular music:

> The American country girl is never caught singing during her work, happily and *naively* […] She gets her father to buy her a "pianner" in order to be able to strum on it the ballads the city-folks sing.[245]

Prejudices like these were leading composers to follow the lead of Dr. Dvořák's essays in

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society attempts to bring into harmonious alignment patterns of passion and patterns of property […] For bourgeois society marriage is the all-subsuming, all-organizing, all-containing contract. It is the structure that maintains the Structure." Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 15. It could be useful to think through how popular music, like the novel, shared a marked interest in adultery and marital conflict.

[240] "Ragtime and the Classic."

[241] "Is the 'Rag' to Go?," *Gazette*, June 5, 1914. My emphasis.

[242] "Is the 'Rag' to Go?"

[243] "[T]he American country people are not in the possession of deep emotional power […]" Frédéric Louis Ritter, *Music in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 387.

[244] Ritter, *Music in America*, 385.

[245] Ritter, *Music in America*, 386.

African-Americanisms, or Arthur Farwell's in Indianisms.[246] There was also a tendency to not be completely clear about whether the musical affectations were themselves of "African" or "Indian" vintage: at any rate, they never seemed to ring as true as the peasant-motives that appeared in the scores of Europeans. When the American composer "tries to be American," wrote one critic, "he does himself the injustice of appearing in the rôle of a mid-European's idea of an imitation Indian."[247]

> The reason for all this is that the majority of those who establish the musical standards of this country are not really in sympathy with the average American's musical inclinations. They are looking for American music in every direction except where there are Americans. They will search through the pueblos of the Hopis, and never once think of Broadway. They will study the musical tastes of the Black Belt, and ignore altogether the musical tastes of the Loop district.[248]

A growing number of intellectuals were beginning to claim that the output of the song industry was actually "the one original and indigenous type of music of the American people": that "the ballads the city-folks sing"—"the musical tastes of the Loop district"—were in fact the "folk-music of the American city"; the "primitive folk songs of Broadway."[249] Ragtime, as a musical young man at Harvard wrote, was "as ripe for the plucking as it ever will be. The next thing to look forward to is a real American symphony by a real American composer."[250]

But everywhere the results were unimpressive.[251] The composer who did employ ragtime

[246] Evelyn Davis Culbertson, "Arthur Farwell's Early Efforts on Behalf of American Music, 1889-1921," *American Music* 5, no. 2 (1987): 156; Beth E. Levy, *Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West*, vol. 14 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[247] "The Primitive Folk Songs of Broadway," *Outlook* (New York, United States, November 7, 1917), 365.

[248] "The Primitive Folk Songs of Broadway," 366.

[249] Moderwell, "Ragtime," 284–85; "The Primitive Folk Songs of Broadway." Frequently, however, people opining on these matters had very little sense of what they were talking about. A Dr. Max Friedlaender, professor in Berlin, addressed the Music Teachers' National Association in Boston, in 1910, and defended ragtime—"the tunes and airs popular with the masses," that fly "from mouth to mouth"—as folk song as worthy of respect as the old German repertory. The learned professor distinguished between the true folk songs which "keep their freshness and vitality through the centuries" and the tunes which "soon fade away." What was true ragtime? "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," "Hail Columbia," "The Star Spangled Banner," and "Maryland, My Maryland." "Word in Praise of Popular Song," *Boston Globe*, December 30, 1910.

[250] Burk, "Ragtime and Its Possibilities," 13.

[251] Scott Joplin was, of course, a composer uniquely qualified to convert ragtime into a national school of

figuration was liable to resettle the music out of the city into the rural South, as Henry Hadley did in the third movement of his Fourth Symphony.[252] Others left its idiomatic dimensions completely aside, preferring to deploy it quotationally or scenically, like a bird in a Mahler symphony. John Alden Carpenter's *Adventures in a Perambulator*, for example—a tone poem depicting a stroller-bound infant pushed through the streets of Chicago—included snatches of "Alexander's Ragtime Band" cranked out on a hurdy-gurdy by a "dark man."[253] It seemed as if the Anglo composer would remain without an idiom of their own. The notion that ragtime could supply one remained as fantastical as the idea that the American composer could develop his or her musical language from the American Indian.

Of the American art-music works that attempted some sort of response to ragtime, Charles Ives's "Four Ragtime Dances" is perhaps the only one that remains a convincing work of music, and precisely because it effects no synthesis. Rather than place ragtime rhythms in the landscape or condescend to banjo-fied Brahms, Ives pushed ragtime syncopations beyond the border of the metrical. The modernist incoherence of "Four Ragtime Dances" registered a reality that the bur-joose was incapable of recognizing—that American society could no longer be effectively grasped as a stable unity.[254] And this was only to repeat the achievement

art music. But his efforts—which included essays in ballet and opera—made a tragically small impression on America's "highbrow" musical culture. A footnote in this chapter, he will loom large in Chapter 3.

[252] Henry Hadley, *Symphony No. 4 in D-Minor, Op. 64* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1912). The "whole effect" of which, the *Outlook* wrote, "was German, with ragtime fixings." "The Primitive Folk Songs of Broadway."

[253] The program in general—written from the perspective of the infant—places the hurdy-gurdy in a primal scene of sorts: "I think it is a sound. We approach it. My ear is tickled to excess. I find that the absorbing noise comes from a box—something like my music box, only much larger, and on wheels. A dark man is turning the music out of the box with a handle, just as I do with mine. A dark lady, richly dressed, turns when the man gets tired. They both smile. I smile too, with restraint, for music is the most insidious form of noise. And such music! So gay! I tug at the strap over my stomach. I have a wild thought of dancing with my nurse and my perambulator—all three of us together. Suddenly, at the climax of our excitement, I feel the approach of a phenomenon that I remember. It is the Policeman. He has stopped the music. He has frightened away the dark man and lady with their music box. He seeks the admiration of my Nurse for his act. He walks away, his buttons shine, but far off I hear again the forbidden music. Delightful forbidden Music!" John Alden Carpenter, *Adventures in a Perambulator* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1917), 1.

[254] Similarly, Charles Hiroshi Garrett writes: "For in the process of quoting ragtime to capture a bygone era, Ives chronicles exactly what had begun to materialize around him at the turn of the twentieth century: the rising influence of African American musical practices on musical life in the United States, the rapid growth

of ragtime music itself, which, as I have tried to demonstrate, included within itself a revolt against Victorian values even as it was conscripted into other battles. The contradictions could and would be managed. But they couldn't be dreamt away.

1.2.12. Divorce

Ragtime could not be married off to Harvard's music department for the same reason that their cultural antagonism existed in the first place. Perhaps the black American South could be some kind of Hungary to some kind of Brahms, but the "folk-music of the American city" was no folk music at all. The urban working-class vaudeville audience only resembled peasants from the vantage of high society. Far from being the music of a residual hinterland, and therefore conscriptable into bourgeois fantasy, ragtime—and popular music as it would continue to develop—was the dialectical other of the bourgeois art music tradition itself.

In other words, the cultural contradictions that ragtime brought to the surface were the contradictions of capitalism. By the end of the ragtime era, America's capital stock had grown—from around $5 billion in 1880—to $46 billion.[255] At the beginning of the 19th century, four fifths of the populace had practiced some form of self-employment; by the end of the ragtime era, 60% of the labor force was composed of non-agricultural wage-earning workers, confronting a much smaller percentage of managers and owners of capital.[256] It is ultimately not that surprising that a shared musical discourse would be characterized by oppositions. For the ragtime era coincided more or less directly with the establishment of the modern labor system and its polarization of diverse forms of human life into the opposing

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of the Tin Pan Alley publishing industry, and the widening reach of popular music in America." My point is that Ives's modernist refusal to make this process sensually coherent is what endows it with realism. Charles Hiroshi Garrett, *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music and the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 47.

[255] Daniel D. Luria, "Trends in the Determinants Underlying the Process of Social Stratification: Boston 1880-1920," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 6, no. 2 (1974): 182.

[256] Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 53 379.

social classes of capitalists and proletarians.[257]

But ragtime was not proletarian. Ragtime was *mass* music. Ragtime was a musical formation that could have only emerged in a class society, but it was not therefore the music *of* a class. After all, society is not culture; class is not class-consciousness; and consciousness is not self-consciousness. While Marx correctly predicted that the progress of industrial society would entail the sharpening of its essential class contradiction, this process—we can be certain by now—does not itself mean that the representation of the contradiction becomes sharpened, or more widely legible. One does not need to endorse a theory of "false consciousness" or the more totalizing accounts of ideology in order to note that the veridical cognition of social reality would be an extremely arduous task, if it is indeed possible.

Not least because those who direct the allocation of capital have an asymmetrical power to *shape* social reality—a power that they can be more or less conscious of wielding. The turn-of-the-century leaders of industry were in fact highly conscious of the volatile world they were attempting to steer. Frederick Taylor's innovations in "scientific management" removed "all possible brain work from the shop floor," yielding a new mass of white collar mental workers—sorted increasingly by education received at young technical institutions—alongside a new mass of deskilled machine attendants.[258] American capitalists were rightfully worried about the revolutionary potential of this latter group, particularly as the capitalist's ability to motivate the daily labor at the required rate was not obvious. Part of the solution was attained by the creation of "internal markets"—the introduction of artificial distinctions within the new pool of homogenized labor: "strictly demarcated job ladders, linking each

[257] Katherine Stone, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 6, no. 2 (1974): 113. Also: "The period 1880-1920 was crucial in the development of modern capitalism [in America], witnessing the "proletarianization of the skilled worker, the first great merger wave, and the rise and fall of the Socialist Party of America." Luria, "Trends in the Determinants Underlying the Process of Social Stratification: Boston 1880-1920," 177.

[258] "In the final third of the 19th-century […] movement from manual to non-manual occupations was more common than the reverse." Melanie Archer and Judith R. Blau, "Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: The Case of the Middle Class," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 30.

job to one above and one below it in status and pay to make a chain along which workers could progress."[259] Another part of the solution was the erection of profit-sharing schemes, welfare programs, and—perhaps most determinative of the long-term shape of American society—the sponsorship of working-class home-ownership through firm-subsidized low-income loans. As an editorial in the trade journal *Iron Age* put it:

> Workmen will build homes of their own, which is most desirable as bearing upon permanency of employment and its influence against labor agitation, for the home-owning workman is less apt to be leas astray by the professional agitator than the man whose industrial life is a transient one.[260]

The combination of these trends—the wholesale invention of new forms of white-collar labor; the strategic award of higher wages to the "semi-skilled" sector of the manual labor force; the expansion of home-ownership; and the increasing access to all manner of consumer goods—meant that America's proletarianization could be felt as the emergence of a new middle class.[261] Daniel Luria's figures on Boston over this period are perhaps more dramatic than national trends, but they do express the scale and force of this social transformation. By 1910, 53% of Boston's metropolitan population were employed in white-collar occupations—a nearly 15% rise over thirty years—a rise which also disguised a decline in traditional petty-bourgeois proprietors offset by a dramatic increase in clerical and sales workers.[262] Thirty-three percent of Boston's workers had held no wealth in 1880; this figure was

[259] "As one steel worker described the effect this had on workers during the 1919 organizing campaign, 'Naw, they won't join no union; they're all after every other feller's job.'" Stone, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry," 133–34.

[260] "The Problem of Workmen's Homes," *Iron Age*, August 3, 1905, 289. quoted in Stone, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry," 138.

[261] Daniel D. Luria, "Suburbanization, Homeownership, and Working Class Consciousness." (PhD thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1976); Mike Davis, "Why the US Working Class Is Different," *New Left Review*, October 1, 1980, 3–44; David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900 /* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); John A. James and Mark Thomas, "A Golden Age? Unemployment and the American Labor Market, 1880-1910," *The Journal of Economic History* 63, no. 4 (2003): 959–94.

[262] Stone, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry," 182.

more than halved by 1920. At which point more than 57% of Bostonians lived in homes they owned.[263]

This chapter has lingered extensively on ideas that were expressed by America's white ruling class; and in a much more reduced way, with ideas expressed by that slender stratum of educated black America christened by Du Bois the "talented tenth." But with the exception of some professional insiders like Edward Marks, the views and experiences of the *embourgeoised* worker—the member of the so-called "middle-class"—have been totally absent. There have been extensive citations from newspapers, which express in their own way at least the consciousness they expected their middle class readers to possess. (But were they earnestly read and trusted? Or glancingly dismissed? By whom? In what proportions?) This absence of simple data is of course no accident. It is part and parcel of mass culture that both the reception by its anonymous audience and the intentions of its makers remain veiled behind the operations of the market.

Mysterious for them then but not for us now. Ragtime rhythms, which ultimately leapt from the coon songs to be the hegemonic idiom of popular music until the arrival of jazz, retained always a referent to two distinct worlds: the pre-industrial American bourgeois; and the emancipated black American. This juxtaposition could be instantiated by Ben Harney and his partner Strap Hill. Or by Harney, Wayburn, Whiting and their respective rural negro musical informants. Or by the accompaniment of "Annie Rooney" with a syncopated left hand. Or by the figure of the dandy coon himself. Or by the very idea of cakewalks in Newport. Or by the celebrations of ragtime produced by Genteel critics like Rupert Hines, Hiram Moderwell, Ashton Stevens, or Charles Reginald Sherlock.

What made this combination so irresistible was the fact that these figures were *opposites*. Which meant that they were *extremes*. Which further meant that the audience they inter-

[263] Stone, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry," 182.

pellated regarded itself as neither element but rather identified with the *frame*. Ragtime, in *framing* both the Negro and the Patrician, could be the musical consciousness of an important bloc which only knew itself by being neither. The mass audience that cleaved to ragtime was a cohort of workers that was in the process of leaving behind both ethnic difference and manual labor. Like the characters in the coon songs that plotted the coordinates of their new world, they themselves were "Getting More Like the White Folks Everyday."[264]

[264] Bert Williams and George Walker, *She's Getting More Like the White Folks Every Day* (Shapiro, Bernstein & Von Tilzer, 1901).

2 "The Real American Folk Song Is a Rag": Ragtime ca. 1950

The story begins again around 1950, when ragtime, long dormant, began to assume a minor but vital place in American musical life. 1950 is a convenient year for dating the first wave of ragtime revivalism. It was the year that Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis's *They All Played Ragtime* (*TAPR*) was published by Knopf, an event as important as any in the history of ragtime. The first earnest attempt at a history of ragtime, it has also been enormously successful and influential. For generations of ragtime enthusiasts, the path from idle curiosity to fanatical devotion—or from fanatical devotion to sober antiquarianism—has usually passed through *TAPR*. It is often called "the bible" of ragtime, and this appellation is even more true than you might suppose. *TAPR* rivals Genesis with its long-winded genealogies of ragtime patriarchs, but it also includes a dramatic account of the music in exile, as well as prophesies of its return to the promised land of American popular culture. The book's ability to inspire is an historical fact. Scads of eccentric young men—mostly men!—became something like musical Chasids, wiggling at their pianos in stridently old-fangled shirtsleeves, garters, and suspenders.

Like any revivalist tendency, these ragtimers coupled a minoritarian righteousness to a starry-eyed populism. "The real story of ragtime," Blesh and Janis wrote, "is that of a song

that came from the people and then got lost."[1] In telling the "real story" *TAPR* aimed to recover this "people's song"—*authentic* ragtime—in order to revivify a contemporary popular music gone wrong. The "real story" was apparently very far from the story told, for example, in the first chapter of this dissertation. According to Blesh and Janis, Tin Pan Alley's infinity of coon songs and piano novelties were actually corruptions of an indigenous folk art. Working in proximity to figures like Charles Edward Smith and James McKune, who were uncovering the beginnings of jazz and the blues in the Mississippi delta, Blesh and Janis hoped that America's music culture could be rejuvenated through exposure to its life-giving origins.[2] "Ragtime is undeniably America's music," *TAPR*'s final sentence declared. "A part of our folksong, and a part of our art. Whenever we shall tire sufficiently of the synthetic, the temporal, the vulgar, the banal, and the cheap, it is right here in our midst."

But a synthetic, temporal, vulgar, banal, and cheap ragtime was also already peeking through the cracks of pop music. While Blesh and Janis were busy separating old wheat from chaff, the old chaff was also finding new fans. In 1951, for example, an unknown Nashville pianist named Del Woods had a surprise gold record with her ragtime rendition of an old Tin Pan Alley tune called "Down Yonder."[3] A few years later a similar ragtime novelty hit ("The Crazy Otto Medley") was achieved by a Johnny Maddox, another Tennessean.[4] In Sacramento, California, 1954, a chain restaurant named Shakey's was founded, which served ragtime pianists in boater hats alongside their competitively priced pizza.[5] And three years earlier, and about 400 miles south, *The Lawrence Welk Show* had begun airing on Los Angeles's KTLA, which featured the pianist "Big" Tiny Little administering regular

[1] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 5.

[2] Marybeth Hamilton, *In Search of the Blues* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

[3] Joseph Murrells, *The Book of Golden Discs* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1978), 58.

[4] Maddox's "Crazy Otto Medley," being a medley, was ineligible for *Billboard*'s end of the year tally of hit tunes. Nevertheless, they reported that it would have been placed at 21 if it were countable as a single song. "1955'S Top Tunes Based on the Honor Roll of Hits," *Billboard*, December 31, 1955, 29.

[5] Carol Helstosky, *Pizza: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 91; John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

doses of ragtime alongside the "champagne music" of Welk's big band.[6] Little would part ways with Welk when the show went national, but ragtime remained: he was promptly replaced by one Jo Ann Castle, who would compete with Del Woods for the title of "Queen of Ragtime Piano." Meanwhile, a Wisconsinite named Władziu Valentino Liberace was regularly playing Euday Bowman's "12th Street Rag" alongside light classical chestnuts. All of these musicians were proud to consider themselves *entertainers*, and their work was faithful to Tony Pastor's vision of mass entertainment for the whole family.[7] While most of them were slightly too young to have cut their teeth in vaudeville, they had spent their early days on the road, where they learned to prioritize a particular conception of *fun* over anything like individual expression or musical authenticity. While these ragtime exponents didn't share the righteous ambition of Blesh and Janis, they were equally serious about fun, and they did share an investment in populism. "I want to play my kind of music," Welk declared. "The kind that the people like."[8]

"The song of the people"; "the music that the people like"—that both Blesh and Welk were prone to formulations like these indicate the extent to which the notion of "the popular" had become a problem for popular music. As I will elaborate below, this problem had everything to do with the way a particular phase of popular music—jazz—had exceeded the limits of common understandings of how popular music was supposed to work: who it addressed, and who it didn't. In short, both Blesh and Welk were drawn to ragtime because it served as an avatar for a version of "the people" that an increasingly autonomous jazz seemed to have dispensed with. But despite this apparent unity of belief, they would be completely illegible to each other.

So ragtime in the 1950s really consisted of two parallel revivals, and only one of them was,

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[6] Murray Forman, *One Night on TV Is Worth Weeks at the Paramount: Popular Music on Early Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

[7] See Section 1.1.5 above.

[8] Don Freeman, "Welk's Act of Defiance Spelled Big TV Click," *Downbeat*, August 12, 1953.

strictly speaking, revivalist. For the sake of livelier prose, I will refer to this latter faction as *Bleshite*, as Rudi Blesh was recognized by all as its leader and chief ideologist. I will call the other faction *Welkite*, after Lawrence Welk, who, though not himself a ragtimer, considered ragtime nostalgia an essential aspect of his media empire, and was arguably the most visible custodian of Tony Pastor's vision of mass entertainment. With a little conceptual blurring, these two tendencies can be regarded as folk revivals, but in totally opposite ways. The Bleshites are probably the more familiar type to the historian—like many anxious *urbanistes* dating at least to the Grimms, they hoped to save what appeared to them *from the outside* to be a rapidly vanishing pre-modern culture.[9] And to a degree they were a part of the larger collectionist effort of their moment—in his approving review of *TAPR* for *The New York Times*, Alan Lomax treated Blesh and Janis as colleagues; and many ragtime recordings would be released by Moses Asch's *Folkways* label.[10] The Welkites, on the other hand, believed earnestly but doggedly in their *own* essential folksiness, which they shored up against a coarsening culture by cleaving to the sanitized coarseness of the past.[11]

As Ross Cole has recently argued, folk music "has several different and frequently contrasting threads running through its history," among them, "utopianism, fascism, nostalgia, and revolutionary socialism."[12] It would be reductive to assign any one of these threads to either wing of the 50s ragtime revival—in fact, compared to other "folk" revivals, ragtime

[9] Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* / (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 47–67; Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also Robin D. G. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk'," *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (1992): 1400–1408.

[10] Alan Lomax, "Alan Lomax Collection, Manuscripts, Review of They All Played Ragtime," 1950; Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Richard Carlin, *Worlds of Sound: The Story of Smithsonian Folkways* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2008).

[11] As I'll suggest in my final chapter, musical-historical events often take the form of this dual articulation, and for good reason. A similar example is given by rock music in the mid-to-later 1970s, which saw the retrieval of early rock'n'roll style by both art-school punks and, for example, Garry Marshall. Why did the Ramones and *Happy Days* occupy the airwaves at the same time?

[12] Ross Cole, *The Folk: Music, Modernity, and the Political Imagination* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 4.

was often distinctly apolitical.[13] Moreover, it would be inappropriate to assimilate my dichotomy to Svetlana Boym's distinction between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgias.[14] While Bleshian nostalgia, as we'll see, tilts toward Boym's "reflective nostalgia" in its interest in beautiful ruins, Welkite nostalgia has none of "restorative nostalgia's" putative commitment to truth. Nevertheless, one could say that Bleshism and Welkism represented competing value systems—although even "competing" is probably too strong a word. For while the Bleshite was hostile to the Welkite, the Welkite was basically indifferent. Welkite Randy Wood's label Dot Records (and his later venture with Welk, Ranwood Records) would never be outsold by Blesh's boutique imprint, Circle Records. Welkite Jo Ann Castle never evinced any anxiety about the authenticity of her performance. In fact, it is unlikely that more than a few Welkites were even aware of Blesh at all. But despite their undeniable cultural cachet, Welkites would receive no plaudits in updated editions of *TAPR*. Instead, Bleshites would refer derisively to unnamed "speed merchants on tack pianos."[15] And of course. The whole Bleshite project was precisely to wrest ragtime from the show business ethos to which Welkites passionately subscribed.

Bleshism and Welkism were competing value systems. Which is also to say: competing forms of explanation. Because they both indexed ragtime music as an "old-time" music, and because they both claimed ragtime as some kind of "our" music—a music *by* or *for* some kind of "us"—Bleshism and Welkism also represented competing narratives about who this "we" was; where they had come from; what had happened to them; and where they might be

[13] R. Serge Denisoff, *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Simon Frith, ""The Magic That Can Set You Free': The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community," *Popular Music* 1 (January 1981): 159–68; Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[14] "In my view, two kinds of nostalgia characterize one's relationship to the past, to the imagined community, to home, to one's own self-perception: restorative and reflective. […] Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance." Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

[15] Carl Hultberg, *Rudi (and Me)* (United States: Ragtime Society Press, 2013), 106.

going. They suffered the familiar paradox that all ideologists of the folk and the folksy do. In tailing a timeless *being*, they uncovered only a contingent and historical *becoming*.

What were these distinct value systems and explanations? What sort of people did they imagine they were addressing? Being responsible to, or for? What futures did they imagine? What pasts did they claim? How could they each take ragtime as their object? How could they hear and play the "same music" so differently? Why would they do this at the same time? These are the questions this chapter tries to answer.[16] It will ultimately argue that the division between Bleshite and Welkite ragtime was a herald of a larger division that was occurring in America. I will claim, in fact, that the political divisions and settlements that characterized post-1960s American politics was built out of the cultural intuitions regarding freedom and heritage that Bleshites and Welkites were forging decades earlier. In a quieter and more marginal way, then, ragtime was once again the sound of an American culture splitting in two.

Telling this story requires managing three perspectives: the Welkite's, the Bleshite's, and mine. Here is a brief summary of my claims and a map to make this prospect more manageable for the reader:

1. Welkism and Bleshism were both responses to the fine art status that jazz, most vividly in bebop, could seem to lay claim to.
    a) For Bleshites, reviving a pre-jazz ragtime was a way of contesting bebop as the necessary sound of jazz *qua* fine art.
    b) For Welkites, reviving a pre-jazz ragtime was a way of contesting this status, full-stop.

[16] That mid-century America was a moment especially ripe with particular answers to this question is the premise of Philip Gentry, *What Will I Be: American Music and Cold War Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

c) For me, the emergence of jazz as a fine art indicates a social crisis and transformation. This is a mere historical tautology. A new "fine art" requires a new public. And a new public means that some mass of people have shifted away from pre-existent publics, which in turn suggests that these pre-existent publics are incapable of processing some new kinds of social experience.[17] But these dynamics only appear as historical tautology for the historian *ex post facto*. To participants they appear as struggles, enemies, solidarities, anxieties, pleasures, and so on. My claim is that Welkism and Bleshism expressed dissent with a society they could not name, and which they only conceived of as jazz *qua* art.

2. This chapter divides into three parts.

   a) The first briefly situates Welkites and Bleshites in socio-historical frame; discusses both *their* respective conceptions of jazz and ragtime as manifest in their verbal statements and their musical performances; along with the musical-historical content that permitted the variability of their conceptions. This discussion yields three tacit ideological conceptions of ragtime shared by Welkites and Bleshites, rendered as mutations of jazz, i.e. jazz *minus something*.

   b) These ideologemes are regarded in the second part both as opportunities to get clearer on 1950s ragtime and condensations of dynamics unfolding across a broader cultural register.

   c) The appearance of these latter elements is the springboard for the third part, which argues that 1950s ragtime and its condensations both emanated from and reacted against the brief moment of hegemony with which it was contemporary.

[17] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2010).

2.1. Backgrounds

2.1.1. A Study of the Changing American Character

What was the background and character of the typical Bleshite?

In general, Bleshites were born to petty-bourgeois or professional households in middle-sized cities. The older Bleshites came by their nostalgia first-hand—the ragtime they proselytized was either the music of their young adulthood or adolescence, and so the musical "innocence" they championed was in some way their own as well.[18] (As Blesh said, his love for ragtime went "back into very early memories that I can't recall.")[19] By contrast, younger Bleshites were more likely to have a self-consciously political investment in the music as Black culture.

Oldest of all was Roy J. Carew, the "perennial prophet of ragtime," whose columns in the trad-jazz journal *Record Changer* would be the earliest flickerings of resurrected ragtime.[20] He was born in 1883—which made him only slightly younger than Buddy Bolden (1877), and older than Joseph Lamb (1889) or the Original Dixieland Jass Band's Nick LaRocca (1889). After a childhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where his father was a merchant and shoemaker, Carew followed his sister to New Orleans. It was there, at the age of 21, that Carew heard jazz for the first time. While working as an accountant for the New Orleans Acid and Fertilizer Company, he kept up with musical life over the course of his fifteen years in the city, before moving to Washington, D.C. and taking a job with the federal government.[21] In his sixties, as we'll see, these memories would be influential in setting the tone

[18] "While the nostalgic reaction can feed on any *prior* period in life, in Western society it is adolescence, and for the privileged classes early adulthood as well, that affords nostalgia with its most sumptuous banquets." Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 57.

[19] John Edward Hasse, "Rudi Blesh and the Ragtime Revivalists," in *Ragtime: Its History, Composers, and Music*, ed. John Edward Hasse (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 180.

[20] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*.

[21] George W. Kay, "Roy J. Carew, Obituary," *Second Line*, September 1967.

for Bleshite ragtime.

Slightly younger, and slightly more worldly, was Blesh himself. Born in Guthrie, Oklahoma in 1899—which made him about a decade younger than most of the ragtime composers and "hot" jazz musicians he would champion—he also had a childhood of comfort but not gentility. Although his father was a doctor, and so the family relatively well-to-do, Guthrie was still a frontier town—a product of the 1889 Land Run. Rudi would describe a socially mixed milieu—his father treated "Blacks, whites, Indians, and Mexicans alike"—and claimed to have spent his youth ducking from the odd shoot-out and delivering opium to the houses of ill repute.[22] It's always hard to know what's fact and what's fiction with Blesh, but again, it's notable that his nostalgic world of archaic jazz and ragtime included features he also assigned to his own childhood.

Guthrie would not remain his horizon. At the age of 11, Blesh was transplanted to Vienna, where his father studied surgery with Adolf Lorenz, the father of Konrad. In Vienna he acquired his manias for music and for collecting—although it was Wagner and stamps, respectively, and not yet jazz or 78s, that first fed these habits. It could be said that Blesh's intellectual career was an attempt to unify the cultural spheres of his childhood—the "wild West" and the Old World. Throughout his writings, he would wrap halos around avatars of individualistic, anarchic freedom as well as highly-cultivated order—and it was best for him if these clashing values were bundled together. And so he was drawn to figures like Buster Keaton, who conjoined antic hilarity with a deadpan expression and extremely careful filmmaking.[23] Or Marcel Duchamp, whose equally antic iconoclasm and wild experiments with chance procedures were pursued with an similarly deadpan rigor.[24] Or hot jazz or ragtime—both of which, for Blesh, represented primitive (and therefore *true*) forms of sophistication.

[22] Hultberg, *Rudi (and Me)*, 2.
[23] Rudi Blesh, *Keaton* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).
[24] Rudi Blesh, *Modern Art USA: Men, Rebellion, Conquest, 1900-1956* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956).

After studying architecture and pursuing a career as an interior decorator in San Francisco, Blesh was able, in his forties, to spin his interest in jazz into stints in newspapers and radio.[25] San Francisco was then a hotbed of jazz and ragtime revivalism—Lu Watters's Yerba Buena Jazz Band was putting on regular jam sessions at the Dawn Club downtown.[26] But Blesh was somehow not inspired by this rowdy scene—it was maybe too Guthrie and not enough Vienna. By 1943 he had relocated to Manhattan, renting an apartment steps away from what remained of the theaters, beer gardens, and dance halls we visited on the Bowery during our walk with Edward Marks.[27] There he fell into a lively bohemian world in which he seemed to circulate especially with the more incidental members—he may have been a bit of a climber. He was friendly with figures like Virgil Thomson, Marcel Duchamp, and Lou Harrison—the latter prepared musical figures for Blesh's first book on jazz; and it was Duchamp, in fact, who christened Blesh's boutique record label, Circle. But more often his associates were the sons and brothers or wives of notables—like Peter Bartók, son of Béla, who helped engineer his recording sessions; or Jimmy Ernst, son of Max, who did art direction for Circle.

By far, the most important of these acquaintances was Harriet Janis (née Grossman 1898), the wife of Sidney Janis. Sidney was a wealthy shirt manufacturer, a former vaudevillian, and by 1948 an important gallerist and collector—the Sidney Janis Gallery would be crucial in the history of both Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, and the impressive collection and Harriet accumulated is currently in the custody of the Museum of Modern Art.[28] The year Blesh moved to New York, Harriet and Rudi began a romantic and professional relationship that lasted until her death in 1961. The supreme product of this collaboration was *TAPR*,

[25] Hasse, "Rudi Blesh and the Ragtime Revivalists," 179.

[26] Hal Smith, "The Dawn Club," *San Francisco Traditional Jazz Foundation Collection*, n.d., https://exhibits.stanford.edu/sftjf/feature/the-dawn-club.

[27] See Section 1.1.2 above.

[28] Among other important paintings, the Janises owned Rousseau's "The Dream," before selling it to Nelson Rockefeller. Grace Glueck, "Sidney Janis, Trend-Setting Art Dealer, Dies at 93," *The New York Times*, November 24, 1989; Maria Castro, "Sidney Janis," *Leonard a. Lauder Research Center for Modern Art*, 2017.

but it was not the only one. Blesh and Janis traveled to Louisiana and Chicago in 1944 to research *Shining Trumpets*, Blesh's first book on jazz; and it was Janis's brother Eugene—an antiquities dealer who liked in the Dakota—who funded Circle, for which Janis produced and wrote liner notes.

Between the two, it was likely Janis who first realized that ragtime could be isolated as a branch of music—distinct from early jazz—and the charter she drew up on its behalf remained basically a rosary for Bleshite ragtime for decades:

> "Why revive ragtime?," many will ask. There are a number of good reasons. First, because ragtime is in itself not only a uniquely American, but also a remarkably fine music. It is, too, both a folk music and one that draws on the melodic and harmonic resources of classical composition, alters them by means of intriguing Afro-American rhythm and phrasing, and at the same time offers a challenging filed to the virtuosity and creative imagination of its performers. Ragtime, during its heyday, astonished and deeply influenced the greatest European composers, from Brahms to Satie, Debussy, Milhaud, and Stravinsky. Here in America, even while the name ragtime was being forgotten, it set the pattern for jazz. Finally, its rich store of original melodies and rhythms have been a mine of direct inspiration for decades of popular music.[29]

Blesh and Janis's vision of ragtime as an indigenous Afro-American art was braided with the distinctly French primitivism you might expect from a couple that was summering with the surrealists in the Hamptons. And the younger Bleshites like Ann Charters (née Danberg, 1936) and her husband Sam Charters (1929) also had ties to the avant-garde. But where Blesh and Janis fit into an older bohemian sensibility, Ann and Sam were tweedier. Ann completed a PhD in English at Columbia in 1965, and was an early advocate in the academy for the Beats: she wrote the first biography of Kerouac and edited his letters. As a pianist, she was one of the first to record what Bleshites were calling "classic ragtime," and also wrote its earliest musicological accounts: "Negro Folk Elements in Classic Ragtime,"

[29] Harriet Janis, "Tony Parenti's Ragpickers," no. S-21 (1949).

which appeared in *Ethnomusicology* in 1961.[30] Like Blesh, the Charters were aware of the debates about African retentions in American Black culture that the anthropologist Melville Herskovits had initiated. "Negro Folk Elements" was an attempt to theorize ragtime as "the musical acculturation of the Negro."[31] Other younger Bleshites were less academically inclined. Of the same generation, but more at home on the stage than in the seminar, were men like Bob Darch and Max Morath. The former was the son of an A&P owner in Detroit; the latter of a real estate broker in Colorado Springs.[32] Both had youthful encounters with ragtime music which spawned lifelong projects of amateur research into music of the era, presented in entertaining and information-rich stage shows.

In general, the Bleshite was a collector, and often a broad-minded one. But like many dilettantes and collectors, they were more hedgehogs than foxes, as Blesh's output make clear. The same lessons are drawn in his treatments of his diverse interests, and intersections between them are constant. Reading his texts, one realizes that for Blesh, vaudeville, early film comedy, early jazz, ragtime, and pre-war modernist art were somehow the same. Depicting the opening of the 1913 Armory show in *Modern Art USA: Men*, *Rebellion*, *Conquest*, *1900-1956* (1956), Blesh made a point of noting that the regimental band played ragtime; his proof that the "healthy laughter" provoked by the show was not philistinism but warm and affectionate was the Tin Pan Alley novelty, *That Futuristic Rag*. Elsewhere, we learn that Willem De Kooning was as irrepressible as the "mocking muted horn of the jam session." And of all the collectors of modern American art, Blesh chose the former vaudeville comedienne (and coon shouter) Fanny Brice to serve as a barometer of taste.[33] Similarly, Ann

[30] A. R. Danberg Charters, "Negro Folk Elements in Classic Ragtime," *Ethnomusicology* 5, no. 3 (September 1961): 174.

[31] Charters, "Negro Folk Elements in Classic Ragtime," 183; Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

[32] John Edward Hasse, *Ragtime: Its History*, *Composers*, *and Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 186; Steve Spracklen, *I Thought You'd Never Ask! Recollections on the Life and Career of "Ragtime Bob" Darch* (Joplin, Missouri: Sprac-Co-Klen Interests, 2020), 10.

[33] Blesh, *Modern Art USA*.

Charters's books on Kerouac and Bert Williams—like her treatment of Scott Joplin—return again and again to themes of social alienation, and of the difficulties of squaring artistic ambition with the marketplace.[34]

So much for the Bleshites. What was the background and character of the typical Welkite ragtimer? For one, where even the lower-brow Bleshites like Morath and Darch had college educations, Welkites like Louis Busch, Big "Tiny" Little, Jo Ann Castle, Johnny Maddox—and Welk himself—had generally left high school for early careers in show-business. But to a certain extent, the true nature of the Welkite pianist would actually remain an open question. As the later Bleshite Terry Waldo wrote of this crowd:

> The new ragtime players of this era were a mythical group of back-room professors, all pictured with dangling cigarettes, flashy vests, sleeve garters, and bearing such names as Joe "Fingers" Carr, "Knuckles" O'Toole, Willie the Rock Knox, Crazy Otto…Who were these happy-go-lucky piano pickers who rattled off all the old favorites?[35]

Who there they? These men remained generally unknown for a good reason. They didn't really exist. Instead, they were personae adopted by an indefinite number of freelance session pianists looking to make an easy buck. As Dick Hyman later explained:

> I never learned who Crazy Otto was, but Joe "Fingers" Carr was known to be the late California pianist/arranger Lou Busch. Most of the other fanciful pseudonyms protected the identities of a number of New York studio pianists, among them Billy Rowland, Moe Wechsler, Lou Stein, and myself. After thirty-five years, I think it is safe to acknowledge that my own honky-tonk ticklings appeared on various labels under the *nommes d'ivoire* of Knuckles O'Toole, Willie "The Rock" Knox, Rip Chord, Puddinhead Smith, Slugger Ryan, Good Time Charlie, and possibly others.[36]

As Hyman pointed out, Welk's star pianists, Big "Tiny" Little and Jo Ann Castle, were

[34] Ann Charters, *Nobody, the Story of Bert Wiliams* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); Ann Charters, *Kerouac, a Biography* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973).
[35] Terry Waldo, *This Is Ragtime* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976), 157–58.
[36] Dick Hyman, *Dick Hyman: Piano Prob* (Katonah: Ekay Music, 1992), 6–7.

using elements of their real names. But their public personas were nevertheless intensely artificial. In fact, Castle had begun her career as an accordionist—replacing her surname Zering with the brand-name of her favored instrument. She only switched to the piano to chase the honky-tonk ragtime craze. (As an uncertain pianist, her early days on the Welk show were apparently not too successful.)[37] But where Bleshites tended to come to their musical fixations later in life, both Little and Castle were entertainment industry lifers. Little had spent his childhood on the road with his bandleader father, and Castle began performing in Bakersfield, California in her teens.

The typological dichotomy between Bleshites and Welkites map quite easily onto the one that David Riesman diagnosed in 1961. In *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman's critique of post-War American society, the sociologist distinguished between "inner-directed" and "other-directed" character types. The former, typical of the old professional middle class, was driven by an inner sense of principle that had been installed in childhood. We'll soon see how much Bleshites celebrated the self-determination and rectitude of individuals like Scott Joplin and John Stark. On the other hand, the "other-directed" character was driven by a "psychological need for approval"—and is there anything more representative of this near-psychotic ingratiation than the literally self-less Knuckles O'Toole?[38] In Riesman's view, the increasing prevalence of the other-directed over the inner-directed was the result of the economic transformations my first chapter discussed—the increasing expansion of the consumer market and concomitant emergence of a "new" kind of middle-class that had no ownership relation to production. Post-war America required its citizens to constantly modulate their external selves to meet the fluctuating demands of an overgrown market. A properly "other-directed" character had possession of a mental "gyroscope," which allowed them to assess

[37] Lawrence Welk and Bernice McGeehan, *Wunnerful, Wunnerful: The Autobiography of Lawrence Welk* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

[38] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 22.

their opportunities for success—and the entertainment industry was the perfect form of employment of such a character.

I won't push this correspondence too far. For now, let us note that, whether Bleshite or Welkite, this era's ragtime retrospectivism was rooted firmly in its time. In fact—the newly rediscovered ragtime was a way to understand the *historicity* of this moment.

2.1.2. From Ragtime to Jazz and Back

A grand pause of around three decades divides the last bar of ragtime's first strain from the downbeat of its second. Without the drastic changes that happened in between—changes in the social, cultural, musical fabric—the new promise that ragtime seemed to offer in the 1950s would have been unthinkable. You've got to leave home to get homesick, after all.

So what had happened that mattered for ragtime? For one, there was the emergence of a more militant and assertive politics in the Northern "Black Metropolises" in the 1920s. The sensibility of the "New Negro" was not compatible with the racial fantasies of the ragtime-era culture industries, and Black talents could more—not completely—avoid the fates of Ernest Hogan, Irving Jones, and Bert Williams, who could only be routed through the ugliest branches of racist folklore. While the minstrel show could retain its generations-old halo of nostalgia, the coon song would be largely obsoleted, its major topic of couple-strife now taken up by the commercial blues, which mostly eschewed extra-diegetic narration and so trafficked less in the explicit elaboration of types.[39] There was also, of course, the matter of the Great Depression, which would only be ended by abolishing 19th-century capitalism and instituting a new form that required much more coordination and centralization of capitals, and carefully managed relations with labor as well.[40] There were also two World Wars.

[39] Charles Keil advanced the hypothesis that the blues was actually a reaction to the coon song, a line of thinkin that I don't believe anyone else has taken up.Charles Keil, "People's Music Comparatively: Style and Stereotype, Class and Hegemony," *Dialectical Anthropology* 10, no. 1 (July 1, 1985): 119–30.

[40] Ira. Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, First Edition. (New York: Liveright

The first encouraged the American ruling class to regard itself more and more as a world-imperial power. The second featured the spectacular use of a weapon which seemed to put the very possibility of ongoing human existence in serious question. And both also required temporary but cataclysmic integrations of oppressed populations—chiefly women and racial minorities—into forms of employment formerly strategically reserved for and guarded by white male skins.[41]

In short, America in 1950 was a much more structured and integrally coherent formation than it was in 1900. More of its population was incorporated into its society, and this society in many decisive ways bore the mark of human design and historical contingency. From the vantage point of 1950—unquestionably, as I'll claim below, the historical peak of American hegemony—ragtime music could sound like a wilder, less domesticated world. This might partly explain the new association of ragtime—made by Welkite and Bleshite alike—with "the old West." While in the 1890s, ragtime "inventors" had professed to bring the newfangled music from the Black South, ragtime performers in the 1950s were likely to summon the ambience of the antique frontier saloon or bordello instead. What had once been a professional secret, laughed about by after-hours song pluggers—that "tipsy country cousins" were

Publishing Corporation, A Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2013); Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Patrick D. Reagan, *Designing a New America: The Origins of New Deal Planning, 1890-1943*, Political Development of the American Nation (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); William H. Chafe, *The Achievement of American Liberalism: The New Deal and Its Legacies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Catherine A Stewart, "Household Accounts: Black Domestic Workers in Southern White Spaces during the Great Depression," *Journal of American History* 108, no. 3 (December 1, 2021): 492–520; Annelise Orleck, "'We Are That Mythical Thing Called the Public': Militant Housewives during the Great Depression," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 1 (1993): 147; Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the Us Working Class* (London: Verso Books, 2018).

[41] Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch., eds., *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War Ii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Emilie Stoltzfus, *Citizen, Mother, Worker: Debating Public Responsibility for Child Care after the Second World War*, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Andrew Edmund Kersten, *Labor's Home Front: The American Federation of Labor during World War Ii* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Sally M. Miller and Daniel A. Cornford, *American Labor in the Era of World War Ii* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995); Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labors War at Home: The Cio in World War Ii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

whistling tunes harvested in whorehouses—was now a part of ragtime's just-slightly-naughty appeal.

But though ragtime now smelled of the torrid locales of 1900, it was addressing a much more atomized 1950s audience. And so it was in this moment that a number of stylistic traits—aspects which had been more-or less incidental or even absent in ragtime's original form—became critical. One such aspect was its new status as an essentially instrumental form, and on top of that, essentially a pianist's repertoire. Moreover, the absence of any interest in reviving ragtime *dancing* made it now primarily a music for *listening*. Finally, the transformation of the media system—in particular the erosion of the physical vaudeville entertainment network by the electronic networks of radio and television, along with recently improved forms of home high-fidelity audio reproduction—insured that the revivified ragtime would often be enjoyed privately, at home.[42] The boisterous music that had spilled from every vaudeville theater, dancehall, and saloon in 1900 was now neatly sandwiched between cardboard LP covers and retrograde acts on variety television. Lacking worldliness, it offered little resistance as an object of fantasy.

The observation that ragtime in 1950 was not the ragtime it pretended to be is banal. All revivals are inevitably reinventions: what's interesting is how a revivalist project reveals a critique of its historical present, and also how this historical present is tacitly understood.[43] Welkites and Bleshites had to squint through a convoluted history in order to see the old ragtime world, and they obviously wore the lenses of their time—lenses which had already been ground by that convoluted history. And they also had to strain to hear the old ragtime

[42] Keir Keightley, ""Turn It down!' She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948–59," *Popular Music* 15, no. 2 (May 1996): 149–77.

[43] "[Each revival …] achieved its own momentum with its own preferred repertoire, its own sanctioned styles, and its own *selective view of the past*." Burt Feintuch, "Musical Revival as Musical Transformation," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (University of Illinois Press, 1993), 192. See also Philip V. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

world, over the music that blared out in between, and which had also educated their ears. The best name for this music is jazz.

In fact, it would be simplest to say that both Welkian and Bleshian ragtime were referenda on the status of jazz. For both, ragtime could be defined as jazz minus something else:

$$jazz - x$$

. But—and this is absolutely crucial—the two parties would not understand "jazz" the same way. This marked an essential difference in their outlook. For by 1950 it was possible to conceive of jazz in two opposite ways. For the Bleshite, *jazz* was a fine art, and ragtime was its folk origins. For the Welkite, it was just the conventional name for a collection of musical fads that had followed the first world war. The existence of this split concept preceded them both.

Jazz

Whatever else it would become, jazz was initially the name for a musical style that supplanted ragtime, which was dissipating rapidly around 1917. Some later observers would chalk this up to America's entry into the Great War. It was said that serious times required serious music, and the inarguable gaiety of ragtime could not underscore trench warfare. (The demise of ragtime for the same reason had actually been predicted at the outset of the Spanish American War as well.)[44]

But this was clearly not the case. What *was* most manifestly the case was that for many people, "ragtime" could no longer contain the sense of the musical current. Something was

[44] Still later, historians enamored of the figure of Scott Joplin would date the death of ragtime to his. But this is to simply overstate the importance of Joplin to the matter of ragtime as a popular form. Despite having penned a perennial in "The Maple Leaf Rag," his actual influence on the music trade was not ongoing – as I will argue in the following chapter, Joplin the *auteur* was a product of the 1970s.

changing.

It is always difficult to divide orthography from ontology in a mass culture's native jargon. Many people in the later teens and early twenties were able to proceed as if "jazz" was simply a new name for ragtime. A number of those who had ridden the ragtime wave simply rebranded themselves. Ben Harney began touring the vaudeville circuit with a jazz orchestra, and even claimed to have invented jazz, just as he had claimed to invent ragtime in the 1890s.[45] Ned Wayburn, now a self-proclaimed guru of stage dancing, toured with an act he dubbed the "Symphonic Jazz Revue." When he wrote his memoir proclaiming his place in the history of ragtime he helpfully explained that the perhaps-unfamiliar style was "now known as 'jazz'."[46] The titles of Axel Christensen's publications slowly morphed from "Christensen's Rag-Time Instruction Book for Piano" (1915) to "Axel Christensen's New Instruction Book for Rag and Jazz Piano Playing" (1920) to "Axel Christensen's Instruction Book for Modern Swing Music" (1937) while the content remained basically unchanged.[47] Still others acted as if jazz bands had always been around. In 1917, a young ragtime singer was claiming that it was *now* taking more than a "bellowing voice and a jazz band" to put over a coon song.[48] The notion that the shift from "ragtime" to "jazz" was simply terminological persisted for a long time. When Twentieth Century Fox told the history of popular music in *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938), the eponymous (and fictional) bandleader passed from the ragtime era to the jazz age without any particularly marked change in repertoire or performance style.[49]

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[45] Burton, "Ben R. Harney, 'Jazz' Originator, Tells About Its Introduction."

[46] Ned Wayburn, *The Art of Stage Dancing: The Story of a Beautiful and Profitable Profession* (Studios of Stage Dancing, Inc., 1925).

[47] Axel Christensen, *Christensen's Ragtime Instruction Book for Piano* (Chicago: Axel W. Christensen, 1915); Axel Christensen, *Axel Christensen's New Instruction Book for Rag and Jazz Piano Playing* (Chicago: Christensen School of Popular Music, 1920); Axel Christensen, *Axel Christensen's Instruction Book for Modern Swing Music* (Chicago: Axel W. Christensen, 1937).

[48] "Songstress Starts Revival of Ragtime," *Pittsburgh Press*, June 13, 1917.

[49] For more on the interesting constructions of this film see George F. Custen, "I Hear Music and.Darryl and Irving Write History with Alexander's Ragtime Band," in *Authorship and Film*, ed. David A. Gerstner and

This conservative approach to taxonomy merely reflects basic aspects of the culture industry's self-representation. Like any other economic sector, the culture industries are constantly ensnared in contradictions between their short-term and long-term goals. For while the short-term profitability of an enterprise requires the continuous production of novelties, its long-term viability requires stable markets, and above all, stable names for the things on sale. There is therefore a bias toward reckoning new forms of musical practice as "crazes" or "fads," expressed as parsimoniously as possible. Thus the earliest appearances of "jazz" as an advertising term were hyphenated locutions like "jazz-time" or "jazz-rags." (If pressed for further description, "jazz-time" was said to produce "a sort of raggy effect.")[50] And although it would be possible to chuckle at him later, Irving Berlin was being perfectly reasonable in 1917 when he claimed that the popularity of jazz would soon fade like the craze for Hawaiian music.[51]

So while the ideologists of the music industry continually claim to offer something new, the conviction that *something new has actually occurred* is felt only by participants outside the industry. And outside the industry, many observers had the definite feeling that something new *was* happening, even if they lacked a precise account. Part of it had to do with space. Jazz was anchored more to hearing and dancing while ragtime had been tilted towards theater and the domestic piano.[52] But there was also something new about the music. There was something clearly new about the rhythm. As the Columbia professor Walter Kingsley explained, jazz musicians were routinely putting in "anywhere from five to ten extra beats between the notes of a composition."[53] And there was also something new about the jazz

Janet Staiger (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

[50] "Elaborate Prom Being Planned," *University Daily Kansan*, December 5, 1916.

[51] "Songstress Starts Revival of Ragtime." The fumbling reception of Adorno's jazz essays has everything to do with Adorno using the industry's sense of "jazz."

[52] Brian Harker, "Louis Armstrong, Eccentric Dance, and the Evolution of Jazz on the Eve of Swing," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 61, no. 1 (2008): 67–121.

[53] "That's an unusually large number, but it's not the largest that's been achieved by any means. The Omaha Indians […] sometimes slip in sixteen extra beats almost before you know it." "The Case of Ragtime," *New York*

ensemble. Most believed, in fact, that jazz could *only* be rendered by an ensemble. Sophie Tucker, the great vaudevillian coon shouter, maintained that each musician within the jazz band contributed "discordant sounds, but collectively they make a melody."[54] And there was also something clearly more wild, something less inhibited, about jazz. When the *Baltimore Afro American* struggled to described the new thing to its genteel Black readership, it emphasized the freedom and wildness of the dance it called forth, lamenting that "at bottom it is nothing more than the wild syncopated boom-pa of a drum of the African wild man."[55]

One thing that jazz seemed not to entail—as ragtime had—was a fusion with the alloy of existing genteel culture. As my first chapter argued, the fascination provoked by ragtime had everything to do with the civilization of its supposedly "Negro" elements and the "Negrofication" of its civilized elements — hence the importance of the dandy coon stereotype and the ragging of "Annie Laurie" or the Mendelssohn wedding march. But the values that jazz advertised seemed totally exterior to those of America's official culture—a culture which had been substantially leveled by ragtime anyway.

This fact had everything to do with the emergence and speedy dominance of devices like the player piano, the talking machine, and the radio over the distributive apparatus of the music industry. For while the amateur pianist had learned to syncopate ragtime at home (or at the various "ragtime schools"), neither jazz's rhythmic conception nor its wild "discordant sounds" could be accurately notated for home performance. Had the musical hearth of the American home remained a keyboard, jazz would have indeed been a mere passing fad.[56] As it happened, a technocultural revolution permitted it to be a permanent rip in the fabric of

Tribune, July 15, 1917.

[54] "What Jazz Is," *Anaconda Standard*, June 30, 1918.

[55] Baltimore Afro American, "A Tribute to Great Music Writer," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 3, 1917.

[56] As a testament to its increasingly reduced status in domestic music-making, the piano required much more sophisticated and aggressive advertising strategies in this period. Paul Michael Covey, "Selling 'The Things Money Can't Buy': Piano Advertising in the Mid-Twentieth Century," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 1 (February 2019): 54–77. See all William Howland. Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

music itself.[57] For not only did recording and broadcast technologies permit an infinity of unnotatable parameters to circulate and sediment, they were also the condition for a new kind of public sphere with new kinds of literacy and forms of discourse without which this very dissertation would be impossible.[58] Ragtime had *not* generated a public sphere. It produced some genteel ideologists, but their stance was essentially apologist. Speaking to other members of their upper crust, they *defended* the virtues of ragtime while also clearly deriving some thrill from slumming amongst the lower orders.[59] The jazz critic and scholar, on the other hand, would take a much more serious posture, and address a public that did not need to be convinced of the music's value.[60]

In effect, jazz would articulate a historical consciousness that was indedependent of the music industry's commercial consciousness. Commercial consciousness tends to think of time in terms of the cyclicity of fashion. It conceives of its products as forms of incidental decoration, not meanings. It looks for opportunities to unload its stockpile of old wares and resists the judgement that they might be obsoleted by a changed world. But as John Gennari has written, jazz cultivated "intellectual discourse as a core element of its superstructure."[61] Already by the 1950s this discourse was sophisticated and multifaceted, and it also possessed a definite sense of its own historical coherence.

Rudi Blesh himself had written one of the early critical accounts of jazz history in *Shining*

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[57] "[R]ecording […] from its beginnings at the turn of the century, enabled previously unreproducible aspects of performance — spontaneity, improvisation, etc. — to be reproduced exactly and so enabled Afro-American music to replace European art and folk musics at the heart of western popular culture." Simon Frith, "Art versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music," *Media, Culture & Society* 8, no. 3 (July 1986): 269. Charles Keil has related this to a "schizophonic split" in American culture. Keil, "People's Music Comparatively," 124.

[58] Michael Denning has recently called this the "vernacular music revolution." Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015).

[59] See, for example, Hughes, "A Eulogy of Rag-Time"; Sherlock, "From Breakdown to Rag-Time"; Moderwell, "Ragtime."

[60] "The mid-twentieth-century writers […] were engaging in a long-term distributed legitimation project, preaching as it were to a skeptical congregation […]" Travis A. Jackson, "New Bottle, Old Wine: Whither Jazz Studies?," in *Issues in African American Music* (Routledge, 2017), 38.

[61] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 14.

Trumpets (1946). Along with writers like Sidney Finkelstein (*Jazz: A People's Music* (1948)), Barry Ulanov (*A History of Jazz in America* (1952)), and Marshall Stearns (*The Story of Jazz*, (1956)), Blesh believed that deep historical truths about America were sedimented in the music of Black America: that, in Gennari's words, "the history of music began long before the music itself was sounded, and that to understand the music one had to know something about the U.S. slave trade, plantation life and culture, the Civil War, Reconstruction and […] Jim Crow."[62] In this emergent historiography, ragtime and the blues were situated as the prehistory of jazz; and jazz as their dialectical synthesis. The progress from New Orleans to Chicago to New York; the road from "hot" to "swing" to "bebop"—these were being reckoned not as essentially haphazard successions of musical fads, but as a sequence of steps taken by a historical *geist*. As scholars like Scott DeVeaux and Bernard Gendron have documented, this historiography was in many ways a compromise formation which permitted various types of jazz enthusiasts to share the mantle of jazz.[63] The articulation of jazz as a *historical* and *evolutionary* music—judgements entirely at odds with earlier celebrations of jazz as a primitive folk expression—was the way that devotees of "trad" or "hot," "swing" and "bebop" could live with each other as mutual citizens of one unified musical state, sharing organs like *Down Beat*.[64] Behind the backs of music critics and fans, a new musical universalism was being forged that resembled—both in its consistency and contradictions—the status that European concert music had attained in the later 19th-century.[65]

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[62] Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, 121–22.

[63] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525–60. For more on fights like these, see Mario Dunkel, "Marshall Winslow Stearns and the Politics of Jazz Historiography," *American Music* 30, no. 4 (2012): 468–504.

[64] Mervyn Cooke, "After Swing: Modern Jazz and Its Impact," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 395–417.

[65] William Weber, "The History of the Musical Canon," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford University Press, 1999); William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). I am agreeing with Scott Deveaux's claim that "bebop is the point at which our contemporary ideas of jazz come into focus […] both the source of the present […] and the prism through which we absorb the past." Scott Knowles DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3. Eric Porter makes similar

The most brilliant attempt to understand this process as historical, social, *and* musical would ultimately be developed by Amiri Baraka—then writing as Leroi Jones—in *Blues People* (1963). In that text, Baraka alluded to Rousseau in his framing of the question of Black American culture. As Rousseau emphasized the historical importance of modernity's separation of the human into the *citoyen* of the public sphere and the *bourgeois* of the private sphere, Baraka maintained that the "separation […] between the freedman and the citizen [was] basic to any understanding of the evolution of black America."

> From a relatively homogenous social, cultural, and geographical unit, existing strictly apart from white America, Negroes became a group of diverse "Americans" forming a psychological chain that begins with a complete awareness of and dependence on what is now called a "folk culture" and moves to a completely antithetical extreme—to those Negroes who are completely dependent upon the culture of mainstream America. It is a psychological chain much like a spectrum that begins at deepest black and moves easily into American gray. There was a period of transition, however, when for the majority of Negroes, the chain did not stretch completely into gray America. But the separation, the cleavage within black America was beginning to be quite apparent.[66]

This cleavage—that is, the integration of black America into America's class structure—was nothing to mourn. It was the condition for the emergence of jazz—"jazz" here signifying the music in its universal mode:

> In the best of jazz, the *freedman-citizen* conflict is most nearly resolved, because it makes use of that middle ground, the space that exists as the result of any cleav-

claims in Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 54–100. It is certainly, by now, a truism of textbook jazz history, Gioia demonstrates. "The first generation of jazz players had succeeded as entertainers, and white America was content to celebrate them on that level. But the black jazz players of the 1940s wanted more. They demanded acceptance as artists, as esteemed practitioners of a serious musical form. Previously only a rare individual—a Joplin or an Ellington—aspired to these heights. But with the advent of bebop, a whole generation of black musicians was asserting itself as co-equals with the purveyors of highbrow culture, the classical composers, the dramatists, the poets, the painters, and sculptors." Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 205. For an early account, see Neil Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americans: The Acceptance of a New Art Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). For a retrospective sense of these debates at various moments in the 20th-century, see Jeff Farley, "Jazz as a Black American Art Form: Definitions of the Jazz Preservation Act," *Journal of American Studies* 45, no. 1 (2011): 113–29.

[66] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), 138.

> age, where both emotional penchants can exist as *ideas* of perhaps undetermined validity, and not necessarily as "ways of life."[67]

This is an essentially Hegelian view of history, in which the production of publicly accessible forms of meaning ("ideas of perhaps undetermined validity") result from attempts to resolve social contradictions; and in which the possibility of "resolving" them—foremost, and finally, the conflict between private life and public life—is made particularly tangible in art. But Baraka was only giving philosophico-sociological heft to a basic conviction that united this generation of jazz historians, including Rudi Blesh: that jazz was, or could be, or had been, or could have been, a *universal* form of music: a "music capable of reflection not only of the Negro and a Black America but a white America as well."[68]

If Blesh embraced such a view of jazz, why was he also so invested in rehabilitating prehistoric ragtime? The answer conveys how even thinkers who embrace the same totalizing narrative teleology can differ, radically, depending on where they locate themselves on the axes of history. While Baraka would advocate for the jazz avant-garde, taking its increasing autonomy as proof of its status as a true art, Blesh was a defiant "Moldy Fig" who had been an active partisan of Dixieland against swing in what Bernard Gendron called "the first jazz war."[69] Blesh's vehement opposition to swing's "hybridized popular music" would also be matched by his disgust at bebop. For him, despite its anti-commercial stance, bebop shared swing's intellectualist interest in "fantastic rhythms and unrelated harmonies."[70] (In his writing, no word is more potentially loaded with venom than "sophisticated"—as in "falsely sophisticated college Negroes.")[71] In short, Blesh's ragtime would be proffered as the authentically Black double to a pale, Europeanized bebop. Being a composerly tradition,

[67] Baraka, *Blues People*, 139–40. My emphasis
[68] Baraka, *Blues People*, 149.
[69] Bernard Gendron, "Moldy Figs and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)," *Discourse* 15, no. 3 (1993): 131.
[70] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*; Baraka, *Blues People*, 190.
[71] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 12.

ragtime could lay claim to the mantle of art that bebop was reaching for. But it would do it on terms that didn't yield to white values.

This is strange, to say the least. Now is probably a good a time to make clear that Blesh was white, and—despite being an unflagging champion of African American art and an unflagging denigrator of most European cultural production—basically subscribed to unreconstructed 19th-century ideas about inherent racial difference. Like most thinkers in this tradition, Blesh would argue on the basis of racial shades within white civilization as well. Jazz's roots could only be in New Orleans, for example, where the French capacity for "free melody"—preferable to Germanic harmony—had still predominated.[72] But despite this important French contribution, for Blesh, the master players of jazz were by necessity Black, and their great performances were a product of their communion with their collective racial unconscious. This was not romantic naivete, or *ad hoc* antiquarian reasoning–it was a reasoned stand against Herskovits. In *TAPR* he argued that segregation—the "anthropologists explanation for the preservation of the racial character of Negro music"—was not a sufficient one:

> [A] far stronger factor exists in a basic motivation that springs from the Negro's musical needs and operates regardless of the environment in the vast majority of the people. The Negro needs a music that is complex in its rhythmic structure and exceedingly powerful in its emotional effect, a music that is capable of inducing a state of ecstasy, as African music, American Negro church singing, and jazz are. The scientific acceptance of the fact of this need as a racial attribute would be a far more satisfactory explanation of many things than the far overextended theories of environment. It would explain why racial characteristics like those of the Negro persist in new surroundings despite a natural imitativeness and why and how imitative borrowings are transformed into more native shapes.[73]

There are genuinely insightful passages throughout Blesh's work, but it is all continually marred by these bizarre homages to biological racism.[74] Now, to be sure, it continues to

[72] Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1946).
[73] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 8.
[74] I say bizarre because, as we will see, he was not at all unable to think on the basis of social history. There is

be difficult for many to think that "needs" may be social products. (For one thing: the distinction between *citoyens* and *bourgeoises* would break down.) But even on Blesh's own terms, it's not clear *why* biological accounts are any more explanatory than sociological ones. Especially when the former is incapable of explaining the predicament that was Blesh's *raison d'être*: that Black American music was a *historical* music of continual change. (If it weren't, how could anyone want to revive its past?) The advance of Baraka's *Blues People* over prior jazz histories—Blesh's very much included—had everything to do with its refusal to oppose history to culture, elaborating instead the figure of "the changing same."

In that book, Baraka pulled no punches on the topic of the jazz revivalists. He excoriated Blesh for the "fantastic […] sophistry" which permitted "a white man to give opinions on how he thinks a black man should express himself musically or any other way."[75] Even more fiercely, Baraka claimed that jazz revivalism "revived quite frankly, though perhaps less consciously, the still breathing corpse of minstrelsy and blackface."[76] There is nothing false about his. But a crucial thing to notice is how Blesh and Baraka were ultimately in agreement that the possibility of an American musical art was only possible on the basis of African American musical culture.

It is not difficult to diagnose the strain of "romantic racialism" that runs through much jazz revivalism, although not all were as romantic as Blesh.[77] It is fairly easy to suspect that the revivalist's preference for Louis Armstrong over Charlie Parker had something to do with nostalgia for an era of black docility. But in a social formation marked by racial polarity, this can only be half of the story. Blesh's ragtime reveries also betray a nostalgia for

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absolutely nothing in his larger project that rests on what were already unfashionable ideas. For a contemporaneous alternative, see Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

[75] Baraka, *Blues People*, 190.

[76] Baraka, *Blues People*, 203.

[77] George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

a prior definition of white America *qua Anglo*-America. We know so well the tale of bebop as an assertion of unapologetic Black style that the *white* ethnic dimensions to the bebop controversy are probably not sufficiently recognized.[78] Here is a strange passage from Carl Hultberg, the grandson of Rudi Blesh, guilelessly offering a ventriloquy of his grandfather:

> In this new post-war Bizarro "Modern" Jazz world, scene creator Louis Armstrong was a square and an Uncle Tom. Jazz fans no longer danced. Bearded brooding Jewish and Italian American hipster intellectuals sat at tables, played chess, contemplated the deep art of it all then argued for hours about who was the hippest based on which of their avant garde Black horn player idols exuded the most hostility towards Whites. Jazz was flagellating itself. Maybe Trad Jazz had been about the Blues and this really was the blues. But they were having none of it. No Blues, no Swing, no dancing. It wouldn't have mattered anyway if they wanted to dance, there weren't many women making the Modern Jazz scene. Not many Black people either, except for the trend setting originators.[79]

How interesting that one would take care to note bebop's supposedly special appeal for the swarthier whites. Especially in a fabulated reminiscence that emphasizes the fall of a common culture of courtship and dancing. To tell the truth, gratuitous citations of someone's Jewishness litter Hultberg's memoir of Blesh, and this might also put Blesh's diatribes against Tin Pan Alley in a slightly different light.[80] While John Gennari and Bernard Gendron have suggested that jazz revivalism's anti-commercialism represented left-wing political commitments or even an "improvised Marxism," Blesh's politics were probably more in line with the right wing of the New Deal.[81] His beef with Tin Pan Alley was with its *monopoly* character, not with commerce or business or capital as such. In fact, the small businessman—like

[78] This is something that Eric Lott's critique of Kerouac's "updated Van Vechtenism" overlooks. The idea that Kerouac, the product of a mill town, would resemble Carl Van Vechten, the scion of a wealthy banking family, requires more explanation than he is interested in providing. Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," *Callaloo*, no. 36 (1988): .605n30. See also Patrick Lawrence Burke, *Come in and Hear the Truth: Jazz and Race on 52nd Street* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[79] Hultberg, *Rudi (and Me)*, 44.

[80] It is also likely a token of some familial animosity between the Blesh family line and the Grossman-Janis family line.

[81] In his book on modern art, for example, he sneered at committed WPA artists as much as any post-war neoconservative.

Joplin's publisher, John Stark—was hailed by Blesh and Janis. For them, Stark came "from a generation that believed that business thrived on fair competition rather than on its crushing, a generation that gave a place to the little businessman."[82] In their telling, the tragedy of the modern music industry was the tragedy of the small producer. "The newcomer, the little man with ambition, an idea, and little else," Blesh and Janis complained in *TAPR*, "can scarcely break in."[83]

In other words: behind the inescapable mediations of black and white, Blesh's worldview actually tended towards something like a musical anti-semitism. What had been lost were America's pure racial sources, both white and black, now corrupted by ethnically marked agents of cheap money, neurosis, and existential angst.[84] What was being memorialized in Blesh's ragtime was not only an antediluvian generation of Black music, but more emphatically, its imagined white audience: those older, cheerfully self-sufficient Americans who grew their own food and played their own music.[85] "There were not so many fancy cans for America to take its music from in those days;" *TAPR* declared. "Mother, Dad, sister, and little brother made it themselves."[86] Baraka was right to cite revivalism's relation to the "still-breathing corpse of minstrelsy."[87] It is important to remember that this corpse referred not only to burnt cork, but also to the white souls underneath.

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[82] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 240.

[83] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 51.

[84] And this is more or less to be expected from an intellectual like Blesh. As Stuart Hall used to point out, without the resources of dialectic—the knowledge that antagonisms are structuring, and not necessarily ephemeral; that change and the same can coexist—a critique of the status quo is bound to resemble conspiracy theory.

[85] In other words, Blesh subscribed to what Richard Dorson in 1950 called "fakelore"—the belief that a national lore was possible, and that somehow its Anglo sources deserved priority. "I fail to see why the English witch deserves a priority in American folktales over the German hexe. the Irish banshee, the Italian Strega, the Jewish golem, the Finnish noita, the Norwegian nisse, the Polish czarowniga, and other demonic beings intimately known to millions of Americans." Richard M. Dorson, "Folklore and Fake Lore," *The American Mercury*, March 1950.

[86] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 4.

[87] For a more recent discussion of these issues, see T. Storm Heter, *The Sonic Gaze: Jazz, Whiteness, and Racialized Listening* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

Paths from Ragtime to Jazz

I'm claiming that Bleshite ragtime was an attempt to render an anti-bebop popular art music, and that this was premised on an unconscious but racist nostalgia for a majority-Anglo America—for the simpler cultural milieu he imagined to exist somewhere around 1900. But meanwhile, the mostly non-Anglo Welkites were also conceiving their musical project as an opposition to bop and its sophistications. "We give people music they understand," Welk avowed. "A steady beat all the time. Steady and simple. […E]ven though the 'cats' may think we're corny, I'd even like to have simpler music, even less complicated arrangements."[88] Like Blesh, Welk thought the genius of jazz lay in melody. ("See what can happen when you just play the melody!" he told guests at his Pacific Palisades home.)[89] And like Blesh, he apparently had a distaste for saxophones. For Blesh, the saxophone represented a revolt against his beloved "New Orleans/Chicago" ensemble of trumpet, clarinet, and trombone. Unlike the contrasting timbres of these latter instruments—those "discordant sounds" heard in the 1910s along with their polyphonic splendor—saxophones could be easily clumped together in big band orchestras which drowned out the ecstatic melody of a communally-grounded individual improviser.[90]

Welk's distaste for the saxophone and preference for brass was traceable not to New Orleans but to Bavaria.[91] For although he found his earliest success in the same moment as Glenn Miller and Artie Shaw, Welk's ensemble owed as much (if not more) to the old Ger-

[88] Freeman, "Welk's Act of Defiance Spelled Big TV Click." In the same article, Welk complains about some of his employees, a bit of which I quoted earlier. "Some of them, though, are 'cats', and I tell them to get that stuff out of their systems. I tell them to go to their jam sessions. But when they come to work for me, I want to play my kind of music—the kind that the people like."

[89] Bradley Rogers, "Lawrence Welk: Champagne Music, Ovaltine Politics," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 146.

[90] Blesh, *Shining Trumpets*.

[91] "In 1958, Welk gave his biographer a description of his music, as written by George Thow, a trumpeter and one of his production team members: 'Lawrence Welk relies on the delicate woodwinds—flutes and clarinets—rather than on saxophones; on muted brass as against the blaring 'open' sound; on muted violins and a great deal of accordion and organ.'" Rogers, "Lawrence Welk: Champagne Music, Ovaltine Politics," 145.

man brass band—of the kind we heard in the Manhattan beer garden in Chapter One.[92] On top of the standard wind, brass, and rhythm section forces of the swing band, Welk employed tubas, accordionists, flutes, carillons, and Wurlitzer organs in his arrangements. Rather than building up layers of riffs (in the manner of Count Basie, for example), or including solo excursions over composed backgrounds (in the manner of Duke Ellington), Welk's charts were exceptionally square. They consisted frequently of catchy tunes promenading in varied instrumental colors—ornamented perhaps, but always clearly articulated as *the tune*.[93]

Where Bleshite ragtime was a forgotten tradition, for Welkites it was a living component of their people's heritage. Welk's careful musical programming basically canonized the taste of the lower middlebrow. And despite the Bleshite conception of ragtime as a tonic to the depravities of swing, the ragtime canon solidified by the Welkite faction proved that the roots of the mainstream swing idiom could in fact lie in ragtime—especially in the instrumental "novelty" rags. There, one can already find the germ cells of many of commercial jazz's cliches. Consider Figure 2.1, an extract from Charles Johnson's "Dill Pickles Rag" (1906), a favorite of Welkite and Bleshite alike, likely the prototype of the music I have in mind, and which features a form of syncopation later defined by Jelly Roll Morton as "secondary rag."



Figure 2.1: Charles Johnson, 1906, "Dill Pickles Rag"

Notice how the syncopation is *not* generated with varied note lengths, but by juxtaposing cycles of three notes against a duple pulse. Notice also how this potentially infinite flow—like descending fifth sequences, or sausage meat—needs to be tied off regularly to give it a

[92] See Section 1.1.2 above.
[93] Rogers, "Lawrence Welk: Champagne Music, Ovaltine Politics."

musical shape.[94] One could easily program a computer to crank out ditties like this, but the song industry did just fine. Figure 2.2 is the "Black and White Rag" (1908), which became a surprise hit in 1952:[95]

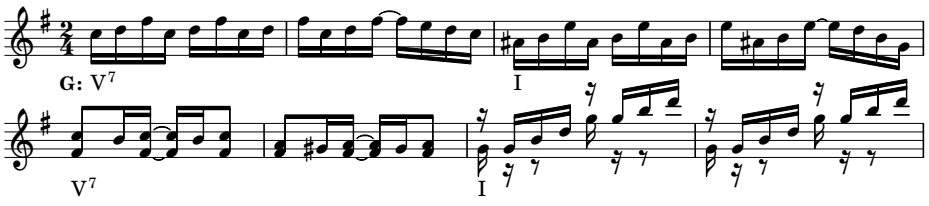


Figure 2.2: George Botsford, 1908, "Black and White Rag"

The "Spaghetti Rag" (1910), (Figure 2.3)—played on *The Lawrence Welk Show* by both Big "Tiny" Little and Jo Ann Castle in different years—pretended that its secondary rag came from Italy…

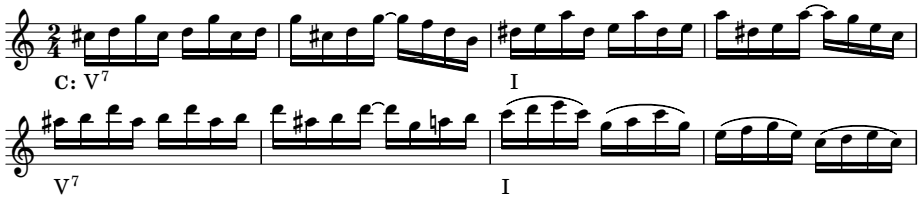


Figure 2.3: George Lyons, 1910, "Spaghetti Rag"

…while the "Down Home Rag" (1911), Figure 2.4, a favorite of Jo Ann Castle and Joe "Fingers" Carr, stuck to the reliable old south, providing dotted rhythms that suggested either banjos or fiddles and which were also used by the more urbane "12th Street Rag" (1919), (Figure 2.5), Liberace's favored rag.

[94] This form of syncopation, by the way—which pretends to overthrow the beat only to restore it—is almost certainly what Adorno had in mind in his infamous "jazz" essays.

[95] The Trinidadian pianist Winifred Atwell had a big hit in the U.K. and Australia in the 1950s with a performance of this rag. Atwell would play a more central role in this chapter if her reception in the U.S. had been as enthusiastic. As it happened, only the Black American press—which was otherwise silent on Welkites and Bleshites—showed any interest in Atwell, and it was more for the palatial English house she shared with her white English husband in the suburbs of London. "Liberace of London: Winifred Atwell Became Famous," *Ebony* 10, no. 5 (1955): 33–38.



Figure 2.4: Wilbur Sweatman, 1911, "Down Home Rag"

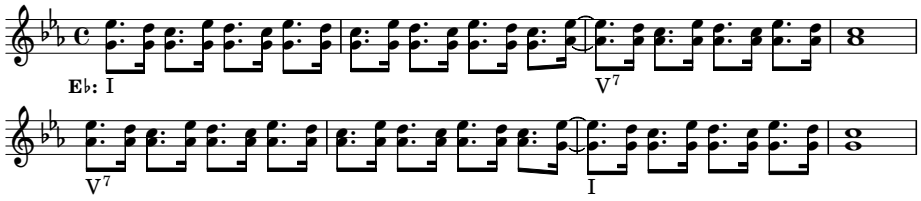


Figure 2.5: Euday Bowman, 1919, "12th Street Rag"

This rhythmic conception provided the basic infrastructure for later commercial swing confections, which would prune the secondary rag's melodic line and marry it to a blues progression. Glenn Miller's "In the Mood," (Figure 2.6), frequently covered by Welk's band, is a ready-to-hand example:



Figure 2.6: Glenn Miller, "In The Mood"

Miller's "String of Pearls," (Figure 2.7), also played by Welk, is slightly farther from the novelty rag.

But not a whole lot of work is required to deform it into the more 1912 form that appears in the top staff of Figure 2.8.

Welk's programming solidified a canon in much the same way that 19th-century phil-



Figure 2.7: Glenn Miller, "A String of Pearls"



Figure 2.8: "A String of Pearls" in 1912 Ragtime Style

harmonic organizations had.[96] One of the effects of establishing such a canon is to make musical works measurable against each other. Hearing Welk's commercial ragtime next to Welk's commercial "jazz"—the old Glenn Miller chestnuts—revealed and codified a stable reception of their differences. And so these examples also reveal the significant new harmonic ideas that such "jazz" had brought to popular music. Ragtime had coordinated its melody and harmony. A relative independence between voice and accompaniment—which was a major contribution of the blues and the condition for the emergence of the riff as a musical resource—was not a feature of ragtime.

Antiphony

In the age of mechanical reproduction, the stabilization of a canon of works permits musicological inquiry into the history of performance.[97] We can use the second strain of the

[96] William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[97] As I have been arguing, the recorded archive is especially important for jazz (in any sense of the word.) "Jazz tunes present different models of identity and authority from most Western musical works. Jazz tunes are played and heard inside a multitude of performance traditions. As with language and in other oral cultures, players learn them in performances by others, full of specific traditions, tempos, keys, grooves, chord substitutions, melodic embellishments, intros, endings, and other structural el- ements. All of these elements can change, and together they both describe and influence the history of how jazz tunes actually sound. In jazz, the multiplicity of recorded versions is a primary source, and neither notation nor original versions are generally authoritative." José Antonio Bowen, "Who Plays the Tune in 'Body and Soul'? A Performance History Using Recorded

"Down Home Rag"—again, a work of high status in Welkite ragtime—to track the emergence of jazz antiphony in the fossil record of recorded popular music. Figure 2.9 provides a familiar gesture as it appears in the right hand of the piano song sheet:



Figure 2.9: Wilbur Sweatman, "Down Home Rag," Second Strain

This is a perfectly common piano ragtime figure, and like much of this rag, it suggests the idiomatics of banjo or fiddle strings: imagine the two lower notes clenched; the top note played as a "hammer-on."[98] A question for the arranger is how many phrases and voices are present in this fragment. Picturing it as banjo or fiddle or piano music, you might hear it as two phrases in a parallel period, sung by a single voice. And in many early ensemble arrangements, that is precisely how it was articulated. In a 1913 recording of the Victor Military Band, the entire passage is handled by the upper brass.[99] In James Reese Europe's performance (recorded around eight months later), fiddles take the line while a rambunctious percussionist blasts out the accent marks.[100] Similarly, neither the Six Brown Brothers (1915), a blackface saxophone sextet, nor Dan Kildare's Versatile Four (1916), a Black string band, nor Earl Fuller's Rector Novelty Orchestra (1918), a white dance band, depart in orchestration from the homophony of the printed song sheet.[101]

Sources," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 9, no. 3 (August 2015): 259. See also Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018). On the related question of historicizing the "Great American Songbook," see Michael Garber, "'Some of These Days' and the Study of the Great American Songbook," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 2 (May 2010): 175–214.

[98] Its composer, Wilbur Sweatman, however, recorded it on the clarinet.

[99] Discography of American Historical Recordings, s.v. "Victor matrix B-13092. Down home rag / Victor Military Band," accessed April 12, 2024, https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/200013341/B-13092-Down_home_rag.

[100] Discography of American Historical Recordings, s.v. "Victor matrix C-14247. Down home rag / Europe's Society Orchestra," accessed April 12, 2024, https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/200014515/C-14247-Down_home_rag.

[101] Discography of American Historical Recordings, s.v. "Victor matrix B-16142. Down home rag / Six Brown

But the arrangements recorded twenty years later by the orchestras of Tommy Dorsey (1938) and Larry Clinton (1939) reveal the strain's possible vocation as a swing band cliché.[102] Dorsey sets the music as a call-and-response between the high reeds and the lower brass (Figure 2.10.)

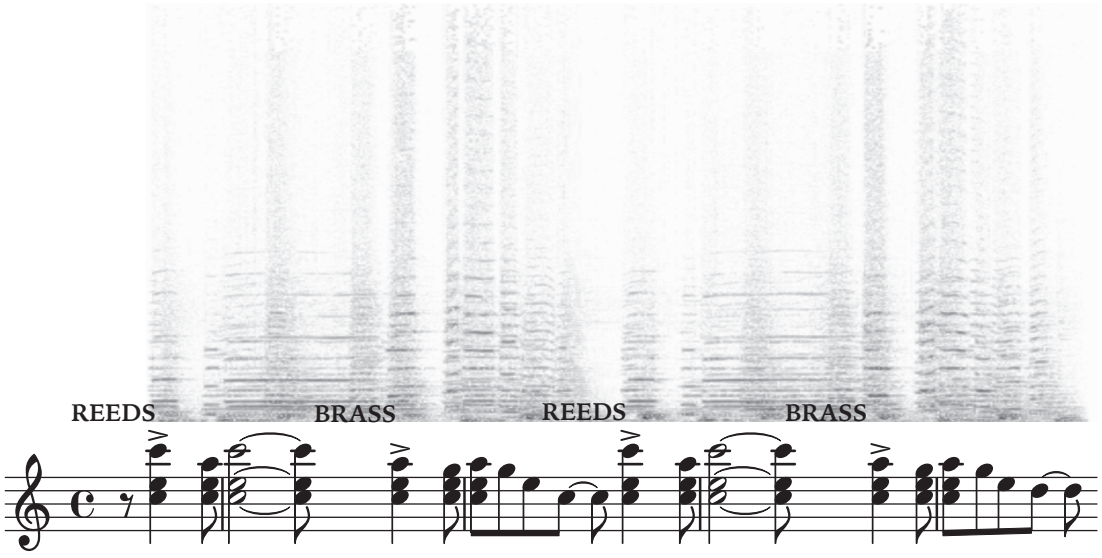


Figure 2.10: Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, "Down Home Rag," Second Strain

Clinton goes a step further by pairing the opposing shouts with a stop-time accompaniment, (Figure 2.11.) In both arrangements, the timbral contrast between the instrumental groups—visible in the spectrograms—is crucial to the musical gesture. It seems so basic to the gesture that it's surprising to realize that the approach was never pursued in ragtime-era arrangements.

Brothers," accessed April 12, 2024, https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/700001135/B-16142-Down_home_rag; Discography of American Historical Recordings, s.v. "Columbia matrix 77726. Down home rag / Earl Fuller ; Rector Novelty Orchestra," accessed April 12, 2024, https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/2000025507/77726-Down_home_rag.

[102] Surprisingly, despite arranger Fletcher Henderson's pioneering role in establishing swing band mechanics, Benny Goodman's 1931 recording is also fairly staid. Discography of American Historical Recordings, s.v. "Victor matrix BS-043341. Down home rag / Larry Clinton Orchestra," accessed April 12, 2024, https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/200040625/BS-043341-Down_home_rag; Discography of American Historical Recordings, s.v. "Victor matrix BS-043341. Down home rag / Larry Clinton Orchestra," accessed April 12, 2024, https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/200040625/BS-043341-Down_home_rag.

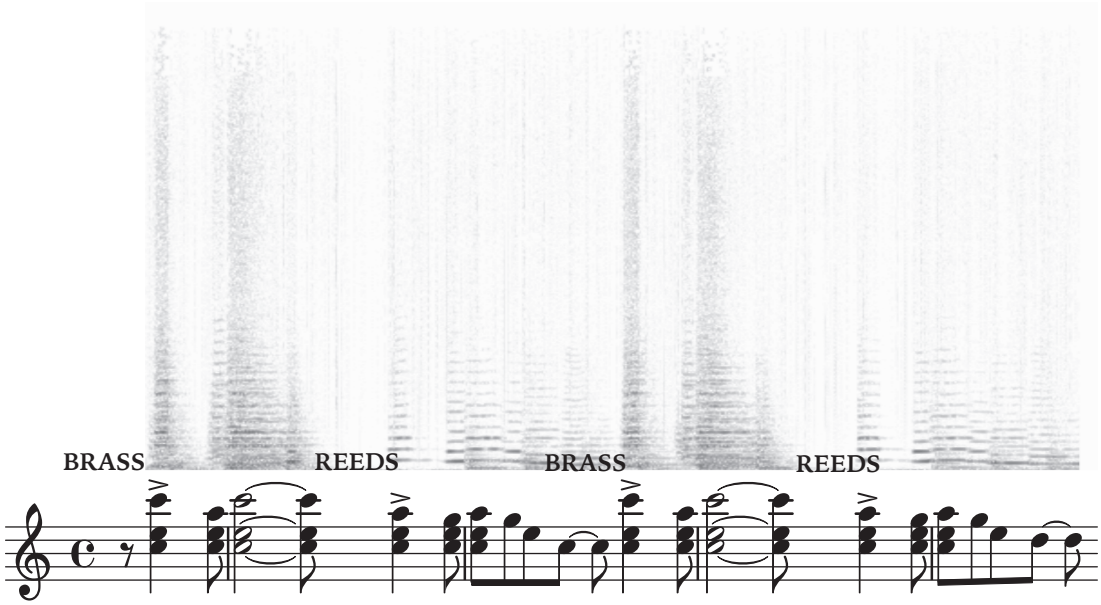


Figure 2.11: Larry Clinton Orchestra, "Down Home Rag," Second Strain

Both are examples of perfectly idiomatic swing ensemble scoring: the association with banjo, violin, or piano has been completely sanded away by the serviceable machinery of the antiphonal swing orchestra riff. Both Welkite and Bleshite ragtime would reverse the process and restore homophony.

Swing

These last two recordings indicate another obvious distinction that jazz furnished beyond ragtime: "swinging" rhythms. This is a difficult aspect to substantiate: there's a reason why "swing"—especially in the term's early days—is often posited as an extra-linguistic "either-you-know-or-you-don't." And indeed, mound of recent empirical research on microtiming has demonstrated that the feel of swing depends on various factors, including tempo and dynamic variation.[103] But of perennial interest has been the ratio of long notes to short

[103] Richard F. Rose, "An Analysis of Timing in Jazz Rhythm Section" (University of Texas at Austin, 1989); Anders Friberg and Andreas Sundström, "Swing Ratios and Ensemble Timing in Jazz Performance: Evidence for a Common Rhythmic Pattern," *Music Perception* 19, no. 3 (March 1, 2002): 333–49; Fernando Benadon,

notes, which has often been assumed to be—as even Axel Christensen demonstrated in his instruction books—something like a triplet 2:1 ratio. The average ratio between the long and short notes of the "Down Home Rag"'s first strain (Figure 2.4, above)—what Fernando Benadon calls the "Beat-Upbeat Ratio," or BUR—appears in Figure 2.1.[104]

Table 2.1: Average Beat-Upbeat Ratios (BUR) in Recorded Performances of the "Down Home Rag"

Performer	Year	Style/Faction	Tempo (Quarter Note)	BUR
Victor Military Band	1913	Ragtime	c.230	1.7
James Reese Europe	1913	Ragtime	c.300	1.2
Six Brown Brothers	1915	Ragtime	c.154	3.4
Wilbur Sweatman	1917	Ragtime	c.230	1.7
Earl Fuller	1918	Ragtime	c.208	2.0
Benny Goodman	1931	Swing Band	c.265	1.1
Tommy Dorsey	1938	Swing Band	c.194	1.8
Larry Clinton	1939	Swing Band	c.180	1.6
Lu Watters	1950	Bleshite	c.178	1.6
Joe "Fingers" Carr	1953	Welkite	c.232	1.3
Jo Ann Castle	1960	Welkite	c.212	2.1

Unsurprisingly, the faster the tempo, the more difficult it is to inflect rhythmic variation as the blistering recordings by James Reese Europe and Benny Goodman prove. Also unsurprisingly, the performance closest to the printed ratio of 3:1 was rendered by the Six Brown Brothers, the act closest to minstrelsy.[105] (As I argued in Chapter One, proficiency in the au-

"Slicing the Beat: Jazz Eighth-Notes as Expressive Microrhythm," *Ethnomusicology* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 73–98; Fernando Benadon, "Gridless Beats," *Perspectives of New Music*, 2009; Fernando Benadon, "Time Warps in Early Jazz," *Music Theory Spectrum* 31, no. 1 (April 2009): 1–25; Fernando Benadon and Ted Gioia, "How Hooker Found His Boogie: A Rhythmic Analysis of a Classic Groove," *Popular Music* 28, no. 1 (January 2009): 19–32; Matthew W. Butterfield, "The Power of Anacrusis: Engendered Feeling in Groove-Based Musics," *Music Theory Online* 12, no. 4 (December 1, 2006); Matthew W. Butterfield, "Race and Rhythm: The Social Component of the Swing Groove," *Jazz Perspectives* 4, no. 3 (December 2010): 301–35; Matthew W. Butterfield, "Why Do Jazz Musicians Swing Their Eighth Notes?," *Music Theory Spectrum* 33, no. 1 (April 2011): 3–26.

[104] Benadon, "Slicing the Beat."

[105] On the possible importance of the Six Brown Brothers for the history of the reception of the saxophone, see Bruce Vermazen, *That Moaning Saxophone: The Six Brown Brothers and the Dawning of a Musical Craze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

thentic Black style of ragtime was tending to chase out the blunter technique of blackface.[106] Entertainers typically invested either in cork or in rhythmic instruction, but not both.) Perhaps most surprisingly, the majority of these performances seem to fall within the tolerances of "measurable" swinginess: all of the musicians felt the dotted-rhythm more in a triple-ish conception than a subdivided duple. Yet only the later performances strike the ear as swung. What to make of this?

The quality that the Benny Goodman, Larry Clinton, and Tommy Dorsey recordings possess is an anacrustic, propulsive swing. Following the model of Benadon, Figures 2.12–2.15 render the microtiming of these performances by plotting the length of notes on the Y-axis.[107] (Counterintuitively, chronological time is not present in the figure: the X-axis provides time discreted into melodic notes.) At one extreme, The Six Brown Brothers make all the long notes more-or-less equally long and all the short notes more-or-less equally short. Furthermore: observe the "rubber-band" quality of successive points—generally a longer long is followed by a shorter short, and vice versa. In this rhythmic conception, the quarter pulse is supreme—macrotiming is not complicated at all by the variations in microtiming.

A similar rhythmic conception undergirds the performances of Earl Fuller and Wilbur Sweatman (actually the composer of the rag.) A certain "jazzy" freedom is advertised by anticipating the first beat (yielding a longer first note), but the quarter pulse is soon restored, visible in the relatively regular saw teeth (Figure 2.13).

At the other extreme, consider the swinging jags of Larry Clinton's performance in Figure 2.14. Here the distinction between long and short is not as polarized. The more interesting visual impression, achieved by the significant variations in the short notes, indicate the degree to which the quarter pulse is no longer a concern. Even Tommy Dorsey's performance, which features much less beat-to-beat variation than Clinton's, is richer in metrical relationships

[106] See Section 1.2.1 above.
[107] Benadon, "Slicing the Beat."

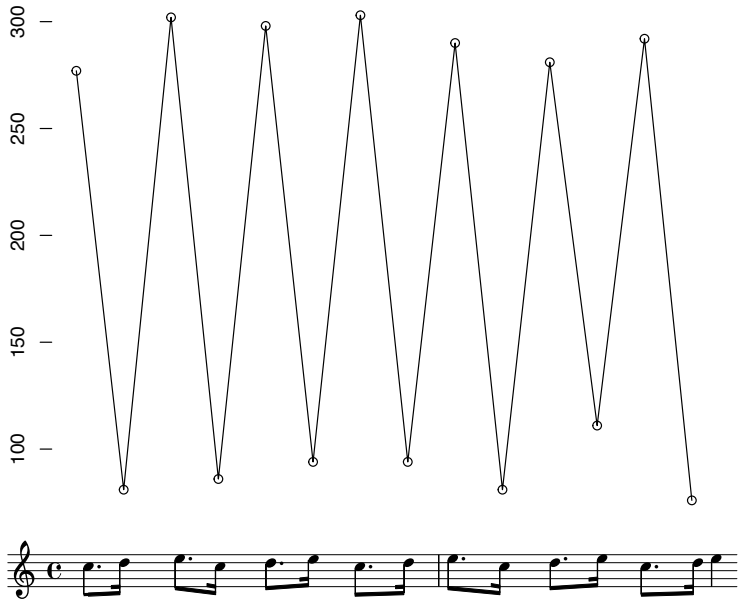


Figure 2.12: The Six Brown Brothers, "Down Home Rag," First Strain

than the earlier recordings. Note how the long Cs, Ds, and Es are accorded roughly similar durations regardless of their place within the bar (Figure 2.15.)

To borrow language from Matthew Butterfield, the variety of metrical relationships visible in these swinging performances "keep projective potential open."[108] Swing rhythms—even the relatively tame ones of a Tommy Dorsey—keep the future relatively indeterminate. In contrast, the earlier recordings are defined by more sedentary grooves: their pleasures are in the simple out-of-jointness of secondary rag, rather than in the sense of forward motion it might stimulate. Closer to the train-wheel rhythms of boogie-woogie, the performances of Earl Fuller and company make the rag's stepwise melodic formula, which doggedly counts out 1-2-3 in C-major, do much of the musical work. Both Welkite and Bleshite ragtime would restore this rhythmic conception to their versions of ragtime, as the relatively regular saw teeth of Figures 2.16 and 2.17 show.

[108] (Similarly, Sweatman's insistently early downbeats document a rhythmic conception more aligned with jazz.) Butterfield, "The Power of Anacrusis."

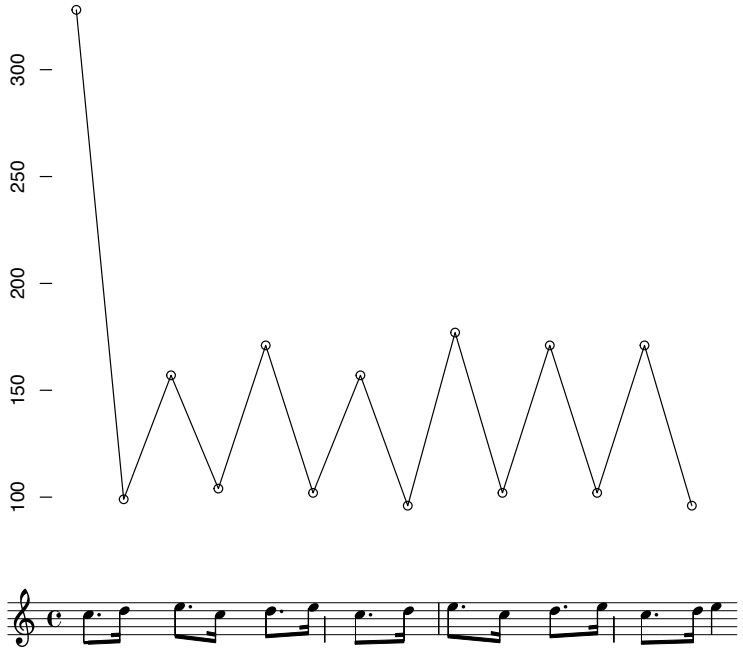


Figure 2.13: Wilbur Sweatman, “Down Home Rag,” First Strain

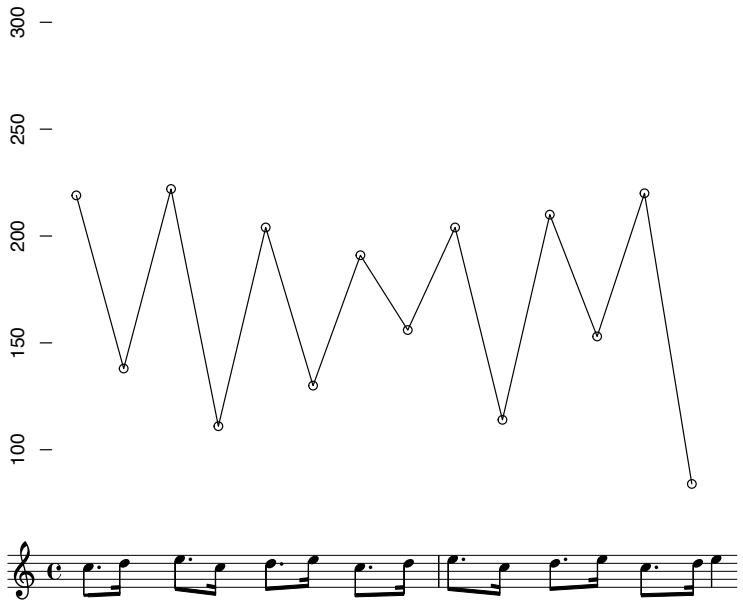


Figure 2.14: Larry Clinton Orchestra, “Down Home Rag,” First Strain

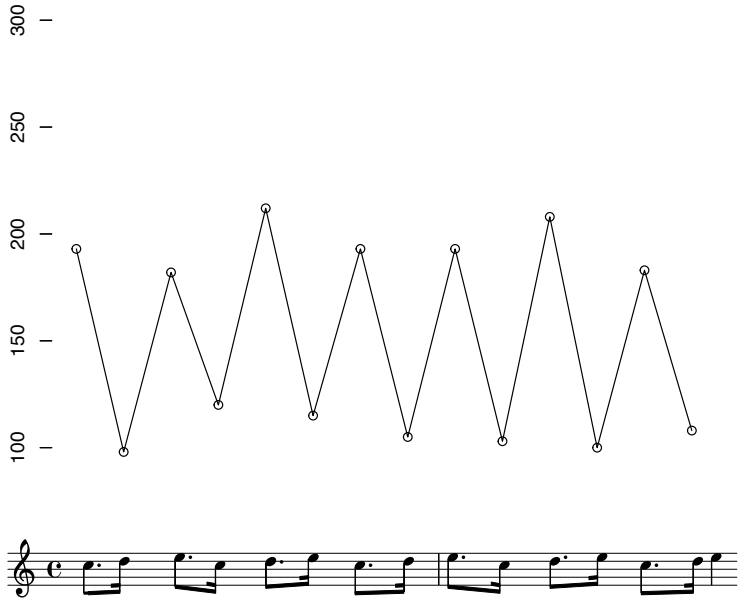


Figure 2.15: Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, “Down Home Rag,” First Strain

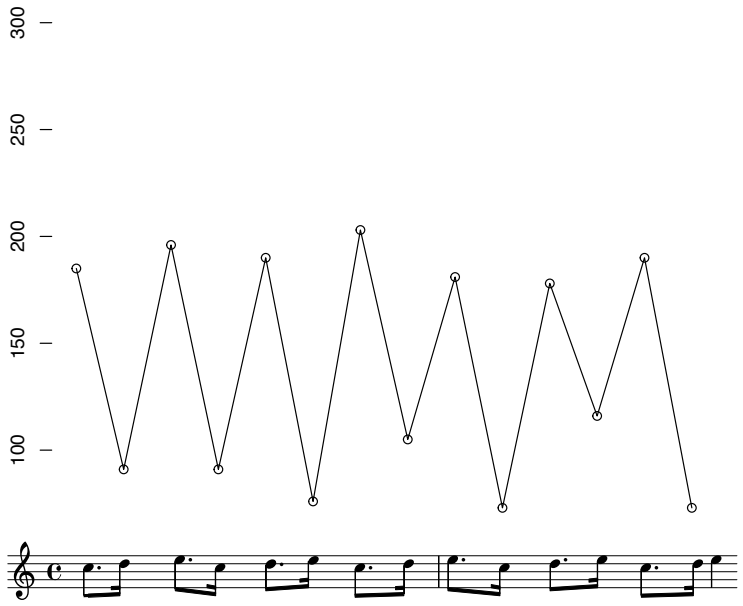


Figure 2.16: Jo Ann Castle, “Down Home Rag,” First Strain

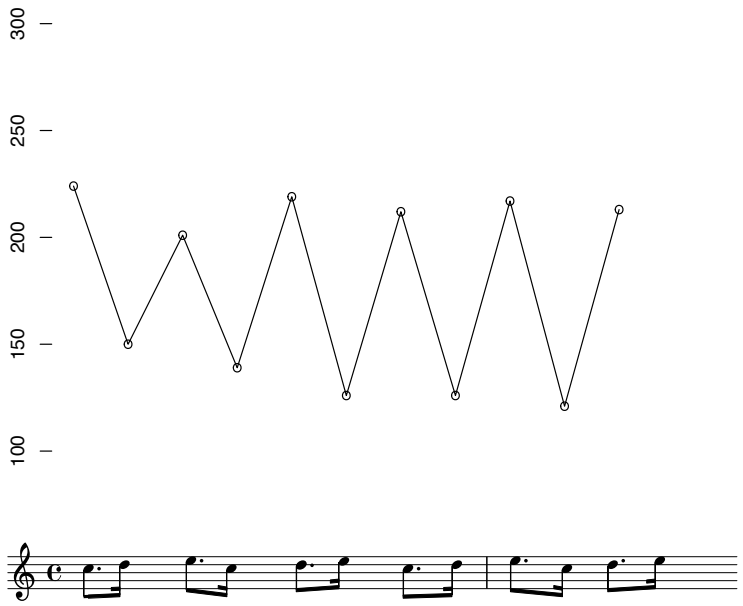


Figure 2.17: Lu Watters, "Down Home Rag," First Strain

The Piano

The "Down Home Rag's" stepwise melodic formula permits another comparison, this time to a melody composed by Miles Davis in 1954. While Welkites were savoring the thrill of spinning out endless *do-re-mi*, Davis was fashioning them into severe exclamations (Figure 2.18).



Figure 2.18: Miles Davis, "Four"

A first thing to notice is how much more inventive this harmonic language is: how much it has dispensed with the dominant-tonic functionality that even Scott Joplin depended upon. While ragtimers would happily add a sixth to their triads, the proliferation of major seventh chords and mode mixture in "Four" would be entirely unthinkable in the ragtime paradigm.

Furthermore, the rhythmic novelty essayed by "Four" depends not on contesting the bar line, but on temporarily overthrowing jazz's *own* sovereign metricity. (Again we can contrast ragtime's pleasure in subverting a given "civilized" norm with jazz's furnishing of its own.) And recognize, also, how the scalar ascents are more impressionistic than implicative. In Tin Pan Alley ragtime—and Joplinian ragtime, too—stepwise motion was typically deductive, conveying a premise to its conclusions, a setup to its punchline. (The obvious example from Tin Pan Alley would be the typical framing gesture of the coon song pre-chorus: a walk up to the dominant for "And to him these words she did saaaay.") But the stepwise motion of "Four" belongs to the proximities of the voice, not to the keys on the piano. It would be bizarre to think that "Four"s scalar run was implying an F on the downbeat, for example.

This reduced status of the piano indicated by "Four"—and Miles Davis's career more generally; and also insisted upon by Rudi Blesh in *Shining Trumpets*—is also significant. The piano was essential hardware in the circulation of ragtime: it was how the vaudeville theater orchestra was connected to the domestic parlor or living room. But jazz belonged to the apparatus of recording. Recorded media permitted blue notes to enter the home, and this feature of jazz—which would yield emotional and harmonic contents that exceeded ragtime—rubbed tensely against the piano. It's significant that the jazz musicians that did nestle comfortably in middlebrow culture were often pianists—I'm thinking of André Previn or Dave Brubeck or Oscar Peterson. And it's equally significant that the jazz musicians who did solve the riddle of the piano in jazz—Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, Mal Waldron, Cecil Taylor, Randy Weston—essentially reconceived the instrument along lines very different from its parlor-sociality dimensions.[109] Just as jazz was a problem for the piano, so was the piano a problem for jazz, and its most artful purveyors offered their idiosyncratic solu-

[109] These pianists are all members of Matthew Shipp's "Black Mystery School," which inspired this paragraph. I'm claiming that the pianism represented by the "Black Mystery School" is implied by crucial aspects of jazz's total conception, which makes the piano a problem in need of solution. Matthew Shipp, "Black Mystery School Pianists," *New Music Box*, December 2020.

tions. But ragtime in the 1950s was—more than ever before—completely at home on the keyboard. Like pre-jazz homophony and quarter-note supremacy, Welkites and Bleshites would restore the piano as instrumental sovereign.

Summary

The discrepancies between pre- and post-jazz popular musical practice can now be used to make my ragtime equation more concrete.

$$ragtime = jazz - x$$

Remembering that "jazz" meant two distinct things to Welkites and Bleshites (to the former: a popular music fad; to the latter: a fine art), *x* can be replaced as follows…

$$ragtime = jazz - antiphony$$

$$ragtime = jazz - swing$$

$$ragtime = jazz - -piano$$

(Subtracting a negative piano is perhaps a tortured metaphor, but I stand by it.)

So far, I have shown how these characters conceived of their musico-historical location. In what follows, I will take this resume of musico-practical judgments as a device for organizing a much wider range of associations, involving contemporaneous historical characters and projects which, despite being remote from ragtime revivalism, were equally animated by the contingencies of the time. We will find that the contradictions unfolded between Welkism and Bleshism are perceivable across the broader cultural sphere of the American 1950s.

2.2. Condensations

2.2.1. *ragtime* = *jazz* - *antiphony* = *jazz* - -*piano* or: Men, Masses, and Machines



Figure 2.19: "Big" Tiny Little, *Make Room for Tiny*, 1957

Welkite "Big" Tiny Little's first record, *Make Room for Tiny* is a case study in how far one can go in avoiding the basic affordances of ensemble playing. Little's piano is described on the LP's back cover as a "'ricky-tick' or barrelhouse piano"—a "cornerstone for much of the Welk gang's fun and group good feeling."[110] Despite being the only player indicated on the sleeve, Little's piano is actually accompanied by a lively jumble of other sounds. The lack

[110] "Big" Tiny Little, *Make Room for Tiny* (Brunswick: BL 54030, 1957).

of credit awarded these other musicians is audible at the level of the arrangement: each instrument shares the same sonic envelope. While marimbas and glockenspiels join Little's damper-less piano in insisting on the prerogatives of the keyboard, slapstick percussion—chuckling snares, Acme whistles—articulate the onsets of each minor rebuke of the bar line. Even the *strum*—potentially a unique contribution of the banjo—is constantly imitated by tremolos in the other instruments.[111] The result is a strange *mass* texture. Despite the heaping up of like sounds, there is no sonic blurring—no new collective sound is created through combination. But neither is there a marked differentiation of roles. In short, the sum here is exactly equal to its parts. Each player is audible and distinct, but not individuated—they're all basically doing the same thing. What we hear is a lonely crowd.[112]

This was the texture of Welkite ragtime. It was not always so extreme. Joe "Fingers" Carr would include some sleazy brass growls along with ample instrumental doublings; and Jo Ann Castle would assign tubas to a traditional oom-pah duties (and comical solos). But redundancy in ensemble scoring was also a hallmark of Welk's approach in general. Take, for example, the 1958 record, *Lawrence Welk Presents Keyboard Kapers*, which seated Little (his "ricky-tick" piano now dubbed a "Tinkly Piano") in between grand pianos played by Larry Hooper and Frank Scott, and flanked by Jerry Burke at the Conn organ (Figure 2.20).

How to interpret the preponderance of this musical texture? What does it mean? Because we know that Welk and company occupy the stance of entertainers and not artistes, we can be confident that their aesthetic decisions are not borne out of fealty to Art. These are "other-directed" individuals, tuning their gyroscopes to the desires of others. So whose desire is it addressing? Who wants this? And why?

[111] And actually, as I'll say more about below, those tremolos really belong to the idiomatics of the player piano!

[112] You could say that this characteristic Welkian texture was sorely lacking in anything resembling Keil's "participatory discrepancies." Charles Keil, "Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music," *Cultural Anthropology* 2, no. 3 (1987): 275–83.



Figure 2.20: Lawrence Welk Presents Keyboard Kapers

One possible answer could situate this image within the aesthetic sensibility that was dominant across consumer sectors at the time. As Shelley Nickles has argued, the taste of postwar blue-collar consumers represented an ethos of "more is better."[113] Perhaps Welk's *more* pianos was the musical analogue to, say, fins on automobiles or chrome ornaments on refrigerators.

Another answer could be found by contrasting this image with a historical antecedent. Figure 2.21 is a moment from Busby Berkeley's *Gold Diggers of 1935*, as evocative of its decade as Welk's LP is of his. And yet, strikingly similar in content.

What is the difference between a redundant assortment of portly middle-aged men at keyboards and an infinity of beautiful girls at grand pianos? For one, it's easy to grasp the latter as a male fantasy. The girls form a harem, the male viewer their potential proprietor, whose needs and desires will not meet qualitative or quantitative resistance. These women will yield: their piano lessons have taught them how to submit. And even if, the fantasy imagines, one is fractious, or a brunette, there is always a next one. But a female viewer can also be interpellated here, and not only as a potential member of the harem. Because these girls are presented as objects of desire and means for desire-satisfaction, they form a store of value which can be brought into relation with the value of a single woman. In the film, the harem accompanies and underlines Dick Powell's pledge of love to Gloria Stuart, for whom he will happily trade them away, or to whom he will make of them a gift. The heterosexual calculus expressed in the Busby Berkeley sequences of the 1930s is fairly continuous with that expressed in the coon songs of 1900. In this calculus men, women, things, and money are totally fungible: the point is to accumulate through exchange.[114]

It is the totalism of this exchange logic that led Siegfried Kracauer to describe such chore-

[113] Shelley Nickles, "More Is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Postwar America," *American Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2002): 584.

[114] It is important to notice that an actual product of sexual exchange—children—cannot enter into this calculus. The only dancing child in Busby Berkeley was the lascivious Billy Barty.



Figure 2.21: Busby Berkeley, *Gold Diggers of 1935*, "The Words are in My Heart"

ographic displays, what he called "mass ornaments," as a "linear system that no longer has any erotic meaning but at best points to the locus of the erotic."[115] In his view, these "indissoluble girl clusters" should be distinguished from aesthetically related figures like military parades for their ultimate meaninglessness, and for their address to a disembodied view-from-nowhere, the only vantage from which the choreography becomes legible as ornament. And so the disembodied anonymity of the girl cluster finds its equivalent in the disembodied anonymity of the mass audience arranged in the tiered seating of the stadium or cinema. "Only as parts of a mass, not as individuals who believe themselves to be formed from within, do people become fractions of a figure."[116]

One can note the Weimar accent of Kracauer's theorization, and the way it seems to miss the interpenetration of military-patriotic, economic, and mythological ends which characterized the American capitalism he was observing.[117] In retrospect, it is obvious how much the context of Depression-era Warner Brothers moviemaking could imbue a cipher with political contents. At a moment of capital strike, idle factories, and breadlines, the figures of assembly-line girl-pianists argued for the necessity of managing effective demand.[118] But his terms do provide a language with which to articulate the specificity of Welkian ragtime keyboard kapers, which are more-or-less the determinate negation of Kracauer's mass ornament. For we can describe the Welkian piano orchestra as a "dissoluble man cluster;" wonder if there is any "locus of the erotic" in sight; and notice again that—unlike their earlier female counterparts—they form no new figure above their own heads. In fact, the reinstantiation of the ringleader—with the central position of either the star pianist or Welk's gratuitous

[115] Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 77.
[116] Kracauer, 76.
[117] Jane Goodall, "Transferred Agencies: Performance and the Fear of Automatism," *Theatre Journal* 49, no. 4 (1997): 441–53.
[118] Thomas W. Benson, *American Rhetoric in the New Deal Era, 1932-1945* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2006).

baton—abolishes one of the chief thrills of synchronized activity: its seemingly spontaneous design. The effect is destroyed if we know that the dancers or pianists are taking orders.

In other words, there is a definite mismatch between form and content in the Welkian ragtime ensemble. It takes the utopian form of a mass ornament, but limits it to a countable magnitude, and fills it not with beautifully refracted human particles but with concrete individuals like Larry Hooper. If these were girl-pianists we could *have* them or *give* them; as docile yielding bodies they could be currency. But Larry Hooper is a professional: his ability at the keyboard is a skill, not the decorative physical movement of a feminine body. He's qualified to read a sheet of music and follow the instructions of his supervisor, Lawrence. This makes him a good employee and co-worker, but it doesn't particularly recommend him as a sexual partner. Along with the jazz-subtractions I've already noted, ragtime in 1950 was a jazz without eros. (On this point, the Bleshites agreed: *TAPR* spoke, shockingly, of ragtime's "remarkably non-erotic quality.")[119] The men on the cover of *Keyboard Kapers*—as well as the men joining the ragtime barrelhouse pianos on banjos, glockenspiels, marimbas, and slapsticks—are husbands, fathers, or sons, but not lovers. Who would love Larry Hooper other than his wife, or children, or mother?

In other words it's possible to read the finite abundance of Welkian ragtime as a revolt against standardization which nevertheless can only use the forms of standardization. By inserting the son-husband-father in the place of the abstracted-girl-cluster, Welkism was lodging a claim for the petty-bourgeois family man against a massifying world.[120]

But it was also therefore its seeming opposite: a celebration of the machinic. Because along with its evacuation of the mass ornament's spectacular unity, Welkism's redundant ensembles did offer a sonic image of a specific mechanical unity. By treating its musicians

[119] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 9.

[120] On this moment's intersection of high-fidelity music, the domestic sphere, and masculinity, see Keightley, ""Turn It down!' She Shrieked."

as purely additive quantities, these arrangements were only imitating the bells, whistles, and cymbals that had been attached to mechanized nickelodeon player pianos or movie theater organs. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the members of the Welkian ensemble were frequently nothing other than human perforations in a roll of paper run through a Wurlitzer.

This fantasy of the human machine would be made exquisitely legible by Liberace on an episode of his TV show.[121] We—the home audience, looking through the camera—disturb his reverie at a shiny ebony grand, and he turns to us:

> Oh hi! You know I was just thinking about what it must have been like in the days of the roaring 20s, when they had those old-fashioned sounding pianos that people used to play with their feet. I'd like to see if I can make myself sound like one of those old timers. Only I'm going to do it with my hands, okay?

Studio audience applause erupts as an improbable barrelhouse, ricky-tick, tack-piano sound emerges from his beautiful Baldwin. And then laughter when—through the magic of television—the grand is replaced with a homely upright, its cover removed to permit glimpses of synchronized dancing hammers on strings (Figure 2.22).

And he sings through an eager-to-please grin:

> I wanna hear it again, I wanna hear it again,
> The old piano roll blues.
> We're sittin' at an upright, my sweetie and me,
> Pushin' on the pedals makin' sweet harmony.
> When we hear rinkety-tink, and we hear plinkety-plink
> We cuddle closer it seems.
> And while we kiss kiss, kiss, kiss, away all our cares,
> The player piano's playing razz-a-ma-tazz.
> I wanna hear it again, I wanna hear it again,
> The old piano roll blues.

It probably goes without saying that the tune—a 1950 confection of Cy Coben—is not particularly "bluesy" in form, although Liberace's portamento singing (indicated in the song-

[121] For more on Liberace's showmanship, see Ivan Raykoff, *Liberace's Musical/Material Appeal* (Oxford University Press, 2018).



Figure 2.22: Liberace's Magic Piano

sheet by an alternately major and minor third) portrays a blues effect amid the applied dominants of standard practice Tin Pan Alley songwriting.[122]

The concatenation of old-time signifiers around the player piano and other mechanical instruments was an irresistible proposition for Welkites. A Missouri man named Paul Eakins would ditch a "growing plumbing and heating business" to collect and restore old nickelodeon instruments, gathering in Sikeston "one of the largest collection of calliopes, band organs, orchestra pianos and automatic banjos in the world."[123] He dubbed his tourist attraction the "Gay '90s Village" and marketed it as "the Disneyland of the Midwest." As with all Welkite ventures, historical accuracy was not necessarily Eakins's highest value: his "Gay '90s" sounds were frequently made by machines that were manufactured decades later. And he would not hesitate to arrange more recent music for his collection of novelties: one of his souvenir LPs included "The Old Piano Roll Blues" performed by a Wurlitzer 105 band organ.

All told, "The Old Piano Roll Blues" was a successful product—probably the most important original achievement of Welkist ragtime. In addition to appearing in the Technicolor bobby-soxer pastiche *Rich, Young and Pretty* (1951), it won places on the charts for Hoagy Carmichael and Cass Daley; Cliff Steward and the San Francisco Boys; Eddie Cantor; Lisa Kirk, and the Sammy Kaye Orchestra; Jan Garber and His Orchestra; the Jubalaires, Al Jolson; and one J. Lawrence Cook with the Jim Dandies.

The story of this last recording—which was, in fact, the tune's first recorded performance—points to the cultural-historical tangles involved in the player piano nostalgia. J. Lawrence Cook was in fact a piano roll arranger. His "performance" on the recording—cadenzic solo included—was punched into paper by his hand, not by his fingers on the keys. His facility at this keyboard-less approach would be treasured by player piano

[122] Interestingly, the song sheet bears Joplin's favored tempo indication: "Ragtime — not too fast."
[123] Paul Eakins, *Fantastic Honky Tonk Player Barroom Biam* (Audio Fidelity, 1963).



Figure 2.23: Paul Eakins, *Fantastic, Honky Tonk Player Barroom Piano*

enthusiasts—collectors today are proud to have his "arrangements" (which is kind of to say: counterfeits) of Fats Waller, Errol Garner, and Art Tatum.[124] But his approach was also a labor-saving measure favored by a rapidly dwindling industry. Rather than hiring a musician to learn, interpret, and "record" a piece onto a roll, workers like Cook could quickly transfer music from song-sheet to roll. Lawrence appeared in a Fortune Magazine piece which noted that the business had declined by half in the previous three years.

> Mr. J. Lawrence Cook, a Negro, sits at his desk, a piano at his side, and plays a few bars of a song on the piano, arranging as he goes along. Then he draws lines on a roll of paper to indicate notes. Then someone punches holes where the lines are drawn, and there is your piano roll. It never gets near a piano until you play it. Mr. Cook does an average roll in two or three hours and is very adept at imitating the styles of popular pianists.[125]

The undisguisedly "mechanical" style that was the result of this approach would be a major component of Welkite nostalgia. But Cook himself would not profit from it. Despite the "authenticity" of his first recording with The Jim Dandies, it would be dwarfed by Carmichael and Daley's take months later. Part of this can certainly be chalked up to simple industry arithmetic. Cook was no star, and his entry was released by a much smaller label. But a more interesting explanation is that audiences seemed not to want the mechanical instruments as much as they wanted people to imitate them. Paul Eakins's Gay 90s Village seems to have sputtered out, and the world of player piano enthusiasts would ultimately be comprised of the antiquarian mole-men you'd expect. Just as Welkian ragtime installed living, breathing Jim Hoopers in the place of the mass ornament's abstracted girl-parts, so did it dispatch the fleshly fingers of a Liberace or a Del Woods or a Johnny Maddox to the place of the faceless automaton. Once again we can hear a quiet revolt against a mechanized society played in that society's home key.

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[124] Cook is covered extensively in Brian Dolan, *Inventing Entertainment: The Player Piano and the Origins of an American Musical Industry* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

[125] "Off the Record," *Fortune*, December 1934.

The Bleshites did not make a fetish of the player piano. Although *TAPR* included "A List of Player Piano Rolls" as an appendix, it was intended as an aid to documentary research, rather than as a locus of enthusiasm. In fact, in the view of Blesh and Janis, the player piano business had been basically dominated by Tin Pan Alley purveyors of "pseudo-ragtime," and the instrument's technological affordances were only spurs for the worst tendencies of "white ragtime composition": "mere digital speed, dexterity, and fanciful piano embroidery."[126] And so while the Welkites pursued these traits, Bleshites were pursuing their opposites. "Melodiousness" and "rhythmic feel" were the prized attributes of ragtime composers and pianists, and these could really only be adjudicated by those already in the fold.[127] For Welkites, the piano was a social link to a prior apparatus of mass culture. For Bleshites, the piano represented precisely the opposite possibility—a technology fit for hearing a counterculture.

In fact, Bleshites would chalk up piano ragtime's demise to the ascendance of recorded music. And the fact that the instrument didn't take to early microphones also meant that there weren't shellac fossils waiting to be unearthed in record stores or trading rags like *The Record Changer*. What the Bleshites had were ragtime piano scores, and the belief that they comprised a folk tradition, but no real ragtime pianists to substantiate this belief. Trying to conjure the oral tradition out of published texts was "an awkward situation," as the Bleshite Samuel Charters would later write. "As though a blues enthusiast would have to learn to play and sing the blues in order to hear the music."[128] And yet: this was all the better for their agenda. Just as the fragility of Greek statuary's original colorful paint afforded a European fantasy of an Apollonian marble-white past, so did the mute paper storing piano ragtime afford a fantasy of a sunken tranquil world at the distant edges of living memory. We might call this world a Black Atlantis.

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[126] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 225.

[127] Which is also to say: "melodiousness," "rhythmic feel," and other ineffable pianistic qualities could be ways of articulating and policing the fold.

[128] Samuel Charters, *Essay in Ragtime: Ragtime Piano Classics* (Folkways, 1961).

Roy Carew was one of the earliest cartographers of this sunken world. In his column for *The Record Changer*, "R.J. Carew's New Orleans Recollections: Observations on Old-Time New Orleans Life," the white writer mixed evocative period detail with musical arcana. A typical memoir would include depictions of late-night rides on dilapidated Tchoupitoulas Line streetcars; of the linen suits worn by elder Frenchmen; of the extra collars carried by male dancers to replace the sweaty ones; of the "heavy fragrance" of the old American Sugar Refinery on Canal Street. But a recurring theme was the informal gatherings, apparently the dominant form of social life, at which homebrewed music was the entertainment.

> Among the piano players at almost any party were those whose natural ability made sheet music unnecessary. They could play nearly any number if they could hear only about half of the melody, playing the other half by faking, guessing, improvisation and composing. […] They could play any kind of music, high class or low, and obliged the crowd with whatever it wanted. In the early days […] the rags were very popular […] [129]

These amateur or semi-professional pianists were the forgotten progenitors of ragtime, referred to in *TAPR* as ragtime's "folk academy." They had names like Al Verges, Tony Jackson, Harry Farrar, or Claiborne Trainor, and some of them would be tracked down for interview by Blesh and Janis.[130] Although this folk academy was very much conversant with the ragtime products of the music industry, their own music apparently formed a totally external line of development. A rag offered by Farrar to the Victor Company was ignored, Carew surmises, because "the time was not yet ripe." This was in 1916: 17 years after "The Maple Leaf Rag."

Carew didn't always specify the race of the pianists he named, but the picture he painted was one of striking interracial intimacy—of blacks and whites crowded together in nominally

[129] R.J. Carew, "New Orleans Recollections," *The Record Changer*, August 1943, 4.

[130] Carew's frequent lament was that they hadn't been recorded in their prime; or that the recordings they did make were lost. Tony Jackson in particular is rendered as something like ragtime's Buddy Bolden: the missing link between the "ballad" tradition and the ragtime one. His story would ultimately be filled out by his protege, Jelly Roll Morton, whose interviews with Alan Lomax would be issued by Rudi Blesh's record label.

segregated spaces and socializing comfortably in the after hours. Nevertheless, the musical superiority of Black ragtimers over their white counterparts was taken for granted, and an extremely tight connection was assumed between racial and musical traits. When Carew began sharing his collection of ragtime song-sheets in the pages of the *Record Changer*, the racial identity of composers was deduced from musical features. Although there was then no available information, Charles Hunter was (correctly) presumed to be a white man because his "Cotton Bolls" rag didn't "seem to jump right."[131] Despite the fact that many of these pianists worked as song demonstrators and piano tuners and were therefore musically literate, as folk masters of piano ragtime they were conjured by these white mythologizers as Black savants: naive poets of an instrument played by ear.[132]

When white composers *did* make the grade, similar racial reasoning was employed. When Charles Hunter was later elevated in *TAPR* to the status of a "ranking white pioneer," it was suggested that his authentic folk ragtime may have been due to the fact that his life "reads like that of a Negro composer." As we have seen, the idea that social context explains white culture and biology explains Black culture was one of Blesh's stranger hobby-horses. He could be equally rhapsodic in either case:

> The pure strains of the people are in Charles Hunter's music, and the evocations too of scenes his blind eyes never saw, of possum and sweet-potato feast on the rough table of the log cabin, of hunting among the hackberry trees, the sumacs and the aromatic sassafras on the slopes, of cotton bolls gleaming white on the bushes among the laborers' black hands and faces.[133]

Where in the music are these vivid evocations? Well, mostly in the titles of the rags and in the illustrations on their published covers. In other words, as much as the Bleshian stance pretended to pierce the veils of the music industry, they were frequently bewitched by precisely the spell the industry had intended to cast. And in returning to the popular culture

[131] "Lemme Take This Chorus," *Record Changer*, November 1943, 35.
[132] This particular fantasy will be important in the next chapter!
[133] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 121.

of the early 20th century, the Bleshites were also reviving the old standpoints of the white eavesdropper or the gentleman advocate—those roles that had been played by (among others) Ben Harney on the vaudeville stage and Hiram Moderwell in the *New Republic*. To be sure, the research efforts undertaken by Blesh et al. were genuine attempts to write history, and they did not attempt to disguise the facts of racism and segregation. In fact, their insistence on the irreducibly Black origins of ragtime count for insight compared to the lilywhite products of Welkist ragtime. But often enough their interventions consisted in trading the music industry's contemporary myths for its old ones.

The question of race was precisely the delicate point of the new-old myth the Bleshites wished to put over: that ragtime was America's undiscovered-forgotten folk music. For if you had to be Black to write it—or at least: poor, white, and blind, like Charles Hunter—how could it be the music of America?

There are two answers to this question. One I have already suggested: that the Bleshites actually tended to—tacitly and un-self-consciously—identify America with white, Anglo-America. But another answer is offered by the large narrative arc of *TAPR*. And in this answer a white man named Joseph Lamb plays an improbably large role.

> One afternoon […] the jazz writer Rudi Blesh walked down East Twenty First Street [in Brooklyn] looking at the house numbers, trying to find Joe's house. Harriet Janis, who was with him, waited on the sidewalk while Rudi walked up the steps to the Lamb's white frame house and rang the bell. It was an afternoon in the middle of the week; Joe was at work and his wife was doing some shopping. Rudi was going to give up when a neighbor called out to him to try Patricia's house. Rudi walked across to Patricia's while Harriet waited at the Lamb's. When Patricia answered the door Rudi asked her if she knew of someone named Joseph F. Lamb. She said that her father was at work, but that he would be back later in the afternoon. Rudi turned around and began shouting to Harriet,
>
> "We found him! We found him!"

This is the story as told by Samuel Charters in the booklet accompanying the 1959 Folk-

ways LP *Joseph Lamb: A Study In Classic Ragtime Recorded at his Home, Brooklyn, New York, August 12, and August 22, 1959*. Along with the lost score to Joplin's opera, Joseph Lamb was one of Blesh and Janis's most important discoveries. Like Leadbelly for the Lomaxes, or Jelly Roll Morton for the jazz revivalists, Joseph Lamb was a living relic. A lifelong textile worker in Montclair, New Jersey, Lamb had also spent the period of 1908-1919 selling his original rags to Joplin's publisher, John Stark. His musical career waned with Stark's business fortunes; his first wife died; and he quickly fell into working-class obscurity in a "modest little frame house […] near Coney Island" where neither he nor his neighbors were aware of his growing prestige among ragtime collectors. Blesh and Janis's description of Lamb forms the climax of *TAPR*:

> Until we located Joseph Lamb, he was considered by most ragtime followers to have been a Negro. He was the hardest of all the ragtime survivors for us to find. Literally no one in the music world had ever met him. At one stage of our search we were almost forced to accept a current theory that his name was a Joplin pseudonym. Acceptance balked, however, at the indubitable fact that the Lamb rags, though delightfully Joplinesque, exude a personality of their own.[134]

The discovery that a great composer of the classical ragtime school was an Irish Catholic from the East—a veteran not of Storyville bordellos but of Knights of Columbus community dances—could have stood as a challenge to the Black Atlantis fantasies of the Bleshites. (As Samuel Charters ironically noted in his Folkways notes, Lamb was a "startling contradiction" to talk about the "primitive musical styles of the American Negro and the rhythmic style of ragtime.")[135] Instead, Blesh and Janis cast Lamb's racial identity as the crowning moment of their story: the living proof of their thesis.

> The musical career of Joseph Lamb conclusively points up two facts. One is that classical ragtime, though of Negro origin, had become […] a music for all America. The other was that ragtime showed itself capable of developing a strong

[134] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 237.
[135] Samuel Charters, *Joseph Lamb: A Study in Classic Ragtime* (Folkways, 1960).

> and healthy tradition. Just as in European music, the ragtime tradition must be one in which composer succeeds composer, each working with individuality, yet carrying a homogeneous development onward.[136]

So goes the cunning of music history according to Bleshism. The baton of ragtime would have to be passed to whites if ragtime were to become *actually* what it already was *potentially* in the folk academy of the Black Atlantis—an autonomous musical art on par with Europe's. Blesh and Janis had been perfectly clear-eyed in their account of the racial-economic logic of Tin Pan Alley ragtime: "The Negroes had originated something that overnight developed a commercial value, and presto! as suddenly as a ten-dollar bill vanishes from a magician's hand, it became the white man's property."[137] But their account of ragtime *qua* national folk art was in many ways its uncritical double. Just as Tin Pan Alley ragtime had the racially hybrid dandy-coon as its signature, so was the seal of Bleshite ragtime a white composer of "thoroughly Negroid" rags.[138] (Now is a good time to recall Baraka's condemnation of Blesh's "fantastic sophistry.")

The Folkways LP is a fascinating testament to the ideological contortions of Bleshism. They were clearly conceived as kindred to the ethnographic recordings of Lomax and Asch. But Brooklyn's Sheepshead Bay was not exactly the Mississippi Delta or a Louisiana state prison. Despite the fact that a Manhattan studio was a subway ride away, the Lamb recordings were done verité-style, with the Lamb's Knabe upright on a warbly reel-to-reel in the Lamb's living room. ("Mrs. Lamb was usually in the kitchen fixing dinner, and she'd come in, still wearing her apron, to listen for a minute. Two or three times the recording had to wait while she used the noisy electric beater to get the potatoes mashed."[139]) Furthermore, Lamb's hearing was quite bad, and his skill at the keyboard was not impressive. The absolute polarity

[136] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 238.
[137] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 128.
[138] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 237.
[139] Charters, *Joseph Lamb: A Study in Classic Ragtime*.

between the artificial ragtime products issued by Welkites and the "authentic" ragtime of the Bleshites is nowhere more audible than in the halting, flat-fingered performances of its hero.

Like the Jelly Roll Morton/Alan Lomax sessions, the Joseph Lamb recordings include interviews and reminiscence. Lamb was not at all the raconteur that Morton was, and he didn't have as spectacular a life. But he could share the story of his chance meeting with Joplin—also related in *TAPR*—which was the life-event to which he owed his fame:

> Well, I'll tell ya how it is. I was in the Stark office, and there was a colored fellow sitting there with his foot bandaged up as if he had the gout, and a crutch beside him. I hardly noticed him. I told Mrs. Stark that I liked the Joplin rags best and wanted to get any I didn't have. The colored fellow spoke up and asked whether I had certain pieces which he named. I thanked him and bought several and was leaving when I said to Mrs. Stark that Joplin was one fellow I would certainly like to meet.
>
> "Really," said Mrs. Stark. "Well, here's your man." I shook hands with him, needless to say. It was a thrill I've never forgotten.
>
> […]
>
> I went to his boarding house a few evenings later and he asked me to play my pieces on the piano in the parlor. A lot of colored people were sitting around talking. I played my *Sensation* first and they began to crowd around and watch me. When I finished, Joplin said "That's a good rag—a regular Negro rag." That's what I wanted to hear.

Joseph Lamb was indeed a fascinating composer, and his rags, like Joplin's, make a case for the existence of an alternate universe where ragtime music could contain all possible musical meaning. But a major component of his appeal for Bleshites might have been the fact that he was actually *one of them*: a pale loner who loved nothing more than the Black music he heard from afar.

2.2.2. *ragtime = jazz - swing* or: Space Is the Place

Although Bleshites celebrated ragtime's joyful syncopations, Joseph Lamb's faltering performances revealed the idiom's capacity for melancholy, for quiet lostness, for Apollonian

stillness. As we will see in the next chapter, this melancholic audition of ragtime would become a major aspect of the music. Actually, this accidental product was completely of a piece with the Bleshian imagination. As their sense of history was an antiquarian one, so their music and their musicians often sounded like relics, in which propulsive vitality was overshadowed by obeisance to formal design. The "classicism" of Joplin and Lamb and company were indicated by their march-and-trio rondo forms. Heard against the shout choruses of orchestral swing, or the breathless choruses of Charlie Parker, they sounded like *gymnopédies*. This is all to say that ragtime was being plotted more on the axis of space than time. It was a music that portrayed a mood or an affect; a zone that one entered or left. The regular syncopation of Bleshian ragtime—its particular subtraction of swing—shared little with Welkian mechanicity. Proffered, again, as the true alternative to bebop, the rhythmic conception of Bleshian ragtime was not the pretext for expressive musical acts but the ambient sound of the left-behind Black Atlantis.

And so even the living white Joseph Lamb was rendered as a denizen of something like the sunken city of R.J. Carew's memoirs. The Folkways booklet was particularly interested in Lamb's social-geographic milieu, which was described as an "older neighborhood" with "houses crowded together along the sidewalk" and yards where children "rush across […] when school's out." Joseph, being retired, "was around the house during the day, and often he'll have to take over the feeding of a new grandchild while his wife runs across the street to make sure the roast her daughter has left in the oven isn't burning." Depictions like these of the fossilized old urban *Gemeinshchaft* went hand-in-hand with another fetish of Bleshites: street addresses. Joseph Lamb's home address—2229 E. 21st Street, Brooklyn, New York—appeared on the Folkways LP, and *TAPR* is littered with them. Around thirty different exact locations are cited, and it is rare that an important personage is introduced without referring

to either their exact place of birth or significant residence.[140] (If any municipal authority had ever renumbered the buildings, that information was often provided as well.) And when a club, saloon, or bordello is named, its street address is rarely unmentioned.

This partly reflects the research experience of Blesh and Janis, which—as depicted above—consisted of a lot of knocking on doors. (A Black man named Shepard Edmonds—a composer, music publisher, and private detective—had advised them to "always check with the local Black undertakers first, who will know where every elderly person of color is in town and what their state of health is.")[141] But it was a feature of Blesh's other writing as well. His history of American modernist art will provide you the numbers of galleries and the years they were torn down. And actually it's this latter point—the fragility of the twentieth-century American urban landscape—that might partly explain this compulsive recitation of addresses. Of the locations indicated in *TAPR*, many today are gas stations or vacant land: already in Blesh's period, many of the temples of early jazz and ragtime lay in the middle of urban zones targeted for so-called slum clearance. In other words, the gratuitous citation of hyper-specific placenames was also a balance sheet of "the subtraction of commerce, and of culture […] from the intimate and casual life of cities."[142]

That phrase comes from Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), a book which formalized in the language of urban theory the objects of Bleshian musical fantasy. *The Death and Life of Great American Music* would have been a perfectly plausible title for *TAPR*, and in fact, the two books were, in many ways, mirror images of each other. Both

[140] 120 East Main Street, Sedalia, MO; 306 Broadway, Sedalia, MO; 514 Ohio St, Sedalia, MO; 133 West Cooper St, Sedalia, MO; 117 West Henry, Sedalia, MO; 114 East 5th St, Sedalia, MO; 3848 Washington Boulevard, St. Louis, MO; 3615 Laclede Avenue, St. Louis, MO; 2658-A Morgan St., St. Louis, MO; 2220 Market Street, St. Louis, MO; 2117 Lucas Ave, St. Louis, MO; 1926 Springfield, Kansas City, Kansas; 806 Grand Ave, Kansas City, MO; 2008 Wabash, Chicago, IL; 2442 South State, Chicago, IL; 3047 South State, Chicago IL; 3446 South State, Chicago IL; 4111 South Wabash, Chicago, IL; 1510 Gratz St, Philadelphia, PA; 2900 State St, Chicago IL; 2840 Armour Ave, Chicago IL; 252 W 47th, St, New York, NY; 163 W 131 St, New York, NY; 2005 Lawton Boulevard, St. Louis, MO.

[141] Hasse, "Rudi Blesh and the Ragtime Revivalists," 182.

[142] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 4.

claimed that a dull and bland culture could be contested—not by a musical or architectural avant-garde—but by re-enlivening past forms. ("What we need, and a lot of others need," wrote Jacobs, "is old construction in a lively district, which some among us can help make livelier.") What's more, they both turned to the same social-historic milieu—the turn-of-the-century city—and the creative capacities that a varied urbanism supports. Just as Jacobs defended the vitality of the "slums" being cleared by urban renewal, so had Blesh made hallowed grounds of the seedy "sporting districts," which he styled in *TAPR* as "the only world open to a Negro that approximated the true bohemian life […] typical of Paris."[143] And in his book on modern art, Blesh sounded just like Jacobs when he bemoaned that, unlike Paris, most American sidewalks are "reserved for walking", just as he did in *TAPR*, complaining that Americans only appreciated nightlife if it was happening in "Vienna or Budapest."[144]

While the Bleshites wove musical romance around the sociality of the vanishing industrial city, the Welkites wove theirs around an equally romanticized geographic form: the small town. Just as Blesh dotted *TAPR* with gratuitously precise street addresses, so Welk, in his first memoir, made a point to name every little town he played in his long touring career, among them Aberdeen, Abilene, Altoona, Beresford, Beulah, Big Springs, Caloma, Chaska, Clinton, Coldwater, Dallas (South Dakota), Dawson, Decatur (Illinois), Driscoll, Edlestein, Enid, Estherville, Flandreau, Fort Dodge, Galena, Gallatin, Grand Island, Hague, Hooper, Lake Okaboji, Lansing, Madina, Midland, Mitchell, Norfolk (Nebraska), Ocamey, Odessa (Texas), Oldham, Pierre, Rock Springs, Scatterwood Lake, Selby, Stanton, Steele, Strasburg, Streeter, Tappen, Tuttle, Twin Lakes, Vermeyo Park, Washburn, Watertown, Webster, West Port, Wilton, Wing, Wink, and Yankton.[145] This attention was not a mere affectation—small

[143] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 60.
[144] Blesh and Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 132.
[145] Welk and McGeehan, *Wunnerful, Wunnerful*.

towns and "small town values" were a major part of the Welk brand. As *Down Beat* noted, Welk "built […] substantial ratings […] by picturing his musicians as likable human beings with mothers and homes in Kansas."[146] He devoted entire programs of his television show to celebrations of "Small Town USA," hailing hayrides, barbershops, and porches.[147]

The mythical American small town that Welk rhapsodized was, of course, not his creation: it had already been sanctified as the "ideal American space" in media organs like *Life Magazine*, which, in issue after issue, depicted the "noble realities of corn and hogs."[148] It is, also of course, not difficult to spot the contradictions: people don't tend to make myths like these out of their *own* actual conditions. Just as *Life* dreamed up its farm stories out of their New York offices, so Lawrence Welk's small town music was conditioned by the television soundstages of Los Angeles and a centralized communications infrastructure.[149] When he toured with his orchestra, he discovered that his ability to pull audiences in small towns depended entirely on whether the local television stations carried his program.[150] And just as *Life*'s rhapsodies of small-town life were read mostly by northeastern city dwellers, so was Welk's reception frequently contradictory. The angry *DownBeat* letter writer who complained about the magazine's coverage of Welk—"You would have to have had plenty of champagne to think that good music […] I think he would have a much better band if he fired half of his musicians, used normal instruments, got new writers, and took that big smile off his face!"—signed his letter from Merion, Pennsylvania.[151] The rebuttal—"Let's face it […] the public digs the enduring kind of music Lawrence Welk and his band play!"—arrived from Chicago.[152]

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[146] Jack Mabley, "Radio and Video," *Down Beat*, April 18, 1956.

[147] John E. Miller, "Lawrence Welk and John Wooden: Midwestern Small-Town Boys Who Never Left Home," *Journal of American Studies* 38, no. 1 (April 2004): 109–25.

[148] Sheila Webb, "A Pictorial Myth in the Pages of 'Life': Small-Town America as the Ideal Place," 2006, 35,47. See also Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

[149] Webb, "A Pictorial Myth," 46.

[150] Welk and McGeehan, *Wunnerful, Wunnerful*, 214.

[151] "Chords and Dischords," *Down Beat* 23, no. 19 (September 19, 1956): 4d.

[152] "Chords and Dischords," *Down Beat* 23, no. 21 (October 17, 1956): 4.

The sunken city and the ordinary small town were equally fantasies.[153] What's significant is how both of their respective musical projects *entailed* these fantasies of geographical *milieux*, and also how much these apparently opposed spatial fantasies were in fact a convergence. Jane Jacobs believed that the older, better urbanism consisted of multi-function buildings; Granville Hicks (the Jane Jacobs of the small town) believed that the virtues of the small town lay in its requiring its citizens to play multiple roles.[154] The condition for Welk's nostalgia was also the decay of the grand ballrooms that had been the venue for his beloved swing and sweet bands. By the time of Welk's residence at Santa Monica's Avalon Ballroom in the 1950s, the space was as much a husk as any sporting house mentioned by Blesh.[155] Some economic force beyond their respective grasps had sucked the music they loved out of the world—for Blesh it was the centralization of the cultural industries; for Welk, the collapse of American work ethic—and both conceptually mapped this process in geographical terms. In this way, they were of a piece of a broader program described by Roy Kozlovsky as "the systematic effort to represent postwar culture through the categories of space," typified above all by the Beats—and don't forget that the Bleshite Ann Charters was a Kerouac scholar![156] *TAPR*'s litany of addresses prefigured—as Welk's memoir post-figured—*On The Road*'s relentless inventory of obscure place names and *Howl*'s incantations of vibrations in Kansas, sirens in Los Alamos, the poles of Canada and Paterson, Rocky Mount, Tangiers, and so on.

[153] "Nostalgia involves, then, a departure from the definite past for the indefinite." S. D. Chrostowska, "Consumed by Nostalgia?," *Substance* 39, no. 2 (2010): 55.

[154] Granville Hicks, *Small Town* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004). See also: Robert Joseph Bicker, "Granville Hicks as an American Marxist Critic" (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1973) majid1991.

[155] Welk and McGeehan, *Wunnerful, Wunnerful*.

[156] Roy Kozlovsky, "Beat Literature and the Domestication of American Space," *Aa Files*, no. 51 (2005): 36.

2.3. The Same Time

If so many writers and poets and musicians and theorists were grasping their moment in the same ways its only because this moment, was, in fact, more self-identical than most. As President Eisenhower is supposed to have said: "things are now more like they are than ever before."

It is a suggestive irony that the syncopations of ragtime—and the syncopations of history indicated by ragtime revivalism—found ears in a historical moment that more than others was characterized by a general *contemporaneity*. More people than ever before or since were incorporated into American society at that moment; and American society was then also more coterminous with American culture. To put it simply, it was the apex of American hegemony. This is a very dubious word, which, like all dubious words, suffers from overuse. As the precise dimensions of this concept have often been obscured, it is worth spending some prose to unpack it and to justify its *special* application to the American 1950s.

But first: What were Americans all doing at the same time in the 1950s? We know the answer too well: our utopian and dystopian imaginations are still furnished with its symbols. Men and women were getting married; moving to new mass-produced suburbs; purchasing houses there with the help of 30-year fixed-rate mortgages; filling them with refrigerators and televisions and 2.5 children; and the men—either dressed in grey flannel sack suits with white collars, or in work-clothes with blue collars—were commuting to offices on newly-built highways in newly-built cars, traded in at regular intervals. The strange thing about these images is that they are true despite their over-familiarity. Even though it was a white America (albeit no longer Anglo-America) that was the main "beneficiary" of this social order—as well as the main character in its "official" mediations—people across all demographics were marrying, having children, and settling in little fortified suburbs.[157]

[157] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University

But this general apparent consensus in social behavior is not what justifies the term hegemony. Although it is common to conceive of hegemony as something like the regulation of consensus, it is important to emphasize that it is, as Stuart Hall once said, *hard work*.[158] Hegemony is not the birthright of dominant classes (or factions of a dominant class): their dominance (which is, after all, their, uh, "hegemony") must be *won* amongst the actual contingencies of history and class struggle, and it also therefore might *not* be won. Above all, the theory of hegemony obliges us to set aside Lukacsian accounts of false consciousness along with Althusserian accounts of ideology. Under conditions of hegemony, the mass of society is not duped—in fact, it is quite the opposite. Unlike other forms of rule, hegemony is uniquely *rational*. It can only be said to exist when political subjects exist who are conscious of themselves *as* political subjects and who furthermore conceive of their individual interests as being congruent—or even merely potentially congruent–with a *general* interest. In other words, as Dylan Riley has written, it bears an "extremely close connection" to the liberal democratic state.[159] (It may even be regarded heuristically as simply the Marxist counter-theorization of the so-called "liberal democratic state.") And so like liberal democracy, hegemony is the result of some sort of revolution. In a sense this statement is tautological, for what word other than "revolution" could one use to describe the stamping of the social world with a new definite and self-conscious shape? But it also indicates that the definite shape of an actual hegemony will vary according to the pre-existing social stuff it organizes and redefines.

Hegemony is the result of some sort of revolution. Which is to say: some transformation of the process of social production. The first chapter of this dissertation theorized ragtime as the

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of Chicago Press, 1992); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). For a view from the period, see P.K. Whelpton, "Cohort Analysis of Fertility," *American Sociological Review* 14, no. 3 (December 1949): 357–66; T.J. Woofter, "Factors Sustaining the Birth Rate," *American Sociological Review* 14, no. 3 (June 1949): 357–66.

[158] George Lipsitz, "The Struggle for Hegemony," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): .147n3.

[159] Dylan Riley, "Hegemony, Democracy, and Passive Revolution in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks," *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011).

musical aspect of the emergence of industrial capitalism in America by theorizing the coon song (and its musical ambience) as having furnished the symbols which could mediate the disparate social types called into existence by this transformation. These social types included the new industrial capitalist himself, who displaced the older ("inner-directed) American bourgeois, and whose livelihood depended on expanded consumer markets and therefore the relaxation of Puritan ethics; the new industrial working class, formed largely out of freshly imported Europeans; the "white collar" mental labor segment of this class—which was partly a product of the Taylorist deskilling of the labor process, partly a product of the expanded market's new need for advertising and sales coordinators, and partly a strategy pursued by the industrial bourgeiosie to motivate workers whose work was less and less meaningful—and finally the increasingly urbanized African American, whose ambivalent social status—urban but not incorporated—would be exploitable as a cultural resource.

But that social order was not an example of hegemony. It was riven by an out-and-out class conflict which was continually refreshed by the economic tumult the mode of production entailed. To put it simply: without forms of coordination that occur outside market exchange, there is no guarantee that the gains in industrial productivity from which profits are derived can actually be redeemed. The possibility of overproduction and underconsumption is ever-present unless something like a state can regulate demand.[160] And continual vivid economic crisis is not a context in which individual and general wills can be taken to be harmonious.

As it happened, something like a state—the United States for example, but also the Soviet Union, as well as most of post-war Europe—learned how to coordinate economic sectors and manage demand by constantly stimulating consumption.[161] The U.S. learned how to

[160] Michel Aglietta and David Fernbach, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*, Radical Thinkers (London: Verso, 2015); Mike Davis, "'Fordism' in Crisis: A Review of Michel Aglietta's 'Régulation et Crises: L'expérience Des Etats-Unis," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 1978; Davis, "Why the US Working Class Is Different"; Davis.

[161] Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

do this from running a war economy and also from John Maynard Keynes. By the time the Taft-Hartley Act was passed in 1947—three years before *They All Played Ragtime* was published—the labor movement unleashed by Taylorism was already being incorporated into a framework where rising productivity was being balanced by rising and also deferred wages, a fund of money which—for around twenty years, at least—permitted all of the cars and appliances (and tanks and missiles) that were made to be *bought*—even by the people who made them. The arrangement was called Fordism, after Henry. I am claiming that this arrangement alone in the history of American bourgeois rule constitutes a case of hegemony.

One reason to insist on the *rational* and *self-conscious* aspects of hegemony (again, as against "false-consciousness" or "one-dimensional man" or "ideology" explanations of post-war quietism) is because it is often overlooked how legible this social formation was to itself. Despite a recurrent story of a tranquil 1950s disturbed (in some way) by the inexplicably strident energies of the 1960s—a mythical emplotment shared by *Forrest Gump*, but also strangely by E.P. Thompson—the practice of rationality entailed by hegemony meant that social reality was not unexamined.[162] Many people were unhappy, and they knew they were unhappy.[163] Although Betty Friedan would famously describe the stultification and loneliness of the suburban housewife as "the problem without a name"—inaugurating for some, the 60s—social critics (and not particularly feminist ones, like David Riesman) had already been writing about the emptiness, loneliness, and abjection that befell women in the suburbanized world.[164]

Bleshism and Welkism were two ways of crystallizing unhappiness with this hegemony. This sounds strange: it's hard to imagine a better avatar of mid-century American hegemony than Lawrence Welk. But it might be the case that under hegemony, all culture—even the

[162] E.P. Thompson, *Out of Apathy* (London: New Left Books, 1960), 5.
[163] This point is hammered home again and again in William T. Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
[164] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

most innocuous mass culture—takes the form of dissent. Which is also to say that not all dissent under hegemony is counter-hegemonic. Political parties are required to either hone dissent into self-consciously counter-hegemonic programs or conscript it into dominant ones. The latter occurred. If one were to trace the social energies exemplified by Bleshism and Welkism through the decades that followed, one would find them easing into apolitical neoliberalism on the one hand, and family-values neoconservatism on the other. Echoes of Bleshian ragtime—a music which had defied the centralizing tendencies of Tin Pan Alley by hewing to the values of small-scale community—would surface in the Californian sensibilities of outfits like the Grateful Dead, Hot Tuna, and Ry Cooder, all of whom played tunes they called rags; and whose appropriations of pre-industrial Americana and homebrewed culture were a comfortable match for the kind of counter-cultural anti-regulationism essayed by their governor Jerry Brown, who embraced Linda Ronstadt, Buddhism, flat tax schemes, and opposed universal health care. Welk, for his part, was lionized by another, even more influential Californian Governor. Ronald Reagan claimed that Welk's business practices—namely his rejection of written contracts—supported a culture of mutuality. "In the back stage life TV viewers never see, there is an unmistakable family spirit," Reagan wrote. "They baby sit for each other, take trips together and help each other in time of trouble. Sounds real American doesn't it?"[165]

So it sounded to Reagan in 1979, in the midst of the hegemonic collapse he was angling to manage. But Welk was already offering his "musical family" as a social model in the 1950s. And at the mid-60s height of Fordism, the Bleshite ragtimer Max Morath was hired by the Industrial Sales Training Clinic of the Gates Rubber Company to offer ragtime as the musical analogue to moving power transmission belts and fluid power products. "You and I are both working the same side of the street," he told his audience of salesmen-to-be. "We're both in

[165] Ronald Reagan, *Stories in His Own Hand: The Everyday Wisdom of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

show business."[166]

The suggestion that a big band was *like* a family—or that a rubber salesman *like* a ragtime pianist—was just another issue from a society that was uncommonly good at similes. A society, said C. Wright Mills, that was resembling "a large filing cabinet."[167] Populated by people, said David Riesman, who needed mental "gyroscopes."[168] In fact, a major side effect of Fordist hegemony was a massive production of social theory accompanying the massive expansion in technocracy, not to mention the massive expansion of higher education and research enterprises flush with cash from foundations established by the industrial bourgeoisie, and this chapter has drawn from a number of contemporaneous mid-century discourses—modernization theory; urban studies; child psychology; public sociology; liberal critiques of mass culture; Beat poetry—to situate the dynamics of ragtime revivalism.[169] It has been able to draw from these sources *because hegemony's contemporaneity also means that intellectuals between diverse discourses often seem to be talking about the same thing at the same time*.

A final reason to insist on "hegemony": it is a concept all of these discourses lacked. For while they all agreed that their moment was a new one, there was less consensus on what its *differentia specifica* was. Was it characterized by the emergence of a "lonely crowd"?[170] Or of a "new social class?"[171] A "new working class?"[172] By the rise of "posthistoric man"?[173] Or of "organization man," who was perhaps himself a product of an "organizational revolution?"[174] Or maybe the revolution was an "educational revolution"?[175] Or was it a "computer

[166] Max Morath, *It's All Yours: Highlights of Gates Industrial Sales Clinic* (Gates Rubber Company, 1964).
[167] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[168] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*.
[169] Val Burris, "Fordism and Positivism in U. S. Sociology," *Social Science History* 31, no. 1 (2007): 93–105.
[170] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*.
[171] Milovan Đilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1957).
[172] Serge Mallet, *The New Working Class* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1975).
[173] Roderick Seidenberg, *Posthistoric Man. An Inquiry* (New York: Viking, 1974).
[174] William H Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956); Kenneth Ewart Boulding, *The Organizational Revolution: A Study in the Ethics of Economic Organization* (New York: Harper, 1910).
[175] Peter Drucker, *The Landmarks of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper, 1959).

revolution?"[176] Did these revolutions establish a "meritocracy?"[177] Or was the result rather a "postcapitalist society," or a "post-ideological society," or a "postbourgeois society," or a "postcivilized era"?[178] Ideas like these populated books addressed to a newly broad audience of educated readers—a public which was itself a product of the formation they aimed to theorize. But—and this is only characteristic of mid-century sociology—none of them would conceive the apparent newness and modernity in terms of class *rule*.

Instead, a general unifying problematic would be indicated by the ubiquitous word "development."[179] For it was taken for granted that the new forms of life and experience had emerged more-or-less spontaneously, naturally. And so mid-century modernization theory asked: How does an agricultural economy *develop* into an industrial one? Mid-century urban studies asked: How does a city *develop* to meet its needs? Mid-century psychologists asked: How does an infant *develop* into an adult?

The corollary to this problematic was the persistent worry that "development" would entail problems only solvable with the tools of traditions that "development" had destroyed. And it is this worry that bound both the Bleshite and the Welkite to ragtime. While, in mid-century frameworks, traditional agricultural society was opposed to modern industrial society; or the old community to contemporary urban alienation; or the joyful child to the neurotic adult; both Bleshite and Welkite ragtime music stood in the left slot beside tradition, community, and joy. What was the "new" music to which it was opposed? If ragtime music was the music of a yesteryear, what was the music that stood in between the "good old

[176] Edmund Berkeley, *The Computer Revolution* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962).

[177] Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958).

[178] Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Conflict in an Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1959); Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Free Press, 1960); George Lichtheim, *The New Europe: Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Praeger, 1963); Kenneth Ewart Boulding, *The Meaning of the 20th Century: The Great Transition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). A helpful list of these sources appear in a table making the same point I am making in James Ralph Beniger, *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4.

[179] Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

days" and the present? The music was "jazz," which bebop—beloved by the Beats; scorned by Bleshite and Welkite alike—had proved could no longer be a musical balm, but, as a fine art, could mediate the forms of alienation—racial, but also individual—that this mode-of-production generated.

Call this mode-of-production Fordism.[180] Call it the Keynesian state.[181] Call it monopoly capitalism.[182] Call it late capitalism.[183] What American hegemony meant in practice was that thousands upon thousands of men drove from their new suburban homes to the steel plants in Cleveland or Pittsburgh where they worked to provide the raw materials that thousands upon thousands of other men fashioned into cars in the assembly plants that they drove to from their new suburban homes in the suburbs of Detroit or Lordstown in cars that they also built.[184] Cars with tail fins to satisfy their residual taste for Old World opulence. Cars without tailfins that symbolized the taste of the white-collar worker they envied and scorned. Cars that symbolized a place for every taste.[185] Cars that could drive by new fast-food restaurants like Shakey's that trafficked in culinary and musical cheese.[186] Sensible Dodges that

[180] Aglietta and Fernbach, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*; Alain Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crisis in Global Fordism* (London: Verso, 1987); Davis, "'Fordism' in Crisis: A Review of Michel Aglietta's 'Régulation et Crises: L'expérience Des Etats-Unis"; Burris, "Fordism and Positivism in U. S. Sociology"; Alessandro Bonanno, "The Legitimation Crisis of Fordism: Ideological and Cultural Contradictions," in *The Legitimation Crisis of Neoliberalism*, by Alessandro Bonanno (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 39–64; Mark Gottdiener and Nicos Komninos, eds., *Capitalist Development and Crisis Theory: Accumulation, Regulation, and Spatial Restructuring* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[181] Simon Clarke, *Keynesianism, Monetarism and the Crisis of the State* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1988).

[182] Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968); Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

[183] Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (NLB ; Humanities Press, 1975).

[184] Ely Chinoy, *Automobile Workers and the American Dream* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955); Sylvia Fleis Fava, "Suburbanism as a Way of Life," *American Sociological Review* 21, no. 1 (February 1956): 34; Edward Dimendberg, "The Will to Motorization: Cinema, Highways, and Modernity," *October* 73 (1995): 90; Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Owen D. Gutfreund, *Twentieth Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[185] Pierre Martineau, "Social Classes and Spending Behavior," 1958; David Gartman, "Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Change: Explication, Application, Critique," *Sociological Theory* 20, no. 2 (July 2002): 255–77.

[186] By the way: "[h]ard cheese consumption, due largely to the mozzarella used on pizzas, [at chains like Shakey's] jumped from 8.3 pounds to 17.4 pounds per person between 1960 and 1978." Jakle and Sculle, *Fast*

would be hawked by Lawrence Welk. Studebakers that could be driven by the likes of Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis on their sojourns through the Mississippi Delta. Or by Alan Lomax. Or by Neal Cassidy and Jack Kerouac—all in a neo-romantic quest for an American reality that resisted the standardization and planning and centralization that had also provided them with their fantasized means of escape. Cars that could transport city planners like Robert Moses, who never learned to drive but who rammed highways through pre-War cities, segregating the black urban underclass; destroying the "slums" that Jane Jacobs defended; creating the blank spaces on city maps that were the sites of ragtime fantasy; sinking the Black Atlantis; connecting the formerly self-sufficient small towns to the sites of industry, draining away workers and the barbershop quartets and farm dances, and thereby providing Welkites with the raw materials of their nostalgia.[187] Cars in which people sat in endless traffic, producing through their impotent inactivity a libidinal attachment to the breathless repetitions of secondary rag.[188] Cars that crashed into other cars and people: permanently wounding Fletcher Henderson, and cutting short his career of honing the materials of early small-ensemble jazz into the orchestral idiom of swing; killing Charles Edward Smith whose research into the blues was the complement to Bleshite ragtime; killing Theodore Lawrence, and so widowing the pianist Vera Brodsky, who would give up her concert career for one in musicology, and who would be instrumental in resurrecting the music of Scott Joplin in the 1970s.

Food, 241.

[187] Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, Historical Studies of Urban America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Mike Davis, "The Year 1960," *New Left Review*, no. 108 (December 1, 2017): 87–116; Albert M. Camarillo, "Blacks, Latinos, and the New Racial Frontier in American Cities of Color: California's Emerging Minority-Majority Cities," in *African American Urban History since World War Ii*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 39–59; A. M. Camarillo, "Navigating Segregated Life in America's Racial Borderhoods, 1910s-1950s," *Journal of American History* 100, no. 3 (December 1, 2013): 645–62; Paige Glotzer, "Real Estate and the City: Considering the History of Capitalism and Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 42, no. 2 (March 2016): 438–45.

[188] David Riesman, *Abundance for What?* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1993); Karin Bijsterveld et al., *Sound and Safe: A History of Listening behind the Wheel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

But that is a matter for the next chapter.

3 “A Guest of Honor”: Ragtime ca. 1970

3.1. A letter from Leslie

On June 23, 1972, a singer named Leslie Guinn wrote a letter to Teresa Sterne, the creative director of Nonesuch Records, thanking her for “a Saturday to remember.” Teresa Sterne was something of a visionary. During her tenure at Nonesuch she proved that there was money to be made in recordings of both neglected classical music and ethnomusicological field recordings. In her hands, Nonesuch, already an established purveyor of budget classical recordings, had become something like the recording industry counterpart to Evergreen Books in making avant-garde culture available in inexpensive form to a growing audience of college-educated consumers. Earlier that year, Guinn had recorded for a Nonesuch anthology of Stephen Foster songs, and he was ecstatic about the result, which had just arrived along with a “Santa Claus bag full of” other Nonesuch LPs.“ He and his partner Mary Ellen had ”spent the day at the turntable,“ ”like a kid with a new toy.”[1]

Of the other discs in the “Santa Claus bag,” one apparently stood out. In his letter was a “P.S.”:

[1] Leslie Guinn, “Letter to Teresa Sterne,” Box 3, Folder 51 (Teresa Sterne Papers, New York Public Library, June 23, 1972).

> Please tell Josh Rifkin that, next to our own efforts, of course, we love the Joplin rags. I told Mary Ellen they satisfied something deep down inside me & she is in complete agreement. Especially the first two on side one (my favorite of all is the 2nd rag.) I'm sure an analyst would know why the 2nd one just about does me in.

As it turns out, this trivial communication actually spoke for the *zeitgeist*. The record that Guinn was so taken with was Joshua Rifkin's blockbuster *Piano Rags by Scott Joplin*, one of the first falling rocks of the 1970s ragtime avalanche.[2] And Guinn's favorite—the one that just about did him in—was "The Entertainer," which is now, though it was not-yet-then, likely the most famous instance of ragtime music. In other words, this letter is one of the earliest extant records of what will become a nearly universal human experience: having Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer" stuck in your head.[3]

If Joplin's ragtime satisfied something deep down inside Leslie Guinn, he had no idea just how satisfied he could soon be. Six months after writing this letter, Universal Pictures premiered *The Sting*. Marvin Hamlisch's period-inappropriate Joplin soundtrack—also inspired by Rifkin's LP—made the "Entertainer" an international hit.[4] By the end of the decade, you could have heard it played on the piano by Rifkin and many others; or played by a period ensemble, like Gunther Schuller's New England Conservatory Ragtime Orchestra; or on a harpsichord by E. Power Biggs; or on guitar by Chet Atkins; or as a violin-piano duet by Itzhak Perlman and André Previn. There were "switched-on-Bach"-style Moog performances. There were funk-jazz versions by Don Sebesky and Bunky Green and others. There were disco versions by Janet Manchester and Shaw. If you liked the melody, but wished it had words, you could listen to Ray Coniff, or the Swingle Singers, or Milton Berle and the Muppets. If you were a ballet-goer, you might have heard the rag at the London Festival

[2] Joshua Rifkin, *Piano Rags by Scott Joplin* (Nonesuch Records: H-71248, 1970).

[3] Harold Schonberg might be earliest. Harold C. Schonberg, "Scholars, Get Busy on Scott Joplin!," *The New York Times*, January 24, 1971.

[4] Rifkin was apparently asked to supply the music first, but demurred.

Ballet; or at the Frankfurt Ballet's *Ragtime*; or at the Royal Ballet. And if your taste in dance was a little more "downtown," you could see *The Entertainer* danced by the Twyla Tharp company (with a young Joel Sachs on the piano) which premiered only four months after Leslie Guinn's letter to Sterne. In short: while Guinn was haunted by "The Entertainer," clearly the culture at large was as well. Why?

In fact, the tune was only one aspect of a larger-scale interest in Joplin and ragtime. The composer's complete works received a sumptuous presentation in two volumes edited by Vera Brodsky Lawrence in 1971.[5] His long-neglected opera *Treemonisha* was restored, orchestrated, and staged a number of times. Numerous biographies appeared; along with radio, musical, film, and tv adaptations of his life story.[6] Joplin also served as the an inspiration for E.L.Doctorow's hit novel *Ragtime*, later adapted for screen, attracting the efforts of the Italian film prodycer Dino de Laurentiis; the filmmakers Robert Altman and Milos Forman, and the composer/songwriter Randy Newman.[7] Young American composers—students of Messiaen, Milhaud, and Nono, like Eric Salzman, William Albright, and William Bolcom—turned to ragtime as a means of sorting out their musical identities. Inside the academy, a number of dissertations and research publications built on and critiqued the Bleshite phase of ragtime scholarship. Outside the academy, the "ragtime underground" of collectors, performers, and little magazines continued to swell. In short, both ragtime music in general and Scott Joplin in particular were extremely useful resources for artists of all kinds in the 1970s.

Dating this strain of ragtime to the 1970s is not just a matter of consulting the calendar. In many ways this ragtime would be unthinkable without that prior socio-historical thing

[5] Scott Joplin, Vera Brodsky Lawrence, and Richard Jackson, "The Complete Works of Scott Joplin: In Two Volumes," 1981, 2 v. of music.

[6] Shirley Fleming, "Joplin's Treemonisha: A Patchwork of Styles, Touching and Trying," *High Fidelity*, 1976; Rubye Nell Hebert, "A Study of the Composition and Performance of Scott Joplin's Opera 'Treemonisha'" (Ohio State University, 1976); Melvin Drimmer, "Joplin's Treemonisha in Atlanta," *Phylon (1960-)* 34, no. 2 (1973): 197; "An Old Ragtime Piano Man Goes to the Opera: Scott Joplin's Treemonisha' Is given Atlanta Premiere," *Ebony*, 1972.

[7] E. L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York: Random House, 1975).

we specify as "the 60s."[8] Taking place during the slackening of those revolutionary energies, this phase of ragtime was defined by much more concrete forms of consciousness than those of the previous chapter and was also a beneficiary of residual counter-cultural institutions. Ragtime in the 1970s would have sounded very different, for example, without organs affiliated with the white student left—like New York City's WBAI, for example, a radio station that did much to promote ragtime.[9] It would have sounded very different without exponents of a Black Power-inflected cultural nationalism, like *Black World*, (renamed from *Negro Digest* in 1970) or *The Black Perspective in Music* (founded in 1973), both of which were interested in ragtime in the name of Black consciousness. Or, for that matter, the various avatars of the Black Arts Movement—musicians like Henry Threadgill, Fred Hopkins, Steve McCall, Anthony Braxton, Muhal Richard Abrams, or writers like Ishmael Reed—who troped on archaic ragtime in their boundary-pushing work. For the first time in its history, the ragtime archive includes a substantial range of Black reception outside of its immediate practitioners. Moreover, and perhaps above all, the sheer *existence* of political crisis in America gave this manifestly American music an affective weight it had not previously possessed. Ragtime's affective power in both *The Sting* and Doctorow—and I will be arguing *everywhere*—depended on its sounding out the disjuncture between American mythology and American reality.

In addition to this timeliness, 1970s ragtime was also the fruit of slightly longer-term and more banal factors. America's brief period of state expansion had included both increased access to higher education and publicly supported sectors of the culture industry, like National Public Radio and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The former factor meant that the 70s wave of ragtime scholarship could be conducted by enthusiasts with academic training. Moreover, it is not incidental that the three outstanding dissertations on ragtime

[8] Davis, "The Year 1960"; Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text*, no. 9/10 (1984): 178–209.

[9] In addition to their ragtime programming, WBAI ran The Free Music Store, where Harold Schonberg knew to head to find out more about Joplin. Schonberg, "Scholars, Get Busy on Scott Joplin!"

in this period were completed at public institutions—the absence of any exoticist tendencies in these texts suggest an intellectual milieu much less self-conscious about cultural status.[10] Combined, these factors were an infrastructural condition for the new and broader intellectual public that ragtime addressed. It was not necessarily large—the pianist Terry Waldo called this "hip population" the "intellectual minority"—but it *was* imagined to be larger than what was being called the "ragtime underground."[11] It's possible to underrate the uniqueness of American mass culture in the later Fordist era. There is simply no pre-war counterpart to television programs like "Camera Three" (which invited on Eubie Blake and Joshua Rifkin to celebrate Joplin), or an imprint like Evergreen Books (which had put out *TAPR* after the first printing by Knopf), or for a label like Nonesuch. The economic viability of these enterprises rested on the premise that mass market avant-garde culture was not an oxymoron. It is doubtful that this premise would have even been *discovered* if college enrollments had not doubled between 1959 and 1969, largely on the state's dime.[12]

The America that heard ragtime in the 1970s was more mediated, variegated, and self-conscious than ever before, and was also no longer capable of sustaining the illusion that it was an integrally coherent formation. And so ragtime in the 1970s was often defined by conflict. At one level, there was the ongoing conflict between Welkites and Bleshites over whether the music was America's folk music or the music of America's "folks." Was it music to be played by a solemn respecter of tempo markings? Or by a "300-pounder with fists like hams?"[13] Despite this ongoing dispute—which, again, was very one-sided—by the 1970s,

[10] Addison Walker Reed, "The Life and Works of Scott Joplin" (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1973); Berlin, "Piano Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural Study"; Joseph R. Scotti, "Joe Lamb: A Study of Ragtime's Paradox" (University of Cincinnati, 1977). Meanwhile, a Harvard undergrad named Parmer Fuller was complaining to Harold Schonberg about the Ivy League smirks he suffered for his interest in Joplin. "Music Mailbag," *New York Times*, February 7, 1971, 164.

[11] Waldo, 184.

[12] Roger L. Geiger, *American Higher Education since World War Ii: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 129.

[13] Paul Johnson, "Dust off the Prince Albert Coats, Rifkin Brings Back Real Piano Rag," *Arkansas Gazette*, June 4, 1972.

the Bleshites *had* succeeded in convincing substantial amounts of people that ragtime was a music worthy of serious attention. And so a whole range of new and more sophisticated conflicts were available for pursuit. It turned out that there were any number of ways one could take ragtime "seriously."

Accordingly, the bulk of this chapter will center on the ways in which musicians and intellectuals in the 1970s nominated ragtime as an art music, and the forms of conflict this entailed. This will be a matter of following disputes about ragtime performance practice. It will be a matter of reading the ragtime musicology of the period, which, as a matter of necessity, very self-consciously justified the value of its object. It will be a matter of looking at the treatment of Joplin by Black jazz musicians and concert music composers. It will be a matter, above all, of studying the aura that was assembled around Scott Joplin in this moment: a matter of asking not only why this seemed so necessary; but inquiring into what means were required to sustain it. That Scott Joplin was a Great Black Composer was both a discovery and invention of 1970s ragtime—and as a premise, it was shared by every participant.[14] But what it meant to be great, or Black, or a composer was never a matter of consensus.[15]

Alongside this investment in ragtime *qua* art, this chapter will also cover the activity of the Welkite sections of the music industry—the entertainers who continued to peddle ragtime alongside other nostalgic products. For although Bleshites had successfully built a ragtime movement that now threatened to break into the mainstream of American culture, this triumph did not come at the expense of the "styrofoam straw-hats." In fact, the relationship between the two could be symbiotic: the nostalgia industry did after all provide jobs and rehearsal-time for more conscientious ragtimers.[16] But even more to the point, as we'll see,

[14] Peter J. Rabinowitz, "Whiting the Wrongs of History: The Resurrection of Scott Joplin," *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (1991): 157–76.

[15] How best to represent Joplin remains a question for the public-facing historian-custodians of his former house in St. Louis. Timothy Baumann et al., "Interpreting Uncomfortable History at the Scott Joplin House State Historic Site in St. Louis, Missouri," *The Public Historian* 33, no. 2 (May 2011): 37–66.

[16] Not least Terry Waldo.

this sector itself acquired an oppositional edge—another way in which this moment can be specified as a post-60s moment. While the political implications of light music could be comfortably latent in 1960, they could only be manifest in 1974.

Leslie Guinn, like many people of his era, was haunted by ragtime; "done in" by ragtime; touched "deep inside" by ragtime. He thought his analyst would have an explanation. This chapter, and the following one, represents mine.

3.2. Ragging the Classics; Classicizing the Rags

It would be impossible to overstate the importance of Rifkin's LP for 70s ragtime. To every music aficionado outside of the "ragtime underground," *Piano Rags by Scott Joplin* introduced the idea that the music was not just the tack-piano music from *The Lawrence Welk Show*. For many music critics, it was a revelation. "This was not just any man's music," Harold Schonberg raved in the *New York Times*. "Joplin was a real composer." Rifkin's "authentic ragtime" is "so delicate one can hardly believe that's what ragtime piano ever sounded like," proclaimed Paul Johnson.[17] The response from almost every quarter was enthusiastic and multifaceted. The letters that arrived on Teresa Sterne's desk came from fans, musicians, and members of local historical societies. As Sterne justly wrote to the editor of *Stereo Review*, Nonesuch and Rifkin had "really opened a public-consciousness door."[18]

How did they do it? Above all, it was Rifkin's mannered performances—his slow-to-moderate tempos; his metrically precise rhythms, devoid of any rollicking swing; and his fidelity to the printed scores. He had, in fact, originally planned to record Joseph Lamb's rags, and drew from Lamb's Folkways LP (discussed above in Chapter Two) for his concep-

[17] Johnson, "Dust off the Prince Albert Coats, Rifkin Brings Back Real Piano Rag."

[18] Teresa Sterne, "Letter to William Anderson," Box 2, Folder 40 (Teresa Sterne Papers, New York Public Library, November 8, 1971).

tion of how ragtime should be played. As he would insist over and again, Joplin's rags were analogous to Chopin's waltzes:

> Waltzes were played in cafes to dance to, but Chopin's waltzes are not cafe music to dance to. It's concert music that's based on this environment music, if you will, but it's a very stylized, very refined, very sophisticated sort of impression of it. The same holds true for Joplin's rags. They are very sophisticated, very refined, very elegant music.[19]

Sophisticated; refined; elegant—these were words that had not generally been applied to ragtime before, at least outside of the Bleshian world, and they were adjectives that Rifkin would repeat endlessly. He had the cultural cachet and credentials to wield them. Unlike the 50s parade of Welkite "professors," he was actually on faculty at Brandeis, as few reviews failed to mention, and had been trained at Juilliard. But with his long-hair and Michael Stivic moustache, he also cut a slightly counter-cultural profile. (Schonberg called him a perfect "child of his time."[20]) And so Rifkin modeled both an official sophistication and a sober hipness that hadn't really been an aspect of ragtime since its early reception among genteel provocateurs. The boisterous barroom fun of 50s ragtime was ruled out. In fact, everything about his LP—from the performance, to the liner note, to the cover art—could be described as deliberate and fastidious. "The hallmark of Joplin's style—something that the cover should convey—is its great refinement and elegance," Rifkin instructed the Nonesuch art department, before also suggesting—somewhat contradictorily—that a dance-hall atmosphere might "give some liveliness."[21] Robert Heimall's cover would choose the former approach.

The upscale ragtime market in LPs that Rifkin and Nonesuch discovered quickly grew crowded. Nonesuch chased *Piano Rags* with William Bolcom's *Heliotrope Bouquet* and then

[19] Leslie Carole Johnson, "Rifkin on Ragtime," *Mississippi Rag*, March 1975, 2.
[20] Schonberg, "Scholars, Get Busy on Scott Joplin!"
[21] Joshua Rifkin, "Elektra Records Inter-Office Memorandum," Box 2, Folder 31 (Teresa Sterne Papers, New York Public Library, July 17, 1970).

even more recordings from both Rifkin and Bolcom. Angel Records joined in with Gunther Schuller's ensemble recordings of Joplin's *Red Back Book* and performances by Previn and Perlman. Columbia Masterworks and Deutsche Grammophon followed shortly after with their own entries. Meanwhile, the audience who had just discovered ragtime *via* Rifkin and company turned to the revivalist sector to feed their new habit and discovered anew the performance practices that Rifkin had sidelined. It wasn't long before non-boater-hat ragtime was codified as a spectrum running from the "classical" Rifkin to the "popular" Max Morath, with William Bolcom lying somewhere in between. A writer named Stephen Allen Whealton was an early proponent of this tripartite model. Where Morath's playing was "idiomatic" and "joyful," Rifkin's played as if ragtime "were classical music," and Bolcom occupied a "middle-of-the-road" position.[22] While Whealton's preferences clearly lay closer to Morath and Bolcom, he did not polemicize against Rifkin, maintaining instead that he could be a "perfect crossover" for those coming from a "strong interest in classical music."

This way of distinguishing and personifying the stylistic approaches was broadly accepted by the 70s ragtime public. For their part, Rifkin, Bolcom, and Morath clearly admired each other's work, even as they recognized their divergent musical strategies.[23] What was fought about was *which* approach was historically accurate, and *which* approach sounded the best. There was often such a tight fit between this latter judgment and the more general worldview and social position of the judger that a Bourdieuian analysis could write itself. The middlebrow general music critic aspired to "high" culture; the political right and left offered competing populisms. Thus *New York Magazine's* Alan Rich, a Harvard undergraduate and Berkeley musicology graduate student, voted for Rifkin on the basis of his "remarkable blend of brainy scholar and lively performer." (Bolcom, on the other hand was "a little too

[22] Stephen Allen Whealton, "An Evening of Orchestrated Rag at the Smithsonian," *Counternotes*, February 27, 1973.

[23] Morath, for his part, thought that Bolcom's album was "superb." Max Morath, "Letter to Teresa Sterne," Box 2, Folder 40 (Teresa Sterne Papers, New York Public Library, May 24, 1971).

honky-tonk" for his taste.)[24] Similarly, the *Washington Post's* Joseph McLellan—who had earned two degrees in French Literature from Boston College— described Rifkin's performances as "purist ragtime," while Morath played Joplin "as if though the music had originally been written for the banjo."[25] On the other hand, the much older Arnold Shaw—a CCNY alumnus and vestige of radical Jewish Brooklyn, went for the people's ragtime: Max Morath above all, and for Bolcom over his Nonesuch colleague. ("Without sounding thumb-tacky, [Bolcom's] touch is more typically raggy and he performs with more of a dance beat than Rifkin.")[26] Meanwhile, in *Commentary*—the organ of formerly-radical Jewish Brooklyn—a future commodities trader named Bruce Kovner was complaining that Rifkin represented something like affirmative action in musical form—a tendency to overvalue on the basis of race. "Ragtime music came from saloons and cat-houses and it was meant to entertain," he insisted. "The music falls apart if played too slowly or with too much introspection."[27]

The faction that was most hostile to Rifkin's classicism was the ragtime underground. Typical were the sentiments of the Bleshite pianist Dick Wellstood, who was as hostile to Rifkin as to the Welkites:

> Joplin is the genius, and his genius will survive all kinds of assaults. Including this one by these Juilliard nit-wits. Those rags have beautiful melodies, and you can really abuse them and they'll still come out sounding well. I think that's happened in a number of cases–earlier the cats with the tacks and hammers now the cats with whatever *they* got.[28]

The critique of the Juilliard nit-wits was developed in the pages of the *Mississippi Rag*, in particular by a young writer/clarinetist/pianist from Minnesota named Butch Thompson. Thompson had studied both American Studies and Music at the University of Minnesota,

[24] Alan Rich, "Wrong-Playing Records," *New York Magazine*, September 25, 1972.
[25] Joseph McLellan, "There Was Ragtime before 'the Sting'," *The Washington Post*, December 9, 1980.
[26] Arnold Shaw, "The Scott Joplin Renaissance," *High Fidelity*, October 1972.
[27] Bruce Kovner, "The Ragtime Revival" (Commentary Magazine, March 1, 1976). Kovner continues to pursue his conservative agenda in classical music to this day. Robin Pogrebin, "After a Showdown, Juilliard's President Retains Support of Board," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2022.
[28] Waldo, 206.

the latter with Johannes Riedel, a ragtime musicologist who I'll introduce in the next section. A major contributor to *Mississippi Rag*, Thompson was also providing old-timey music for Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion*—a radio revue that was sort of like a center-left alternative to the center-right *Lawrence Welk Show*. For Thompson, Morath represented the authentic approach. Unlike the mannered Rifkin and Bolcom, Morath could be "serious without feeling the compulsion to be profound […]"

> Rifkin's formal approach, refreshing as it is alongside the Crazy Otto-with-all-your-favorites image ragtime has had for too long, needs an antidote after too many listenings. You find yourself wishing somebody would smile just to clear the air. Morath's major role may very well be to help keep the music from sliding in overreaction, too far into the realm of watery "classical."[29]

In the same issue, Thompson grumbled about the "latest manifestation of Scott Joplin's new respectability": Gunther Schuller's New England Conservatory Ragtime Ensemble's *Red Back Book*. He was particularly incensed about Angel Records's claim that the LP represented the first recording of the "Red Back Book," pointing out that selections had been recorded by Bunk Johnson and other trad jazz performers in the mid-50s. This oversight could be excused as the ignorant product of Angel Records's PR department. What could not be excused was the music:

> What is most distressing about the Schuller performance is their almost antiseptic quality: the arrangements sound "sanitized" and emerge almost as parodies of the folk tradition from which they evolved.
>
> While ragtime aficionados may rejoice that their cause is in the process of vindication, they may well wonder whether a vibrant folk tradition can survive the establishment's attentions in recognizable form.[30]

Thompson and the other writers for *Mississippi Rag* tended towards these drastic formulations: the struggle between the ragtime underground and the ragtime classicists was a

[29] "The Entertainer," Mississippi Rag: November, 1973
[30] Butch Thompson, "Dusting off the Red Back Book," *The Mississippi Rag*, January 11, 1973, 5–6.

struggle between the forces of life and forces of death. The "Joplimania" inspired by Rikin and *The Sting* was therefore greeted with more dread than pleasure. "What will Glen (sic) Gould do with 'Euphonic Sounds?"' Thompson worried. "Everybody hold your breath."[31]

Unsurprisingly, readers agreed with the *Rag's* party line. "Rifkin may be great playing Horowitz, but he just can't play ragtime," wrote a William Bluestone, who signed himself "Billy Blue."[32] "As far as I'm concerned, Morath is a standard. He can play 'barroom' or 'serious' ragtime–and he always *sounds* like *he's* enjoying it, which is the mark of a pro–not a dilettante."

But though righteous, the *Rag* was not overly sectarian. The March 1975 issue devoted three long pages to a charitable interview with Rifkin. After establishing his trad-jazz *bona fides* with chronicles of a youth spent ransacking Harlem record shops for "hot" 78s, Rifkin defended his choices in a forthright but equitable tone.

> My record offended a lot of ragtime buffs–in a sense, the ragtime coterie. Of course, it didn't *come* from those circles at all. There could be very justified grounds for some resentment on the part of a lot of people who've been playing it for decades. Somebody comes seeming more or less out of left field and has tremendous success with it. I certainly can see that a lot of people would be very shocked by my style of playing. It's the old ragtime devotees who have not liked it…and I can understand that reaction very well. I can't agree with it and I would have to say very strongly that I think there's a mistake there.[33]

Despite the unambiguous points of conflict, there was some surprising convergence as well: Rifkin agreed with the *Rag* that Gunther Schuller's recordings were not "true to the way things are supposed to go." Above all, Rifkin presented himself as a conscientious musician open to criticism and capable of self-critique. "Some of my style I don't like that much any more," he admitted at the end of the interview, referring to the Jelly Roll Morton repertoire he was trying on. "I still like the way I play some of the pieces but I'm a little displeased

[31] Butch Thompson, "Mandel in Minneapolis," *The Mississippi Rag*, January 3, 1974, 13.
[32] Billy Blue, "Letter to the Editor," *The Mississippi Rag*, January 2, 1974, 3.
[33] Johnson, "Rifkin on Ragtime."

with the way I play others." And despite Billy Blue's implication that Rifkin didn't sound like he enjoyed playing Joplin, Rifkin vowed that he wouldn't attempt a Morton record until he had the time to be "relaxed enough to do it simply for pleasure," as he said he had first done Joplin.

The interview was a bit of a coup for Rifkin. Months later, the *Mississippi Rag* letters page noted that the feature had "prompted a great deal of interest and many readers have asked if Butch Thompson's views have changed since the interview was published." Thompson's "current comment on the debate" was given:

> I, too, was impressed by the Rifkin interview. It showed him to be the serious, well-read, thoughtful musician I suspected he was all along. Nonetheless, I must stick to my guns. I still think Joplin's music suffers when it is played as though it comes from the European salon tradition. It does not come from there, and I don't think Joplin, even at his most "serious," would want to hear it sounding that way. I respect Mr. Rifkin's work (more than that of some others who participated in the faddish revival that now seems to be over), but I rarely play his records.
>
> […]
>
> What gets in the way of a really valid, serious acceptance of the music in its original form—and this goes for everybody, from music professors right down to the average Joe out for a good time—is that *nobody can believe that music they relate to so directly can possibly be an art form*.[34]

Nobody can believe that art can consist in direct address; can be enjoyed; can be felt as an unambiguous relation. What a strange thing to say in the pages of a journal dedicated to the revival of a popular art. And how revealing that Thompson's quarrel would be not only with a Rifkin, a Bolcom, or a Schuller, but with *everybody*. In the little city of the ragtime underground, Thompson was a prophet in the square—inveighing on behalf of a disalienated art; for an art that refused to distinguish itself from entertainment; for an art that didn't choose between pleasure and authenticity; for an art that didn't know the difference between naivete and sentimentality. This was Thompson's dream, but it wasn't his alone. Even the

[34] Charles B. Davis & Butch Thompson, "Rag Bag," *The Mississippi Rag*, January 9, 1975, 4. My emphasis.

classicists —especially the classicists!—were *themselves* drawn to ragtime *via* this dream. As Bolcom told *Musical America*, he wanted a music that could be "a living language […] to be spoken both in the academy *and* the street."[35] Can anybody believe in such a music? And what about the precise meaning of "can"? Is it the belief that's impossible? Or is it that "everybody" has lost the ability to believe? Has God abandoned his people, or have people abandoned their God?

Thompson's comment was therefore perhaps truer and more radical than he intended. The suggestion that "nobody" could believe in the prospect of disalienated art would presumably encompass Thompson himself, and maybe even Joplin. It's hard to avoid the suspicion that the ragtime undergound's obsessive struggle against classicism was an anxious attempt to enjoy the social wound it was pretending to heal.

3.3. Scholarship

At the level of performance practice, the post-Blesh ragtime world struggled against a newly interested academy. This struggle would also occur at the level of theory.

Ragtime scholarship in this period could only begin with scrutiny and critique of Blesh's work, but the necessity of this task was not immediately apparent. There was simply no other writer who appeared to have the command over the corpus—or the music collection—that he had, and even by the early 70s *TAPR* still held a monopoly on in-depth considerations of ragtime. And so he was the natural choice to supply the introduction for the New York Public Library's *Complete Works of Scott Joplin*, a project that was being shepherded by Vera Brodsky Lawrence. Fresh off her success editing the works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, Lawrence was then at the beginning of her second career as a Americanist musicologist. As

[35] Jack Hiemenz, "Musician of the Month: William Bolcom," *Musical America*, November 1976, 39.

she had done for Gottschalk, and the composers surrounding Arthur Farwell, she was endeavoring for Joplin: to collect and stamp a body of American music with academic sanction. For too long, in her view, American musicians and musicologists had deferred to European value judgments. It was time to make a stand for the worth and unique values represented by America's indigenous classical music. Despite this righteous mission, her editorial introductions include no rhetorical grandstanding. Instead, she offered her hard-nosed positivism as a practical demonstration of the value of her objects. Especially compared to the sharp elbows evident in her correspondence, the pithy introductions she composed for her *Wan Wan Press*, American song, and Gottschalk editions evince an extreme scholarly sobriety.[36]

This made for a contentious collaboration with Blesh, who had always preferred a good yarn to a boring fact. The conflict in their approaches plays out in her marginal notes on Blesh's draft introduction. She was irritated by Blesh's lack of sourcing, especially when he implied the existence of a source. (He sort of had a habit of throwing quotation marks around.) "If it's a literal quote it should be credited. This applies to all the quotes in the piece. Otherwise misleading and embarrassing to have it discovered."[37] She pointed out that there was no evidence for Blesh's contention that Joplin's parents had been slaves. "Since we are not sure, better not to say," she chided. "One of these bright students might find out the opposite." (One did.[38]) When Blesh wrote that the young Scott had possessed a "sense of melodic line"; or that his mother's death fortified his decision to pursue a musical career, she demanded sources: "This kind of supposition without documentation is just what we can't do in this book." At some point she began cross-referencing passages of the draft with the

[36] Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Arno Press, 1969); Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *The Wa-Wan Press, 1901-1911* (New York: Arno Press, 1970); Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Music for Patriots, Politicians, and Presidents : Harmonies and Discords of the First Hundred Years* (New York: Macmillan, 1975).

[37] Vera Brodsky Lawrence, "Rudi Blesh Introduction," Box 6, Folder 17 (Vera Brodsky Lawrence Papers, New York Public Library, n.d.).

[38] Reed, "The Life and Works of Scott Joplin."

pages from *TAPR* that Blesh had more-or-less recycled. But the book, of course, was not any better documented. When Blesh did cite a source, like the United States Copyright Office, she double checked and found him, unsurprisingly, making stuff up. Blesh's oft-repeated anecdote that Joplin's first opera, *A Guest of Honor*, had been lost in the mail, en route to the Copyright Office—a "fact" still much repeated by ragtimers today—was simply incorrect.[39]

But her more pointed notes regard his stabs at musicology. One thing they apparently went back and forth on was Blesh's genealogical *Formenlehre*:

> The rag form also resembles the typical quadrille of the period, which was a suite of five dances (e.g. march, waltz, mazurka, polka, schottische, galop) arranged for four dancing couples. But, aside from the unique aspect of syncopation, there are three main differences between rag and quadrille: one, in rag the themes are continuously joined and played without pause, while in quadrille they are separate entities as in the early classic dance suites; two, in quadrille each theme is a separate dance meter at its own proper tempo while in rag all the themes are typically in 2/4 and all at one tempo; three, in quadrille the A (or any other theme) does not reappear later while in the vast majority of rags the A theme is reprised.[40]

This is hokum, and frankly not too far from Ben Harney's pseudo-professorial spiels from about eighty years earlier.[41] Blesh's "three main differences" annul any resemblance to the quadrille—with those kinds of caveats, practically any musical form could be claimed as an ancestor. Lawrence was understandably skeptical, but her notes suggest that she and Blesh had already argued about the matter:

> I'm still not happy about this—in spite of your explanation. I still don't see the relationship. I'm afraid you'd be refuted on this by the musical cognoscenti. Wish you'd jettison it![42]

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[39] Lawrence, "Rudi Blesh Introduction."

[40] Lawrence, "Rudi Blesh Introduction."

[41] "Rag time (or negro dance time) originally takes its imitation steps from Spanish music, or rather, from Mexico, where it is known under the head and names of Habanera Seguidilla [sic], etc. being nothing but consecutive music, either in treble or bass, followed by regular time in one hand." Harney, *Ben Harney's Ragtime Instructor*.

[42] Lawrence's choice of words—"I'm afraid you'd be refuted"; "embarrassing to have it discovered"; "one of

Why was Blesh so invested in this? Well it was his unsophisticated way of shoring up ragtime's sophisticated credentials. He knew enough to know that the inorganic, non-developmental aspect of Joplinian ragtime—the fact that its form always comes apart into easily separable units—could be counted as a demerit in its highbrow reception. And so he reached for a form that also included a succession of disparate themes. Frankly, it's hard not to suspect that he just liked the French aura of the word *quadrille*—French expressions crop up across his writing, and elsewhere in the draft Parisians like Debussy and Stravinsky are cited as validators of ragtime's worth.[43] This Europhilia was a recurrent and basic contradiction in Blesh's way of thinking. He wanted to assert that ragtime was America's "classical music." But this meant making the music more *European*!

Now, Blesh, being essentially a fan, wouldn't notice or worry over this kettle logic. But Lawrence was very sensitive to it. Again: her mission was to assert a "classicism" and a concept of "art music" that was *not* dependent on European models. One can find her growing increasingly frustrated over the course of the draft. She blanches when Blesh misnames the Joplin Ragtime Exercises "etudes"; calls it far-fetched when Blesh claim's that Joplin's "Bethena" waltz was a "logical extension of the Viennese entrain"; and is vexed when Blesh claims that Joplin had begun "giving a more specifically classic cast (in the European sense) to his syncopated piano pieces." "I don't see the European sense" she wrote. "It defeats the whole concept of Joplin's ragtime to give it a European connotation […] Why does the overworked word "classicism" have to be European?"

Lawrence, scrupulous positivist, rooted out other instances of Bleshian kettle logic. She pointed out that, despite Blesh's assertion that Americans were only now willing to accept the "Maple Leaf Rag," an "awful lot of people did from the beginning," noting that it *had* sold a

these bright young students might find out" are revealing.

[43] That said, the *quadrille*—like many other dances with less posh names–was definitely danced in New Orleans. (A city not particularly important to Blesh's history.) Thomas Fiehrer, "From Quadrille to Stomp: The Creole Origins of Jazz," *Popular Music* 10, no. 1 (1991): 21–38.

million copies. When Blesh claimed that without Joplin's ability to notate, "ragtime would have bloomed and then quickly faded," she pointed out that it did fade. Over the entire draft there is one approving note, which basically sums up Lawrence's entire response. When Blesh did refer to the "barrel house" sensibility of the "Gladiolus Rag," she was ecstatic. "*Bravo* on non-European musical reference."

The published, much-revised introduction shows the compromise between Blesh's and Lawrence's opposing visions in the title: "Scott Joplin: Black-American Classicist." Blesh's dichotomizing between "Negro folk" and "European classical" cultures was displaced into America's internal racial dichotomy. Blesh had previously sometimes insisted on ragtime's unambiguously Black genesis. Now he emphatically described the music as of racially mixed origin: "[T]he elements of scale, key, and harmony (and the instrument itself) came from the white side, the […] polyrhythms came from the black." Ragtime was a music "born out of wedlock, with at least a part of its parentage black."

This modern racial frame was in some ways just as weird as Blesh's previous racial-ethnic romanticism. But it was also, in some ways, more coherent. In this frame, bordellos and sporting houses, being illicit islands of interracial sociality, were the *necessary* birthplace for ragtime. This, in turn, gave Joplin's life a seriously tragic cast: the venereal disease that killed him could now be rendered as another product of the institutions that gave him his calling. In Blesh's earlier draft, Brahms and Dvorak had substantiated ragtime's worth. In this new, racial frame, Joplin's white associates were the only legitimators. Especially John Stark, Joplin's white publisher, assuming his customary role as the patron saint of ragtime—the "honest" white man of musical taste who rescued Joplin and ragtime from the oblivion of the bordello. This emplotment pitched the realization of Joplin's ambition as the overcoming of American racism. The contemporary recognition of Joplin as a great composer was therefore also the recognition of what ragtime had always in principle been—the music of an America

beyond the color line.

So was Bleshism whipped into shape for the 1970s. Lawrence's opinion of Blesh only fell, and with it her interest in ragtime and Joplin. Her papers at the New York Public Library include her marked-up copy of Theodore Albrecht's article, which advanced the theory that a man named Julius Weiss was Joplin's first piano teacher—a character that really might have been an invention of Blesh's. The last page records Lawrence's final recorded judgment on the man. "This author is what I never believed possible—even more of a dream-spinner than that prince of hot-air virtuosos, Blesh."[44]

The prince would be by-no-means dethroned: his general profile as a ragtime expert remained intact until he died. But 70s ragtime scholars were frequently critical of Blesh, even as popular writers and the ragtime underground continued to rely on *TAPR*. Addison Reed, the first Black scholar of Joplin, who completed his dissertation in 1973—supervised by Calvin Bower—found "many contradictions of Blesh's account" in the interviews he conducted, and advised that one should "consider any fact documented by Blesh with some skepticism.[45] Edward Berlin, who completed his dissertation on piano ragtime in 1976—supervised by H. Wiley Hitchcock—regarded *TAPR*'s comments on ragtime music "of limited value," and he regretted its "entanglement of fact and speculation, which is often difficult or impossible to unravel."[46] Even William Schafer and Johannes Riedel, who, as we'll soon see, essentially tried to supply a musicological basis for Bleshite ragtime, scolded Blesh for his "absolute judgments," which misunderstood the "flexible" character of Black music.[47]

In addition to recognizing a need for source criticism, 70s ragtime writers were also aware that a critique of concepts was necessary: unlike Blesh, they were aware that the notional

[44] Vera Brodsky Lawrence, "Notes on 'Julius Weiss: Scott Joplin's First Piano Teacher'," Box 6, Folder 12 (Vera Brodsky Lawrence Papers, New York Public Library, n.d.).

[45] Reed, "The Life and Works of Scott Joplin."

[46] Berlin, "Piano Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural Study," 297–98.

[47] William John Schafer and Johannes Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime: Form and Meaning of an Original Black American Art* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 22.

and historical borders of ragtime were not immediately given. Schafer and Riedel thought that the subsequent progress of jazz had "warped" listeners' perspectives on ragtime.[48] Even Terry Waldo, whose book *This Is Ragtime* addressed the lay audience imagined by *TAPR*, averred that "[t]he conception of ragtime that has emerged in the 1970s is in fact completely different from any previous ideas about it."

> We have not witnessed in this decade a simple revival of ragtime but a reassessment of the music in terms of our day. The same may be said of all ragtime revivals that have occurred over the past thirty or so years. *Ragtime* for Scott Joplin did not mean the same thing as it means for Marvin Hamlisch or Joshua Rifkin.[49]

Accordingly, Waldo organized his book in much the same way that this dissertation is organized, with whole chapters devoted to distinct revivals. Berlin did similarly in his dissertation, having discovered that—Welkite and Bleshite mythology notwithstanding—ragtime was not originally a pianist's repertoire, but known by most turn-of-the-century American's as a genre of song. One result of this heightened consciousness was to underline just how *composerly* Scott Joplin actually was. The more complex—and historically accurate—picture that emerged in the work of Berlin, Waldo, and Schafer and Riedel suggested that there was not one authentic ragtime, as Blesh had more-or-less claimed, but an expanded field of ragtime production, encompassing frivolous popular entertainment, but also local folk traditions, and, at its summit, the works of "classic ragtime" composers like Joplin, James Scott, and Joseph Lamb, who stood outside both folk and popular worlds in following the dictates of musical conscience over the dictates of tradition or the market.

They could also be rendered as composers who fashioned raw folk materials into artworks. This was the essential thesis of Schafer and Riedel's book, *The Art of Ragtime: Form and Meaning of an Original Black Art* (1973). Schafer was a professor of English at Berea College;

[48] Schafer and Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime*, 35.
[49] Waldo, 4.

Riedel, a professor of Musicology at the University of Minnesota—where he had taught Butch Thompson. They pitched their book—mainly successfully—as the first *scholarly* text on ragtime. It essentially added a musicological basis to the story told by *TAPR*. Or at least musicological figures: in many ways it merely supplied an academic veneer to the sorts of claims about ragtime's provenance that Lawrence had found lacking. But the patterns on this veneer are revealing. Just as Rifkin was insisting on the necessity of playing Joplin "absolutely as written," Schafer and Riedel emphasized ragtime's status as a *literate* music. Where earlier Black music had existed only in performance, "ragtime was conceived and executed as a written form."[50] It was therefore "not a mere style," but a "canon"; not just sound, but sound made text.[51] Schafer—again, an English scholar by trade—was clearly influenced by some intellectual currents of the time. While *The Art of Ragtime* doesn't outright cite Marshall McLuhan, or Walter J. Ong, or Jack Goody, their influential texts on the "consequences of literacy" are clearly in the background.[52] Ragtime, in Schafer and Riedel's conception, was essentially the *alphabetization* of the Black oral-musical tradition. But in contrast to the likes of McLuhan and Ong and Goody, they laid no stress on what was lost with the transition to musical notation.

Why not? Because the ultimate goal was not rigorous or interesting scholarship but the defense of ragtime as respectable music. And so the Bleshian Europhilia returned in a new form. Ragtime composers were not just composers like any old European composer, but composers like particular *kinds* of European composers—precisely analogous in their sphere to Holst, Grieg, and Dvorak.[53] "Essentially [Joplin, Scott, and Lamb] were as much collectors as composers, assembling and synthesizing the works of itinerant ragtime stylists who

[50] Schafer and Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime*.
[51] Schafer and Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime*, 147 177.
[52] Jack Goody & Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, no. 3 (1963): 304–45; Walter J Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (University of Minnesota Press, 1981).
[53] Schafer and Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime*, 14.

were too unskilled, or too indifferent, to write down their own creations."[54] Even the less elevated works of "Blind" Boone were conscripted into this vision: Schafer and Riedel claimed that his suites were "clearly syntheses of various materials he collected on his travels through the Midwest," and "representative of the way the itinerant ragtime "professors" must have accumulated and organized their materials.[55]

One of the virtues of this idea was that it seemed to provide a respectable basis for the non-organic, additive form of "classic ragtime." In this way, it was a sophisticated updating of Blesh's *quadrille* strategy, and in fact they also repeated Blesh's geneaology.[56] But it did contradict some of their other tendencies. For Schafer and Riedel also wanted to insist that the canonic works of classic ragtime were not mere medleys or pastiche but possessed a "constricted, jewel-like musical form."[57] The authors also hailed James Scott in particular for developing the "organic" tendencies of his collected musical materials. And they also denigrated the work of later ragtime composers who had received the *forms* developed by Joplin *et al* but who had relation to the folk content with which to fill them. In his review of the book, Gilbert Chase noted the authors' "nineteenth century aesthetic idealism," and it's not difficult to spot.[58] On what aesthetic basis could these collector-composers join their themes into organic, "jewel-like" musical wholes? The authors, despite their showy musical figures, could not ultimately say.

This was the internal contradiction the book struggled to manage, and it is really just another repetition of Blesh's earlier kettle logic. But there was another problem as well. As Edward Berlin pointed out, they had absolutely no evidence that the melodies they "col-

[54] Schafer and Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime*, 51.
[55] Schafer and Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime*, 30.
[56] Actually, Schafer and Riedel also repeated the *quadrille* hypothesis. Schafer and Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime*, 5–6.
[57] Schafer and Riedel, *The Art of Ragtime*, 49.
[58] Gilbert Chase, "Review: 'The Art of Ragtime: Form and Meaning of an Original Black American Art'," *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 9 (1973): 192–96.

lected" were derived from folk sources:

> How did the white, urban, Joe Lamb manage to collect melodies from the air of black, Missouri communities without leaving the New York-New Jersey area? Most important, what were these folk melodies like? How did they differ from back folk tunes from, say, Louisiana or Georgia? If the authors have this information, why is it not shared with their readers? In the absence of some concrete evidence, is it valid to make such definitive judgments as: "Scott came closest to capturing Joplin's sensitive handling of Missouri folk materials . . ." [...] and "Scott worked with Joplin . . . and delved into the same regional folk material"[59]

Berlin also had as much patience as Vera Brodsky Lawrence for the *quadrille* hypothesis:

> We are told that rags are folk melodies arranged into a "simple quadrille-like structure" and that Joplin and Scott both have "the same subtle quadrille-like feeling" but are left completely uninformed as to the structure and nature of the quadrille.[60]

Berlin, for his part, argued in his dissertation that the formal design of the "classic rag" was easily traceable to the typical "march and trio" forms that were the bread and butter of American march ensembles, a view later articulated by Samuel Floyd and Marsha Reisser.[61] In his view, there was no simply no reason to invent a folk pre-history when there was actual history ready-to-hand. Indeed, so much of the aura around Joplin's mysterious acquisition of High European Culture—his command of functional harmony; his operatic aspirations; his Chopinesque relation to social music—should have been dispelled by the simple fact that he had studied music for two years at George R. Smith College in Sedalia. Schafer and Riedel, like Blesh before them, were basically hypnotized by the idea of a Black American Art Music. They couldn't think the "art music" part without mystified European models, and they couldn't think the "Black American" part without conjuring the old imagery of the

[59] Edward Berlin, "Review: 'The Art of Ragtime: Form and Meaning of an Original Black American Art'," *Black Perspective in Music* 3, no. 1 (1975): 105.

[60] Berlin, "Review: 'The Art of Ragtime: Form and Meaning of an Original Black American Art'," 106.

[61] Berlin, "Piano Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural Study," 167; Samuel Floyd and Marsha J. Reisser, "The Sources of Resources of Classic Ragtime Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 4 (January 1, 1984): 22–59.

"Southern Negro" folk. Their new emphasis on literacy was a desperate attempt to manage these contradictions, but these contradictions were in fact the substance of the fantasy. Scott Joplin transfixed many of his 1970s white enthusiasts in much the same way that the "dandy coon" had done seventy years earlier—by appearing both Black and white, rich and poor, urbane and country.

3.4. Great Black Music

Now, a possible way out of this embarrassing impasse was actually implicit in Schafer and Riedel's subtitle, which suggested that ragtime was not only an art but a "Black Art." This approach was pursued by a number of Black scholars and musicians. One was Addison Reed. Unlike Schafer, Riedel, and Blesh, who turned to the *très European* quadrille to vindicate ragtime's serial form, Reed claimed that piano ragtime's seriality—like Black music in general—represented a tendency "toward open-ended form," and that moreover the "scholastic attainment of formal cohesion" was simply not a relevant aesthetic priority.[62] Reed was far from the only person making the case that Black music could be distinguished from Euro-American music on this basis. Leroi Jones (not yet Amiri Baraka) had claimed that "arbitrariness of form" was a hallmark of what he was calling New Black Music.[63] Across the culture, the notion that there was such a thing as an autonomous Black Music was rapidly becoming a commonplace. As Eileen Southern put it in a special issue of *Black World* in November 1973:

> We Black musicians and music historians complain bitterly, and correctly so, that white critics do not understand our music, that they persist in assessing our music in terms of European art-music values. We insist that our music has different traditions and values in terms of both function and artistic purpose.[64]

[62] Reed, "The Life and Works of Scott Joplin," 174.
[63] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 175.
[64] Eileen Southern, "Music Research and the Black Aesthetic," *Black World*, 1973, 10.

Elsewhere in the issue, David Baker inveighed against the "fallacy" of "trying to impose European standards, norms, values, and criteria on an essentially non-Western art form."[65] Despite this increasing unanimity, it was possible to specify the non-Western-ness in various ways. Reed and Jones offered socio-political grounds for their judgments.[66] Others were taking a more culturalist approach. In a series of essays, the composer Olly Wilson developed a theory of Afro-American music as a species of West African music, and Joplin and ragtime figured in this account more than a little.[67] For Wilson, Joplin was proof of the West African diasporic culture's innate preference for *bricolage* over organicism. "Media is a vehicle of expression, not the substance of expression," he declared. "Both Scott Joplin and Arnold Schoenberg wrote pieces for the piano about the same time, but there any similarity ends."[68] (Furthermore, the phenomenon of "secondary rag"—the three-against-four syncopation discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation—was judged by Wilson to be a retention of West African multimeter.)[69] Black music in the United States, Wilson claimed, necessarily existed on "two different levels. The West African diasporic level; and the level in which Euro-American musical forms are transformed to become consistent with Afro-American cultural practices."[70]

Later, Wilson would dispense with the culturalist language of retentions and deploy in-

[65] David Baker, "The Battle for Legitimacy: 'Jazz' versus Academia," *Black World*, 1973, 23.

[66] I'm using "Black Power" here to condense a variety of political activity that would, in another kind of chapter, be more rigorously specified. History is moving fast at this moment.

[67] Olly Wilson, "The Significance of the Relationship between Afro-American Music and West African Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 2, no. 1 (1974): 3; Olly Wilson, "The Black-American Composer," *The Black Perspective in Music* 1, no. 1 (1973): 33; Olly Wilson, "Black Music as an Art Form," *Black Music Research Journal* 3 (1983): 1; Olly Wilson, "Composition from the Perspective of the African-American Tradition," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1996): 43.

[68] Wilson, "The Black-American Composer," 36.

[69] Wilson, "Significance of the Relationship," 7–9.

[70] Wilson, "Black Music as an Art Form," 21. These formulations are, of course, drawing from Richard Waterman's formative work. Richard A. Waterman, "'Hot' Rhythm in Negro Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 1, no. 1 (1948): 24–37; Richard A. Waterman, "On Flogging a Dead Horse: Lessons Learned from the Africanisms Controversy," *Ethnomusicology*, no. 2 (1963): 83. A recent consideration is found in Michael Iyanaga, "On Flogging the Dead Horse, Again: Historicity, Genealogy, and Objectivity in Richard Waterman's Approach to Music," *Ethnomusicology* 59, no. 2 (2015): 173.

stead DuBois's metaphor of the veil to characterize this duality, but Scott Joplin remained an important point of inflection:

> The concept of duality is also at the core of understanding the aesthetic approaches of many African-American composers who work partially or completely outside the veil. These composers often reflect a compositional vision that results from an understanding of the musical values of African-American traditions, i.e., the music within the veil and, simultaneously, technical mastery and understanding of practices clearly extrinsic to the veil—the European-American, literate musical tradition. The African-American composer who works within a literate tradition thus is *a priori* engaged in accommodating different musical impulses and, consciously or unconsciously, must determine the means of creating an artistically viable musical reconciliation. In general, the history of African-American music and its impact on the broader musical community certainly suggests that there have been many highly successful and significant reconciliations *[…P]articularly, the music of Scott Joplin and his associates [..] are vivid examples of black music that was successful as music within a written as well as an oral tradition. The most significant thing about this music […] is that it creates a new tradition, a new paradigm whose model is a result of a new ordering of the contrasting musical impulses.*[71]

In other words, while Blesh and other white romantic scholars of ragtime had tried to map ragtime's "duality" onto racial duality—to emplot it as a music of "racially mixed origin," and implicitly, as the sonic herald of an integrated American culture—many Black musicians were moving in a different direction, and hearing its hybridity as a cultural integration which, having occurred wholly within the sphere of Black music, was an expression of Black culture.[72] On this view, ragtime was Black not *despite* its assimilation of Euro-American elements, but *because* of it. It's not surprising then, to find Joplin as a recurrent reference in amongst the musicians that connected with the A.A.C.M. and its commitment to Great Black Music. Wadada Leo Smith had discovered Scott Joplin in his local library in Leland, Mississippi, in his continual hunt for black composers.[73] (His source was almost certainly *TAPR*.) The

[71] Wilson, "Composition," 45. My emphasis.

[72] On this theme, see also Thomas Brothers, "Ideology and Aurality in the Vernacular Traditions of African-American Music (CA. 1890-1950)," *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (1997): 169–209.

[73] George Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: Uni-

pianist Muhal Richard Abrams had made a point to study ragtime and stride alongside as a part of his self-education at the piano, and he and Anthony Braxton would perform the "Maple Leaf Rag" on a duet recording in 1976. But perhaps the most sustained engagement with Scott Joplin was undertaken by Henry Threadgill, Steve McCall, and Fred Hopkins, who, as the trio Air, made Joplin a consistent part of their performing repertoire.

Air's enduring statement on Joplin would be the 1979 LP *Air Lore*, which included renditions of "The Ragtime Dance" and "Weeping Willow Rag" along with two tunes by Jelly Roll Morton and a Threadgill homage to New Orleans's "Paille Street." While *Air Lore* was received in some quarters as a satirical riposte to the revivalism and academicism of the times, the trio's relationship with Joplin was by then almost a decade old and had preceded the heyday of Joplimania. In 1971, Threadgill had been conscripted by the avant-garde theater artist Donald Sanders to provide music for a play. Based on ethnographic material gathered by the actors in a then-dilapidated Chicago North Side neighborhood, the production focused on the characters of the seedy Hotel Diplomat. It was Sanders's idea to use ragtime to accompany the depictions of flophouse life, proving that—even before *The Sting*'s panning shots of Depression-era Chicago—the old Bleshian lamination of ragtime with urban decay was a spontaneously available association. And it was Vera Brodsky Lawrence's NYPL Joplin edition that ended up in Threadgill's hands. His orchestrations would be the first music the new trio played:

> It was an interesting challenge, because ragtime was so closely associated with the piano. There were no models of how to proceed. There was nothing to listen to for examples of trios of saxophone, bass, and drums playing rags. I had to figure out how to make them work for our format. And we all had to rethink how we played our instruments. The constraints of the form pushed us in some interesting directions stylistically. […] It was great training material. We were already mature as individual players, but as a unit, ragtime shaped us. We stuck close to the form: *rags are structured like little suites*, *we realized*, *but if you maintained the*

versity of Chicago Press, 2008), 170.

flavor of each section they allowed room for expansion and improvisation.[74]

What Addison Reed was discovering in his dissertation, Air was discovering in their rehearsals—the musical potential of the inorganic, "open-ended," serial form. The performances on *Air Lore* prove the continuity between Joplin's ragtime and the trio's densely composed works—you can hear from the first cut how comfortable Threadgill, McCall, and Hopkins were with this poly-chronistic repertoire. The music is not parody, and it's not collage—except in the sense that Joplin rags were themselves collages in a way intuited but not quite theorized by Bleshites. But it's equally distant from each of the three approaches elaborated in ragtime quarters. It's not Morathian, embodied, "beery" ragtime. While it shares Rifkin's admiration for the music, its attitude is not reverence. One *might* think—and in fact, many did—that Air's ragtime appropriations resembled Bolcom's: that they betrayed anxieties about modernism. This would be a misunderstanding, as Studs Terkel recognized:

> TERKEL: Some would call your music avant-garde, very advanced, but the fact is, it has a history–
>
> MCCALL: Exactly
>
> TERKEL: –we're talking about evolution.
>
> THREADGILL: Absolutely. Exactly. What we're doing didn't just jump out of space, without any roots. I mean, we've played all kinds of music, I mean: we've all served our apprenticeships. As you know, Fred went to DuSable under Captain Dyett; I've been in Army bands, and all kind of bands—polka bands, and just anything you could name. Small traditional jazz quartets playing traditional jazz music; big bands […][75]

These citations of high school bands, party bands, and military bands in particular suggests the kind of overlooked institutional histories that actually spine Black music, despite the re-

[74] Henry Threadgill and Brent Hayes Edwards, *Easily Slip into Another World: A Life in Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023). My emphasis.

[75] Studs Terkel, "Henry Threadgill, Fred Hopkins, and Steve Mccall Discuss Their Trio Jazz Group, Air" (The Chicago History Museum, September 4, 1981).

curring mystifications of its ideologists.[76] Listening to *Air Lore* with an ear to these histories reveals these various forms of overdetermination. Those descending chromatic flourishes from Threadgill's sax—those are Monkian gestures. But they're also re-notations of free jazz wails. And they're also Joplin's favored cadential formulas. Because they're also march band formulas. That a single mundane musical gesture can represent so many disparate genealogies is not in any way remarkable—all culture is, in some way, sediment. But Air's embrace of this musical polymorphism represented an alternative to the ragtime's underground fractious litigations of "true" ragtime performance practice. Despite Butch Thompson's claim that a disalienated art was an impossibility, Air made a pretty good case for the contrary.

3.5. The Entertainers Play "The Entertainer"

Air and other exponents of "Great Black Music" were not the only musicians who were able to approach Joplin without *angst*. Thanks largely to its use in *The Sting*, the "Entertainer" became one of most recorded melodies in the 70s. There were at least 180 unique performances of "The Entertainer" recorded in the decade. But despite this apparent wealth, one generic designation stands out against the rest. Nearly half of the total corpus can be classified as "Easy Listening." Measured in sheer weight of vinyl, "The Entertainer" belonged to *this* repertory, and *not* to the repertories of "classical music," avant-garde jazz, or ragtime revivalism (Figure 3.1).

What was "Easy Listening?" The term was devised by the post-war recording industry itself, as an umbrella term to describe what was basically its major sector: things like post-

[76] On these themes, see, for example: Samuel A. Floyd and Ronald Radano, "Interpreting the African-American Musical Past: A Dialogue," *Black Music Research Journal* 29, no. 1 (2009): 1–10; Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

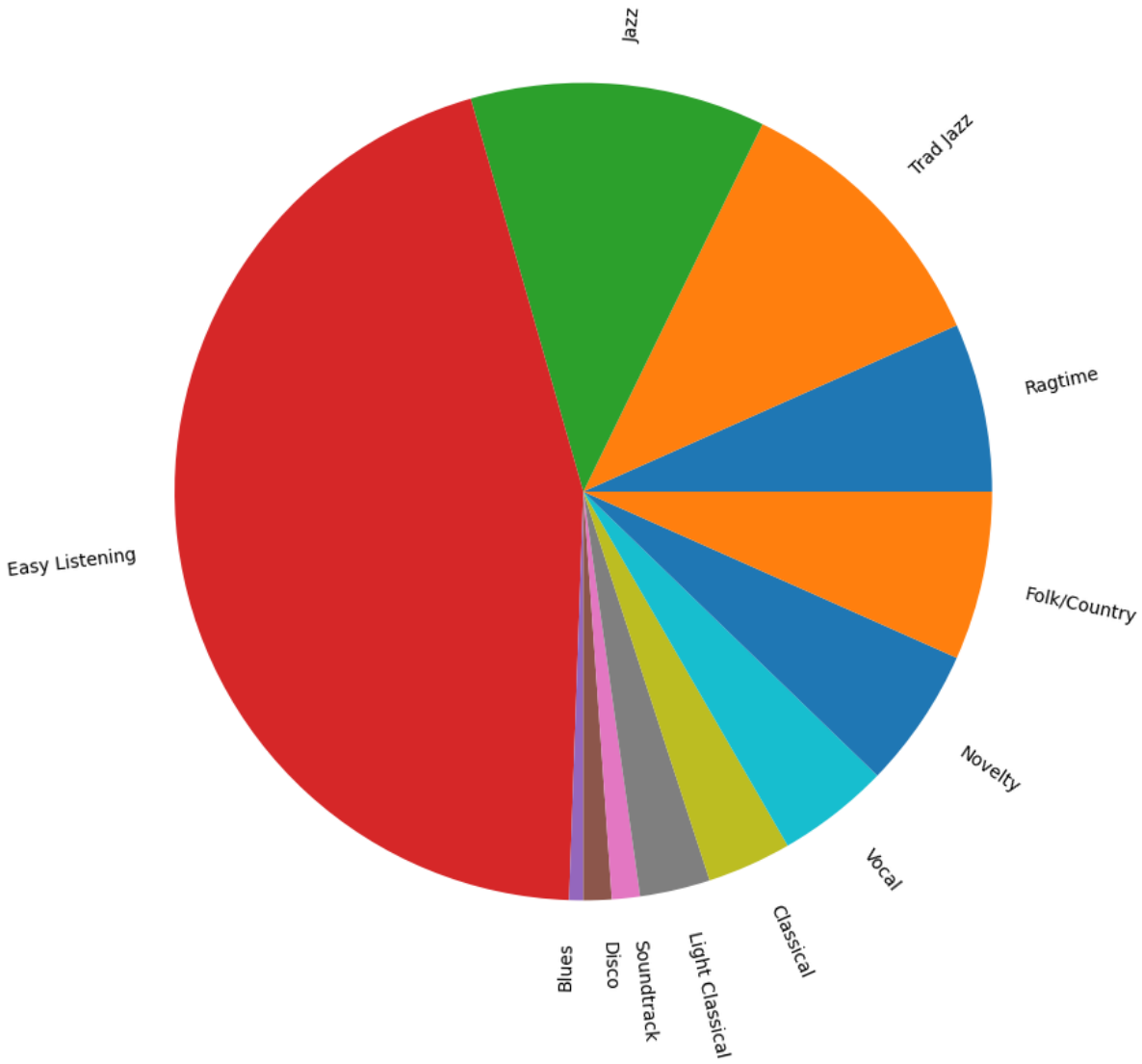


Figure 3.1: Genre Distribution of 1970s “The Entertainer” Recordings

Tin Pan Alley vocal music, "mood music," "exotica," and "lounge."[77] Lawrence Welk and his orchestra would occupy a major role in its history, and a special place should also be reserved for Annunzio Paolo Mantovani, who was one of the first to craft his musical arrangements, microphone placement, and studio effects together—and who did, in fact, render an "Entertainer" in 1975. Moreover, Mantovani did have a definite conception of who the "Easy Listening" audience was. "Perhaps twenty-five percent of the people like the Classics," he wagered. "And about twenty-five percent of the people like the Beatles. I aim to please the fifty percent in the middle."[78]

In short, the Easy Listening orchestra combined a commitment to sensual excess and the most technologically progressive recording capabilities with a conservative, even reactionary approach to musical content. This makes it an incredible archive of the styles and fads of popular music, which it deployed as musical *topics*. The word is entirely appropriate. If the 18th-century practitioner of the "classical style" articulated an urbane consciousness by playing with signs like "march" or "opera buffa" or "Turkish," so did the Easy Listening orchestra—through its deployment of "Dixieland" clarinets; "Swing" muted brass; "Hawaiian guitar"; "minstrel banjos," "cowboy harmonica," "Hollywood" strings, and so on—articulate a mid-century American "suburbane" consciousness.

These topical resources were put to work in "Easy Listening" "Entertainers" which assimilated the archaic features of Joplin to its existing stockpile of musical signifiers. Luckily,

[77] Tim J. Anderson, *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Keir Keightley, "Long Play: Adult-Oriented Popular Music and the Temporal Logics of the Post-War Sound Recording Industry in the USA," *Media, Culture & Society* 26, no. 3 (May 2004): 375–91; Keir Keightley, "Music for Middlebrows: Defining the Easy Listening Era, 1946-1966," *American Music* 26, no. 3 (2008): 309–35; Joseph Lanza, *Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong* (University of Michigan press, 2004); Derek Scott, "Other Mainstreams: Light Music and Easy Listening, 1920–70," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and AnthonyEditors Pople, The Cambridge History of Music (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 307–35; Rebecca Leydon, "The Soft-Focus Sound: Reverb as a Gendered Attribute in Mid-Century Mood Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 39, no. 2 (2001): 96–107.

[78] Quoted in Leydon, "The Soft-Focus Sound: Reverb as a Gendered Attribute in Mid-Century Mood Music," 100.

it had a ready-to-hand symbol—that "saloon" tack piano, which Welkites had long associated with a kind of good old-fashioned, slightly naughty fun. A characteristic example from Percy Faith layered the tack-piano on top of a jet-setting '60s groove, answered it with a bossa nova flute choir, and chased all these symbols with Mantovani-Hollywood strings.[79] Bert Kaempfert stuck closer to a jazz vein in his "Entertainer," but used iconic materials from different jazz phases to vary the melody—a riotous Dixieland ensemble breaks out of an elegant "swing band" texture in the repeat of the first strain.[80] Lawrence Welk, as ever a shameless practitioner of pop music pastiche, rubbed a swingin' brass section against his trademark straight-eighth "champagne bubble" pizzicato strings.[81]

Despite Easy Listening's policy of anodyne musical geniality, "The Entertainer" called forth a kind of self-consciousness that this sector didn't typically advertise, as the handful of lyrics composed for the melody make clear. After all, the tune itself, they believed, referred to people like them—industry hands who had dedicated their lives to their audience's enjoyment. For some lyricists, "The Entertainer" was an opportunity to celebrate the nobility of their profession:

A lyric which concluded (Figure 3.3).

Others took it as an occasion for a little self-serving history lesson (Figure 3.4.)

This latent hostility to rock'n'roll was more manifest in the version written for Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire (Figure 3.5):

As the song ultimately deduces (Figure 3.6):

This anti-rock stance of the Easy Listening world was only natural. By 1976—the date of this particular recording—it would be easiest to describe Easy Listening as simply the wing of popular music that had resisted the ideologies of rock—among them: the romantic

[79] Percy Faith & His Orchestra, "The Entertainer" (CBS, 1974).
[80] Bert Kaempfert, "Gallery" (MCA Records, 1974).
[81] Lawrence Welk, "Lawrence Welk's Most Requested Tv Favorites (Champagne Style)" (Ranwood, 1975).

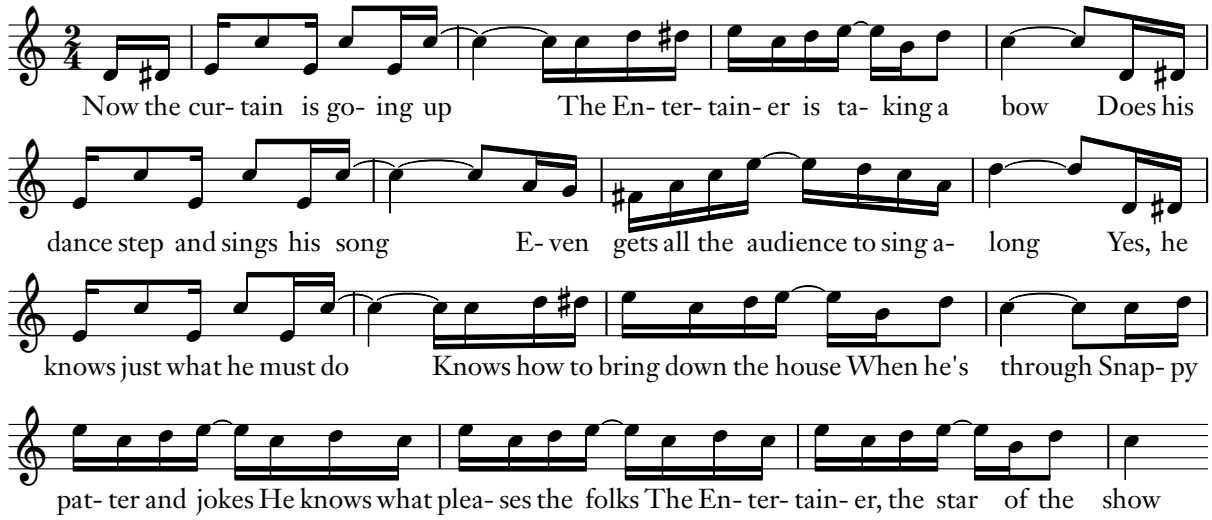


Figure 3.2: "The Entertainer," lyric by John Brimhall, Verse 1



Figure 3.3: "The Entertainer," lyric by John Brimhall, Verse 2



Figure 3.4: "The Entertainer," performed by the Ray Coniff Singers

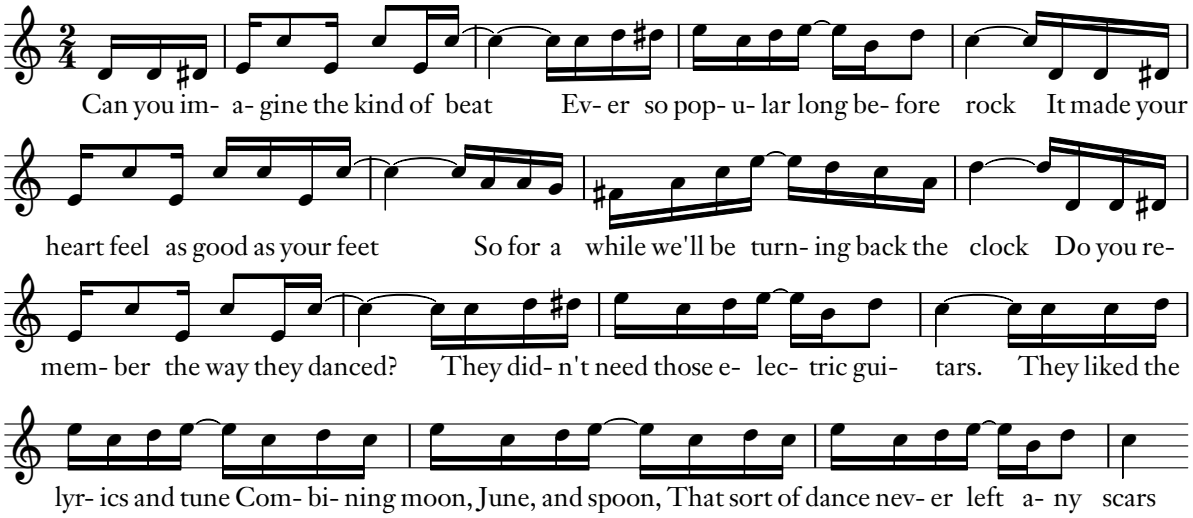


Figure 3.5: "The Entertainer," performed by Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire



Figure 3.6: "The Entertainer," performed by Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire

cults of authenticity and genius that had accrued to various rock'n'rollers; the newly intense bond between performer and song; and the decline of couple dancing. In fact, Terry Waldo, interviewing people on the streets of Columbus for NPR, discovered a common "connection in the minds of most interviewees between ragtime and the nostalgic embrace of anything old and a rejection of the present."

> One woman glared at me as she vehemently declared that "ragtime music is positive. It's the positive side where people can join in and sing together rather then folk or rock where they talk about the negative and dance apart."[82]

In other words, just as the ragtime underground and the ragtime classicists looked to ragtime as the balm for an alienated art music, so did others look to ragtime as the balm for alienated popular music.

[82] Waldo, 157.

But actually, Joplin's "Entertainer" itself seemed to know about alienation—a fact that 1970s pop repressed. Of the 31 different Easy Listening "Entertainers" I've been able to study, only four of them include the third strain—an absence that's actually characteristic of the entire corpus. What made this bit of music so indigestible for 1970s pop?

One thing to note is how free its harmony is compared to previous strains (Figure 3.7).



Figure 3.7: Joplin, "The Entertainer," Third Strain

Where the first strain is essentially all cadence—constantly preparing you for its conclusion—this one features a harmonic sequence that doesn't constantly imply a point of repose. It's also more song-like. Where the jerky leaps of the first strains suggested the ergonomics of the banjo, this strain has a singing voice, even two singing voices. The effect is dramatic: it's as if there's suddenly a *subject* in the music—someone with the inner world that mediant relationships seem to reveal. This is the kind of musical gesture that made people call Joplin Schubertian. It's not surprising that your Lawrence Welks and Mantovanis would prefer to repress it.

Like the Easy Listening arrangers, most of the lyricists who set the Entertainer simply ignored this strain. But the Swingles didn't. (It's fair to describe the Swingles as kind of the Evergreen Books or Nonesuch Records of *a capella* singing groups.) After using the first two strains to narrate the stage triumphs of the eponymous entertainer, they used the swerve of

the third strain to bring us off-stage.

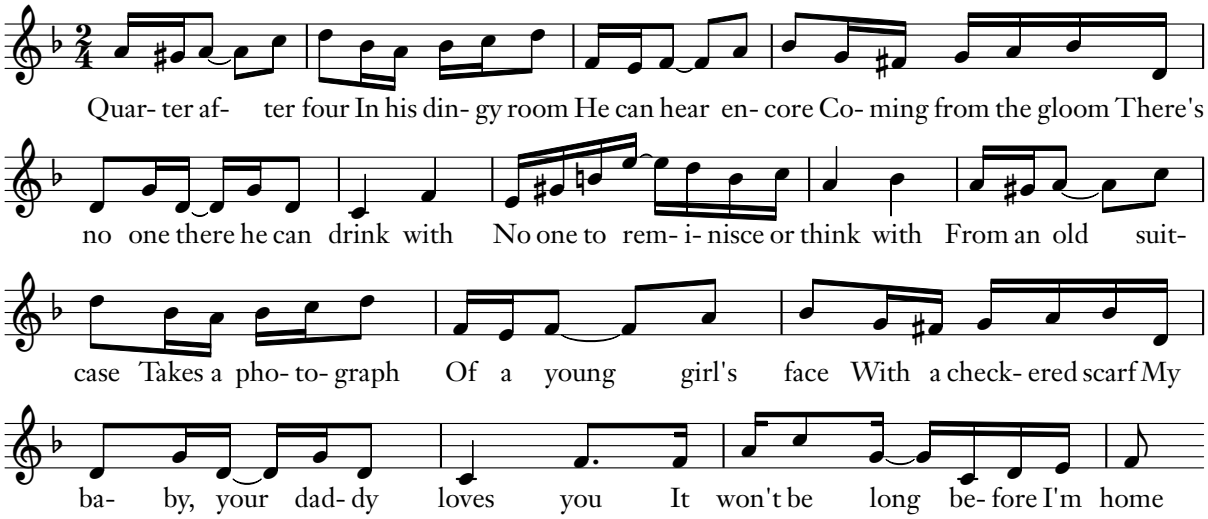


Figure 3.8: "The Entertainer," performed by Swingle II

To be sure, these are age-old-tropes: the sad clown forced to smile; the lights of the stage compared with the dinginess of life on the road—in short, the contradiction between the demands of public life; of ones employment, of the market, and one's personal, private desire. Not very saleable for Easy Listening. But it corresponds exactly to many of the forms of unhappiness that we've seen so far. And it corresponds exactly to the emplotments of Joplin's life-story that were also being made.

3.6. Joplin on Stage and Screen

The idea that Joplin's biography could be fashioned into a powerful narrative work occurred to many people in the 70s. Alongside a handful of mass market biographies, which were mostly rehashes of *TAPR*; and Doctorow's *Ragtime*, which condensed the story of Joplin with Kleist's *Michael Kohlhass*; an early ambitious attempt was Katherine Lombardo's *Joplin*, a play brought to the stage of the St. Nicholas Theater by a young William H. Macy in

1976. (This theater was actually just a few blocks south of the one that had heard Air's Joplin arrangements, about five years earlier.)

The play was not well received. "A pretentious mistake, insecurely performed, and full of cliches," declared the Chicago Daily News.[83] "Scott Joplin Dies Again" was the headline in the Chicago Tribune.[84] And the performance notes reveal a continually troubled production. The notes for January 29th record that morale was "way down." The February 5th show was "technically […] one big fuckup." A few days later, the notes read: "Waited for audience to arrive—they didn't."[85]

It's true that the script is a bit hackneyed. Much is made of Scott's (invented) desire to realize his father's deferred dreams:

> JOPLIN: Goddamn! […] I'm talking about going to college! My father couldn't go to **any** school…there was no place for him to go…hardly any places for me, either, but where there is, I've gotta go!…can't you understand how important this is to me…to all of us!…….my daddy ran off…thinkin' about us kids, sons of slaves and where we might end up…and he couldn't face us thinkin' WHAT he did…he just gave up!

Similarly, ragtime itself—which, in the world of the play, is Joplin's wholesale invention—is also an achievement made in his father's name:

> JOPLIN: When I began composing my music I'd say to him…"Daddy, this ragtime come all the way up from Africa, too! Making a stop on your banjo before it gets to my piano." Daddy laughed.

This is a little cringe, and it was ultimately cut. But it's necessary to recognize that these trite and tortured exchanges are results of the trip-wires we've already seen. The clichés are deployed to fill in the same aporias, and again reveal both the nebulous grip on Joplin's persona and the limits of many imaginations. Where could he have gotten his ambition

[83] Richard Christiansen, "This Week at the Theater," *Chicago Daily News*, January 29, 1977.
[84] Linda Winer, "Scott Joplin Dies Again on St. Nicholas Stage," *Chicago Tribune*, January 28, 1977, A3.
[85] "'Joplin,' Performance Record Sheets" (Chicago Public Library; St. Nicholas Theater Company Records, Box 3, Folder 2, n.d.).

from, if he weren't some kind of Hamlet? How could the history of the music be grasped except as the passage of a reified musical subject called Africa? Again we see the familiar, unmastered antinomy between orality and literacy. For if the music was, in fact, essentially an oral folk one, Joplin could *not* be its inventor—only its transcriber, its alphabetizer. But the cultural rupture entailed in this transcription requires an authenticating party to establish the continuity of the tradition—hence the new symbolic importance of Joplin's father. If the bearer of literacy is only (somehow) accomplishing the task begun by his father, the musical lineage remains intact.

And so, to a certain extent, these aesthetic failures stem from the same theoretical failures we saw earlier with Blesh and Schafer and Riedel, which consisted in making unnecessary equivalences between "European," "white," "classicism," "literate," and so on. The play's parsimonious script and stage design only made these equivalences clearer. Aside from the role of Joplin, every other character that appeared onstage was played by one of four actors, indicated in the script as "White Man," "White Woman," "Black Woman," and "Black Man." And so Joplin's mother, various prostitutes, and both of his romantic partners all appeared as avatars of one mythical "Black Woman." Likewise, both the sainted John Stark and ragtime's white adversaries were versions of "White Man." The set design affirmed these polar condensations by employing a rotating platform: scenes in whorehouses or riverboat or vaudeville stages on one side; scenes in backstage dressing rooms or in private domestic spaces on the other. Just like the Swingles, and thousands of film musicals, *Joplin* used the on-stage/backstage dichotomy to organize its materials.[86]

Given these heavy-duty polar oppositions, how does one make a narrative move forward? The typical strategy, of course, is a comedic marriage plot, in which the formation of a couple out of oppositional value systems represents the safe management of contradictions. But this

[86] Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

route was not available: the fascination Joplin exerted as a historical personage was precisely his failure—the fact that he died unreconciled to the world. And neither could he be effectively rendered as a tragic figure—the forces that brought him low were completely external. And so the "Joplin" play was compelled to furnish a Job-like Joplin, a never-ending victim whose steadfast belief in dignified Black musical expression would outlive his humiliation.

This turned out to be, as most critics agreed, a fairly depressing proposition for an evening at the theater. Most of the scenes of Joplin's abjection are repetitious and hackneyed, and nothing grates like shallow sentimentality. One semi-climactic scenario does leap out, however. Late in the play, Joplin is at home in his Harlem boarding house, working—as always—on *Treemonisha*. Or at least *trying* to: the racket of piano-roll playing ragtime somewhere else in the building is disturbing the peace he needs for his composition. "Listen to what they're doing to my music!" he yells to his wife. "Will you tell them to take that music out of this house?!"

The offensive music that enrages Joplin through the walls is "The Entertainer." And curiously enough, a similar scene is the capstone of the movie *Scott Joplin* (1977), starring Billy Dee Williams as the composer. The film's final scene finds Joplin succumbing to syphilitic nervousness while attempting to play the rag. His seizing hands refusing to guide the music to the half-cadence, he is ushered humiliatingly off the stage.

The scene is supposed to be climactic, but like Lombardo's script, it falls flat. Unlike Kathleen Lombardo's script, however, Christopher Knopf's screenplay did work very hard to make a marriage plot out of its oppositions. In fact—in addition to a subplot covering Joplin's unhappy marriage to Belle Hayden—the film aims to structure itself by way of two evolving relationships: one between Scott Joplin and the dissolute Creole composer/pianist Louis Chauvin; and the other between Scott Joplin and the white publisher-patron John Stark.

The Joplin/Chauvin dyad condensed a number of our familiar antagonisms. The primary one is the literacy/orality opposition, a theme which the film introduces at their first encounter. At an odd hour in a bawdy-house, Chauvin finds Joplin working at the piano with a pencil, and picks up his manuscript.



Figure 3.9: Joplin and Chauvin Meet, *Scott Joplin*

> CHAUVIN: You, uh, read that stuff?
>
> JOPLIN: I write it.
>
> CHAUVIN: Write it? Whatcha want to do that for?
>
> JOPLIN: To be heard.
>
> CHAUVIN: Well, I heard it. (Sits at piano and plays a convincing "Maple Leaf Rag" by ear.) What you mess around with that note-music for? You're the only one that can read it.

But Joplin dreams of a reception that Chauvin can hardly imagine—a public beyond the bordello, reachable through printed music. For Joplin, to write means "to be heard"—a locution repeated frequently and solemnly throughout the film. This ambition is met with skepticism by Chauvin, but ridiculed even more by their wider circle of Tenderloin colleagues. When Joplin accepts a low initial payment from Stark for "Maple Leaf Rag" in exchange for royalties, a bordello denizen named Poor Alfred—played by Taj Mahal—scoffs: "Boy on his way for to be a famous Black composer like all them other famous Black composers!"

Joplin sticks to his guns, and the movie proceeds to ground Joplin's beliefs in investment, pleasure-abstention, and concert music in his apparently thoroughly bourgeois lifestyle. It isn't long before Joplin is married and ensconsed in an impeccably decorated St. Louis manse, leading the life of a gentleman music teacher and composer. It's in this setting that Chauvin returns, to the obvious chagrin of Joplin's wife. Flashier than ever, two women on his arm, Chauvin grins at the elegant composer. "Well I'm looking at you and I'll tell you the truth—I've never seen such a dull-looking man."



Figure 3.10: Joplin and Chauvin Again, *Scott Joplin*

Their divergent worldviews are at this point in the plot the most pronounced, each attaining the worldly success they desire. Chauvin is playing high-class bordellos in Chicago. Always the hedonic realist, he brushes Joplin off when he complains that Chauvin has been playing "Maple Leaf Rag" in "three quarter time." "I play it on a cigar box if that's what they want!" Chauvin responds. But Chauvin is actually at the Joplin residence for business—he's been sent by the bawdy-house impresario Tom Turpin to ask Joplin if he'll be the "guest of honor" at a gala for madams from around the country. When Joplin initially declines, it's Chauvin's turn to be righteous:

> CHAUVIN: You playin' it safe?
> JOPLIN: What are you saying?
> CHAUVIN: I don't think much of this uptown stuff; messing around with piano scores.

JOPLIN: Louis…

CHAUVIN: A man any good he plays his music — you playin' it safe!

This persuades Joplin. After all, he "wants to be heard," and the real audience at a sporting house might indeed be as real a public as exists. And so he appears at the gala, prostituting his musical abilities for an audience of prostitutes, pimps, madams, and white patrons. The subsequent shame he feels is the spur for a new, even-greater ambition—"to put as much distance between myself and the Tenderloin as soon as possible." In a series of brief scenes, we find him rededicated to the cause of respectable music—composing an opera; advocating for the inclusion of ragtime at the St. Louis World's Fair—until a call from Chauvin brings him back to the sporting world. Chauvin, now gravely ill with syphilis, is sweaty and delirious. Sitting at the piano, he plays a tender, wistful strain, before turning to Joplin with a rueful shrug.

CHAUVIN: I know what it is, I just can't write it down. I never learned, and…I ain't got time.

JOPLIN: Ain't got time?

CHAUVIN: I got this sickness. It comes and goes. Live life from day to day! Maybe? … Maybe I did it wrong. Shoulda learned to write stuff down, like you. I don't know, maybe you did it right. Listen, I uh, I want you to help me. Help put my stuff down on paper. People knowing my name, Louis Chauvin.

And so the two musicians collaborate on a rag that will become "Heliotrope Bouquet," with Joplin playing midwife to Chauvin's natural, untutored genius in a scene that anticipates Salieri taking dictation at Mozart's sick bed in *Amadeus*. The scene consummates the marriage of Joplin and Chauvin. Chauvin needs Joplin's *bildung*; but perhaps, the movie suggests, Joplin needs Chauvin as well: there is a kind of *joie de vivre* in Chauvin's music—a knowledge of actual sentiment—that could only have eluded the buttoned-up Joplin. Chauvin will soon die, but he will die happily, having achieved immortality through the medium of Joplin's literacy. However one feels about this kind of plotting, it must be reckoned as sturdy



Figure 3.11: The Marriage of Joplin and Chauvin, *Scott Joplin*

Hollywood craft. By the end of their story, Joplin and Chauvin have come to terms with their opposing ethical systems, and have even been able to recognize the other's respective virtues. The Joplin-Chauvin marriage, as inked in "Heliotrope Bouquet," will be richer than either man apart.

It is the sturdiness of this narrative construction that reveals the creakiness of its parallel plot: the Joplin/Stark relationship. Although the movie knows that the two men must overcome their differences, it can't decide what those differences are, or how they could be unfolded into a productive conflict. The first meeting makes the screen-writers dilemma clear. John Stark, as Sedalia's local music paragon, has just tuned the piano in the brothel. As he is leaving, Scott Joplin—who does not yet know Stark's name—irritates him by demonstrating that a note is still flat. An intense standoff occurs in front of an audience of the brothel's Black workers.

STARK: You're an entertainer?

JOPLIN: And a composer.

STARK: You're published?

JOPLIN: I will be.

STARK: Will you be? When will that happen?

JOPLIN: When I am heard.

STARK: The man to be heard by in Sedalia is Mr. John Stark.

JOPLIN: Then I will be heard by John Stark.

STARK: Best of luck, Mr. Joplin.



Figure 3.12: Joplin and Stark Meet

Has Joplin's self-assured ambition just ruined his chance "to be heard" by the man who could open doors for his career? No. The next scene finds Stark impressed by Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" at a cutting contest. He calls the composer into the office of his publishing house, and raves to him about his music, which he calls "Vital, but disciplined!"

> STARK: Good thing, discipline! Necessary for any artist! Now your music—you can play it, you can dance to it, you can listen to it. Can you write it? Can you put it down on paper? Most of you people can't. You can improvise, but you can't put it down.
>
> JOPLIN: Oh, I can write it.
>
> STARK: Where'd you learn how to do that?
>
> JOPLIN: In college.

Joplin is already a learned composer. The screenplay's problem is that Joplin—as the audience has already derived from his relationship with Chauvin—begins the movie at the end of the plot. According to narrative necessity, Stark should be Joplin's prosthetic father or lover, seducing Joplin into an unknown but more beautiful world, just as Joplin will lead Chauvin into the world of literate, immortal music. But the seduction has already happened before the movie begins—there's literally nothing for Stark to teach Joplin. When Stark grants him royalties in perpetuity and then proceeds to explain what the term means, Joplin interrupts: "I know what it means." The exchange summarizes the movie's conception of their relationship and its major flaw. The hard-bitten Stark has wisdom to give Joplin, who is already wise. How can this a story make?

In response to this awkward situation, the screenplay continually lurches into incoherence. Knowing that the Joplin/Stark plot needs a scene where Joplin submits to Stark's vision, the film briefly turns Joplin into a Chauvin-style sport so that Stark has a Joplin to parent:



Figure 3.13: Stark Seduces Joplin, *Scott Joplin*

> STARK: Oh to be a Black piano player in a brothel in the United States of America! Who could have a care, playing for pimps, prostitutes and alcoholics!
>
> JOPLIN: A man's only in this world once.
>
> STARK: If he doesn't die of whiskey or syphilis before he's forty.
>
> JOPLIN: And nothing but money comes in these places. They'd just as soon tip you five dollar bill as a dollar if they're in the mood and the music was good.

STARK: I concluded that you wanted to be a composer.

JOPLIN: For fifty dollars in dimes?

STARK: I was wrong in my conclusion.

This is bewildering, to say the least—we've already come to know Joplin as a man who wants "to be heard." But it's not as bewildering as Stark's subsequent monologue, which—thanks more to the magic of movie formula than eloquence—convinces Joplin to finally set aside the Tenderloin ethos he's just acquired for a shot at a larger world:

> STARK: Come with me, and you will play for people who will not hear you. Some, who will smirk or hold their ears. Or even worse, ignore you completely. You've experienced it, you know what I'm talking about—it's akin to a kick in an open wound. The option? Withdraw from the process: retreat. Do not compete.
>
> You don't want any of this. You want a chance to be heard. But you want guarantees against failure. Immunity against being ignored. I can't give you that—immunity. It means: "Stay where you are, Mr. Joplin."

The jerry-rigged seduction works: Joplin and Stark join forces. But their relationship will soon falter on the very ambition that Stark has supposedly seduced Joplin into (and which he already had). The publisher declines to back the composer's opera: "I should have remembered that we see life differently," Stark tells Joplin, despite the fact that they don't. The idea of a ragtime opera is "career suicide," says Stark, a strange sentiment from a man whose initial case to Joplin consisted of fighting for an unknown audience and who explicitly admitted the possibility of failure. We've already seen Stark tell Joplin and others that Joplin is a "genius, truly a great American composer," the rival of Chopin and Schubert. Furthermore, we've already seen and will continue to see Stark suffer in the marketplace for his refusal to compromise on ragtime music of high quality. The movie desperately needs Joplin and Stark to be characters who "see life differently," but this can only be accomplished by constant swerves in character-definition. Joplin is a shiftless sport or an uncompromising

genius depending on whether or not Stark is an uncompromising musical artisan or a small business philistine.

Despite the fact that Stark and Joplin lack the fundamental conflict to make a marriage plot sensical, the movie barrels toward its climactic scene of humiliation. Joplin, hoping to secure backers for his opera, has rented a theater to perform selections. Only two men are in the audience—an unnamed white potential patron, and John Stark. Inexplicably, instead of introducing vocal numbers, Joplin sits at the piano and plays "The Entertainer."[87] Before he collapses from syphilitic nerves, the piano music crosses over into an ensemble performance in the underscore. The camera zooms into Stark's face, and a dissolve into a montage of sepia-tinted flashbacks implies that we are privy to his reminiscences of a complicated life with his narrative partner Joplin.

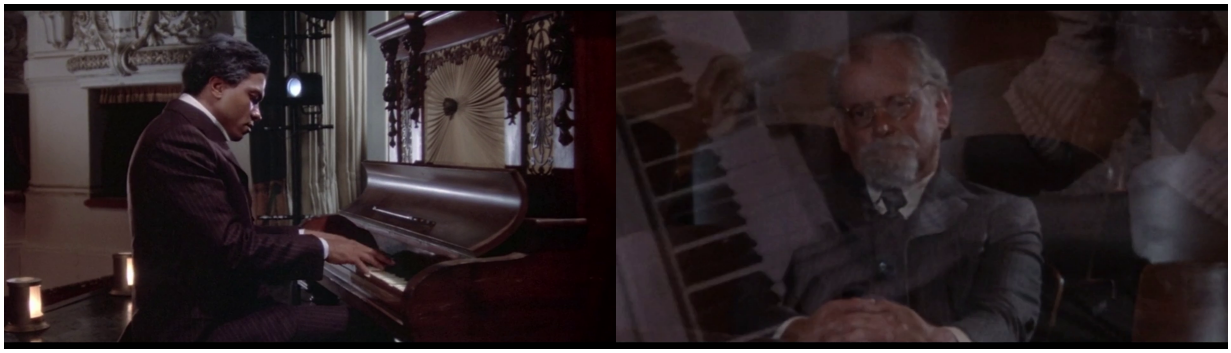


Figure 3.14: The Unconsummated Relationship, *Scott Joplin*

Except: the memories *can't* be Stark's. For in addition to highlights of their relationship, we review moments from Joplin's childhood, and intimate moments between Joplin and his wife. The attempt to make the Joplin/Stark couple the narrative's telescoping structure can't but falter. But it also testifies to the broader problems this chapter has surveyed. The film's John Stark is essentially a redundant character. When he has an ethos, he is more or less merely the white double of Joplin. He is required by the film for the same reason he was

[87] Even the screenwriter in his memoir refers to this scene as Joplin playing "his operatic score." Christopher Knopf, *Will the Real Me Please Stand up* (Georgia: BearManor Media, 2010), 151.

required by Blesh—he represents the passage of authentic Black musical culture to white America. But the film is stymied by the narrative prerogative to make Stark *also* the passage of Euro-American values to Joplin, a prerogative it repudiates in the Joplin/Chauvin plot. Fatally hamstrung, the specificity and genius of Joplin—the ostensible premise for any possible *Scott Joplin*—essentially disappears.

I am insisting that this narrative poverty is not an unforced error. This point might be put most strongly by comparing the narrative choices of *Scott Joplin* to other ready-to-hand emplotments. Why, for example, could the film not emplot Joplin's attempted passage from the Sedalia bordello to New York opera as a *bildungsroman*? Why couldn't the film emplot Joplin's post-"Maple Leaf Rag" career stagnation as a "price-of-fame" tale, as had recently been done for Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl* (1968)? Why couldn't Joplin's ragtime have been served up as a nostalgia epic—an occasion for a walk down a semi-historical memory lane, as had earlier been done for Irving Berlin in *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938) or in *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* (1939)?

Each of these possible alternative solutions would run aground on the same antinomy that afflicted the actual *Scott Joplin*. For they would each presuppose the existence of either a public or a collective subject that could serve as the authentic audience for Joplin's music or the authentic bearer of his memory.[88] Despite the new salience of "The Entertainer," the public theorized by Joplin's *Treemonisha* was no more possible in the 1970s than it was in the 1910s—a dual competency in the semiotics of grand opera and of Black American folk culture was by then a quaint and curious object of address.[89] And the mass subject that

[88] As Frederic Jameson would later point out, it was exactly this historically impossible subject that poignantly narrates Doctorow's *Ragtime*. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 1, no. 146 (July –August 1984): 70.

[89] It cannot be emphasized enough that Joplin's *Treemonisha*, the story of the enlightenment of a rural Black community, ends with a ravishing depiction of a folk dance, the justly-loved "Slow Drag." Despite the tendency to assimilate the work to Black bourgeois ideologies of "uplift," this decision indicates that Joplin—unlike most of his white 1970s interpreters—did not conceive the project of rational culture along European lines.

could use a Brice or a Berlin or the Castles to savor (and fabulate) its pre-War innocence did not exist for Joplin either: the generation of Black Americans who might have regarded the composer's story as also theirs was long gone. In other words, the condition of all these available emplotments would be something like a "post-racial" American society—a society that simply did not exist. In its place stood an assortment of unconvincing memorials to Scott Joplin, the musician who was supposedly its herald.

3.7. …an analyst would know why

> Please tell Josh Rifkin that, next to our own efforts, of course, we love the Joplin rags. I told Mary Ellen they satisfied something deep down inside me & she is in complete agreement. Especially the first two on side one (my favorite of all is the 2nd rag.) I'm sure an analyst would know why the 2nd one just about does me in.

What would Leslie Guinn's analyst have said?

If his analyst had been Theodore Reik he might have had some ideas. In a peculiar book called *The Haunting Melody*—brought out by Evergreen Press—Reik had written extensively about one of his own earworms: a few bars from the last movement of Mahler's *Second Symphony*.[90] This music had afflicted him during an emotionally trying week when Reik was drafting a eulogy for his friend and teacher, Karl Abraham. In the course of his self-analysis, Reik discovered that he had harbored contradictory feelings of love, admiration, and animosity for his mentor. A part of him had greeted the death as an opportunity for his own self-actualization; in some way he had *wanted* Abraham to die. And it turns out that the exact musical passage that haunted Reik had its origins in a similar moment in Mahler's life. For

[90] Theodor Reik, *The Haunting Melody: Psychoanalytic Experiences in Life and Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1983).

the text of Reik's Mahlerian earworm were words which Mahler had heard at the funeral of Hans von Bulow, a *maestro* who loomed in Mahler's psyche much as Abraham had in Reik's. Through a tangled musical transference, Reik decided, Mahler's feelings toward Bulow had become the musical mediation of Reik's towards Abraham.

Perhaps this is farfetched as a general theory of earworms. It depends almost entirely on "verbal" and anecdotal associations from the biography of Mahler, and very little on musical features. What could such a theory teach us about an earworm without words? But maybe this line of interpretation is useful in the case of music that *is* saturated with "extra-musical" significations. Mahler is certainly one example. This chapter has insisted that "The Entertainer" in the 1970s was one as well. I don't think it's wrong to claim that for a brief moment Joplin was something like a Mahler: a composer whose own psychic life and experience of social exclusion seemed to have been deposited in the melodies distractedly hummed by a "so-called" mass unconscious.

Furthermore, as this chapter has documented, there was a definite eulogistic and memorial quality to the Joplin revival. Many of its participants seemed to want above all to give Joplin his overdue proper burial. And for this reason, I think it's not really that far-fetched to claim that something like "the mass psyche" resembled Theodore Reik's at Karl Abraham's funeral; just as Reik's had possibly resembled Mahler's at Bulow's funeral. But whose funeral was it this time?

In a way, it was ragtime itself that had died. The Joplin revival of the 1970s, the ragtime revival—it's actually more correct to describe these events as ragtime's last stand. There is still today a community of ragtime enthusiasts, but it's definitely smaller than it ever was. And in terms of its circulation as a "musical topic"—well, it's in video games and in ice cream trucks. But the Easy Listening orchestras that had tenanted the store of popular music's memories don't really exist anymore. In fact, as Tim Anderson notes, the entire genre of

Easy Listening itself collapsed around 1980.[91] Which was also when Teresa Sterne—the creative force behind Nonesuch Records—was dismissed from her post.[92]

But, of course, it wasn't just ragtime that was dying in the 1970s: it was the entire socio-historical structure that had supported it, and kept it afloat, and which ragtime, in some ways, had made audible. For the historical period bounded by Joplin's birth in the 1860s and his proper burial in the 1970s encloses almost perfectly what most historians of capitalism would regard as a coherent epoch. As I have been previewing, and will argue in a more sustained fashion in the next chapter, this epoch—this mode of production—can be fairly described as requiring and representing an incredible machinery for *incorporating* staggering quantities of people and culture into the social rubric of waged labor. In short, this period produced, and briefly sustained, a fitfully conscious working class with a remarkably active class *unconscious*.

Which is why, at the end of the 60s, when the contradictions of this mode of production could no longer be managed, when the profit rate began to decline, when the social machinery failed, when mass incorporation was no longer tenable, when—as Jefferson Cowie has put it—"the unified notion of a working class crumbled"; then, in the "last days of" this working class—ragtime could also sound like the collapse and the failure of this incorporation.[93] A failing that could be heard in the creaky attempts to discipline "The Entertainer" into the norms of incorporated music of both the "low" and "high" cultures of the working class. A failing that could be heard in the creaky narrations of Scott Joplin's life story. A failing that could be heard above all in the haunting music which suggested melancholy, alienated entertainers. Perhaps Joplin's own beautiful failure to achieve *his* musical disalienation finally found its true vocation as the music haunting a post-industrial America that, since his second death in 1974, has not ceased to fall apart.

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[91] Anderson, *Making Easy Listening*.

[92] Is Horowitz and Paul Grein, "Nonesuch Label Being 'restructured'," *Billboard*, December 15, 1979.

[93] Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2012).

4 Towards a Materialist Framework for Music History

Some recent scholarship in music has been interested in discerning the nature of musical categories, and often with the goal of uncovering their relation to the "worldly" categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on. It is probably proper to note that this interest in musical categories is related to a reckoning that the discipline—like many disciplines—is experiencing. Many people in music studies are wondering if and how the academic study of music is separable from projects conceptualized with terms colonialism, white supremacy, heteronormativity, or however else one conceptualizes the dominating aspects of our present. At the moment, it is difficult *not* to think that even the most apparently neutral systems of classification provide ideological cover for more sinister systems of power. The very name for the traditional corpus of musicology—Western Art Music—seems increasingly false. How certain are we in the actuality of any of the individual terms of this mouthful? Not to mention the concept they name in their combination?

And so one might turn to an archaeology of musical categories. Perhaps if we expose the *constructed* nature of musical genre we might at the same time uncover some high and dry ground from which to survey the musical and social field. But these efforts tend to be dissatisfying. Music, as we all probably once thought, seems often to be transcending the

world; to be eluding our understandings. As much as we try to bring it down to the earth of "social" relations it escapes our grasp.[1] How are we to justify our apparently vivid sense that we are encountering "the social" when we encounter musical distinctions?[2]

4.1. Three Typical Mistakes

I will present a train of thought that I think will help, or will at least help me. But let me first summarize a number of mistaken tendencies that crop up frequently in theorizations that attempt to relate social categories to musical categories—three banana peels that we have to avoid slipping on.

1. A tendency to assume that the distinctions of prestige and power in the social field are directly mirrored in the musical field.

This assumption is advertised by the following sentence which I draw from a brilliant essay by Eric Drott, although one may find versions of this thought in many places:

> Given the close association of genres with social categories defined in terms of race, class, gender, age, and/or nationality, individuals will often value those music with which they identify strongly.[3]

[1] There is of course, a robust discourse on the affordances of music's seeming ineffability. The position I will advance below regards "ineffability" itself as a social fact—that it is an aspect that music takes on only under specific material conditions; and that the paradoxical situation of a robust discourse about the ineffable needs itself a theoretical elaboration. Michael Gallope, *Deep Refrains: Music, Philosophy, and the Ineffable* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017); Michael Gallope et al., "Vladimir Jankélévitch's Philosophy of Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 1 (2012): 215–56; Vladimir. Jankélévitch and Carolyn. Abbate, *Music and the Ineffable* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?"; Carolyn Abbate, "Sound Object Lessons," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 69, no. 3 (2016): 793–829.

[2] Why do I put scare quotes around "social"? To indicate that this is also a very *particular* way of conceiving of what's outside and maybe wider than music, and I've used "worldly" to denote the same concept. I don't think I need to be more precise right now, so I'll just warn the reader that this is an ad hoc formulation by using scare quotes.

[3] Eric Drott, "The End(S) of Genre," *Journal of Music Theory* 57, no. 1 (2013): 24. Similar ideas underpin Robin James, "Is the Post- in Post-Identity the Post- in Post-Genre?," *Popular Music* 36, no. 1 (January 2017): 21–32; Fabian. Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Vilde Aaslid, "The Poetic Mingus and the Politics of Genre in String Quartet No. 1," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 9, no. 1 (February 2015): 1–25.

While there maybe certain spheres where this might seem true, I hope I can make it clear that it is very *obviously* wrong. Ideas like these probably descend from the American take-up of Bourdieu, which has somewhat uncritically taken an account of French society to be an account of society in general, and which frequently adheres to a class reductionism that would embarrass the most vulgar Marxist.[4] The primary trouble with this (perhaps pseudo-) Bourdieuian view is that it believes that everyone is somehow sitting in their proper socio-cultural seat. The elites like their elite music; the lower middle-class likes their lower middle class-music; the whites like their white music; the particularly-bad whites like their particularly-bad white music; and so on.

Is this a plausible view of culture? I think not. To paraphrase Stuart Hall: it would be simple and convenient if we found an obviously white supremacist society in possession of an obviously white supremacist culture.[5] But the fact of the matter is we don't. We have, in fact—among other things—a popular music that has been continually refreshed by appropriations of African American musical practices that often—though not always—retain their symbolic link to African American life *even* in their appropriation. It would be impossible to understand the history of popular music in America without appealing to categories like minstrelsy, ragtime, jazz, rock & roll, and hip hop, each of which would be impossible to truly account for without referring to their social and historical origins in African American culture, either in real or ideal or imagined form.[6]

This is, of course, *not* to say that the appropriation, fetishization, and exoticization of African American music in popular music is innocent of social domination. Very, very far from it, and I will expand on these themes below. But it is to say, contra Drott, that many

[4] Michael Denning, "The End of Mass Culture," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 37 (1990): 11–12.

[5] "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media" [1981] in Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 104.

[6] Or, of course, all three simultaneously!

music listeners—like, say, the white majority of the United States—have always valued musics with which they supposedly cannot "identify strongly." At least, that is, if "identifying strongly" is taken to mean "corresponding to one's own race, class, gender, age, and/or nationality."

2. The tendency to assume that musical distinctions mirror social distinctions is related to a tendency to flatten the social field—to consider all social categories through the concept of "identity."

This tendency is advertised everywhere we recite the semi-canonical forms of social difference—the "race, gender, sexuality, class, et al." litany that I just quoted a version of from Drott and dropped a version of myself above. But it is also advertised when we try to organize this arbitrarily long series by speaking of "intersectionality." An implication of both of these habits is that the differences are of more-or-less the same kind, and moreover that the inner differences that they subsume (between white and black; woman and man and so on) are themselves of more-or-less the same kind: that one has a gender identity in more-or-less the same way that one has a racial identity, or a class identity, or a sexuality, and so on. And also that one *is* a woman in more-or-less the same way that another *is* a man; that one *is* black in more-or-less the same way that another *is* white.

Such assumptions hover in the background of the following quotation from Robin James, although, again, there are any number of texts that make similar claims:

> It is very easy to associate certain racial and/or ethnic groups with specific, usually folk-based music: a quick survey of the radio dial and the way various stations market themselves tells us that hip hop is "black," salsa is "Latin," and rock is "white." Even when critiquing essentialisms such as this, academia is fond of claiming that specific styles and genres are expressive or representative of aspects of racial identity and race politics.[7]

[7] Robin James, *The Conjectural Body: Gender, Race, and the Philosophy of Music* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 5. Other recent examples include Veronika Muchitsch and Ann Werner, "The Mediation of

What I want to draw out here is a crucial difference between race and ethnicity that James elides. For if we can agree that we can draw a customary distinction between race and ethnicity—that determinations are "ethnic" when they refer to the *cultural* practices of groups of people: things like language (or dialect), religious custom, styles of dress and adornment, food, and so on; while "race" names a *social* distinction enforced by a particular society—the problem that James is trying to show us is no problem at all.[8] In very important ways, salsa *is* in fact Latin—it is a form of music that was invented by people from Latin America in diasporic communities in the United States, primarily the Bronx.[9] In just the same way, hip hop *is* black—although, being interested in emphasizing the specifity of "ethnicity," I would prefer to say something like "African American" or "Black," observing the convention of treating the name of *a people* as a proper name. It is a form of music that was invented by African Americans (among them, importantly some say, recent migrants from the Caribbean); fascinatingly, again in the Bronx![10] There is a breathtaking history that could be written about how it came to be that legacies of the two major colonial systems of the New World—one Hispanaphone, in many respects pre-capitalist (and probably crucially, *Catholic*); the other anglophone, in every respect capitalist (and probably crucially,

Genre, Identity, and Difference in Contemporary (Popular) Music Streaming," *Twentieth-Century Music*, 2024, 2AD, 1–27; Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*; Mikkel Vad, "Whiteness and the Problem of Colourblind Listening: Revisiting Leonard Feather's 1951 Blindfold Test with Roy Eldridge," *Twentieth-Century Music*, 2024.

[8] Because so much energy is expended justifying the existence of racialized domination, it is not often enough noticed how difficult the concept of "race" actually is. One of the discursive roles it plays is to continually efface the boundaries between biology, culture, and society — even in the thinking of those who wish to contest racist discourses. It is common, for example, to regard the biologization of social distinction as the hallmark of racist thinking, but, as Étienne Balibar has noted, culture can play the same role as biology in the racial imagination. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991). On these themes, see also: Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*; Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000).

[9] This is, of course, a highly contestable statement. For an interesting litigation of the New Yorkiness of salsa, see "Salsa's to New York like an Apple's to Sauce!" in Vernon Boggs, *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (New York: Excelsior Music Pub. Co, 1992).

[10] The "Caribbean-ness" of early hip hop is also highly contested. For the canonical early view, see Tricia Rose (Author), *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). For a more recent contrary view, see Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

not Catholic)—produced a dynamic and durable musical expression at the same moment of crisis, and in the same outer province of one of the capital cities of the twentieth century. But this history can't be written unless we admit that ethnicity and culture are not equivalent to race; and that not all forms of "essentialism" are analogical—even if we tend to subsume them all under the rubric of "identity."[11]

Let me be clear: This is not to say that we can *collapse* racial difference into ethnic/cultural difference—far from it! But we can make distinctions that help us ask and answer the questions we want.

There is one determination in this passage from James that is unequivocally racial: whiteness. It is clear that one *cannot* be white in the same *way* that another is black (or African American) or Latin because the contents of both black (or African American) experience and "Latin" diasporic experience can be rendered in cultural terms, while only racists can seriously sustain the notion that whiteness is cultural.[12] So if we agree that rock music is "white"—and it strikes me that it could be fruitful to think how it is—it could only *be* "white" in a way different from how salsa *is* Latin.[13]

One of our basic problems when we attempt to connect the "musical" field to the "social" field is that such attempts tend to presume that they are isolable. And because of the basic nature of *explanation*, our tendency will be to pretend to restore solid, substantial *social* causes to the diaphanous, contingent *musical* effects. But there will always be local controversies on either side, and these will often simply be ignored. And so "critical" accounts which render the shifting nature of musical features end up simply being resolved into social facts which

[11] On these issues, see also David Brackett, "Questions of Genre in Black Popular Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 25, no. 1/2 (2005): 73–92; Georgina Born, "Music and the Materialization of Identities," *Journal of Material Culture* 16, no. 4 (December 2011): 376–88; David Brackett, *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016).

[12] I say "seriously" because any of us can jokingly sustain the notion of white culture—the lack of spice in the food, rhythm in the dance, presence of mayonnaise on the bun, or what-have-you.

[13] For a recent discussion of the whiteness of rock music, see Jack Hamilton, *Just around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

appear solid only because they remain naive accounts. (Robin James's critique of musical essentialism depends on *not being critical* about the social categories invoked.) Furthermore, our attempts to bridge the musical and the social field will often assume that whatever concepts fall in one field are not structured in advance *by* or *with* those of the other.

3. This flattening of the social field corresponds to a tendency to flatten the musical field—to imagine that all music "is" in more-or-less the same way.

Obviously, nobody *affirms* this belief—all of us music studies people believe in the particularity of our objects of study. And yet we also often have to believe, sort of, in the existence of something like music-in-general, if only for the sake of employment or of being polite to our peers.[14] One therefore finds a thought like the following, which seems natural in one sense, but I which I want to estrange. Here is Theo Gracyk arguing why Beethoven's D-minor Symphony cannot be called "popular music" despite the fact that its melody is widely known.

> Taken as a whole, the *Ninth* cannot be popular music, for it is quintessentially music for concert performance, demanding sustained attention and analytical listening.[15]

What I want to draw out is how *tautological* this thesis is; how it is simply begging the question it presumes to answer. "Taken as a whole"—well we might as well leave it at that! For what would it mean to take a Hank Williams song—Graczyk's preferred counterexample—"as a whole"? Is it even possible? Would a Hank Williams song be broken into parts in the

[14] In a way, I am only repeating points made, in a different spirit and to different ends, by Philip Bohlman in Philip V. Bohlman, "Ontologies of Music," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford University Press, 2001), 17–34. Bohlman's essay famously begins: "Music may be what we think it is; it may not be." The line of argument I develop below has less to do with what attributes one might attach to music—which, as Bohlman demonstrates, the diversity of cultural practices makes infinitely vast—and more to do with what forms of social experience make the bare concept of music stable enough to admit of practically infinite predication. Not all categories produce or admit the kinds of skepticism that Bohlman gave grounds for.

[15] Theodore Gracyk, "Popular Music," in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy*, 2020, 537.

same way that the *Ninth* would? And, while I think Graczyk is right to say that the *Ninth* is "quintessentially music for concert performance," it is hard to imagine how this sentence might be rewritten for Hank Williams. What is a Hank Williams song "quintessentially for"? Furthermore, while certainly it would be strange to submit Hank Williams to the same *form* of analytic listening that we apply to Beethoven, aren't there still ways in which one listening to Hank Williams is analytic and another is not? Can we be certain and general about what individual musics "demand"? In other words—a sentence like Graczyk's is tantamount to saying: Beethoven is art music because it is art music, while Hank Williams is popular music because it is popular music. This is obviously not false—how could it be?—but it's not telling us anything either.

I don't think it's strange to find someone spinning their wheels in the mud when trying to explain what "art music" is. As we know from a few centuries of dispute, the concept of "art music"—or "autonomous music," or "absolute music"—and the concept of the "social" interact like the positive ends of two magnets. But Gracyk's essay is particularly interesting to me because of the way it backs into "social" explanation. Ostensibly a *philosophical* investigation of the concept of popular music, Gracyk is compelled ultimately to ground the distinctions between art and popular music in the social form that sustains them, claiming that "no music counts as popular music unless its originating society has both."[16] The peculiar thing about Gracyk's account, however, is that despite his insistence that his categories are both mutually constitutive and unthinkable without their social basis, there is no whiff of dialectics. And because Gracyk knows in advance that Hank Williams "counts" as popular music while Beethoven "counts" as art music, supposed musical distinctions between Beethoven and Hank Williams get palmed off as conceptual distinction between art and popular musics. But the logic of the concepts themselves do not come into view.

[16] Gracyk, "Popular Music," 543.

4.2. Historical Materialism to The Rescue

Actually, not really. "Historical materialism" signifies lots of things and most of the things it signifies are wrong. In this section I pivot to some recent music scholarship with a historical materialist bent, but which I also believe makes some crucial and revealing mistakes. Get ready for some more "banana peels." Which "historical materialist" beliefs in music scholarship are wrong? Well, for one:

1. The belief that music needs to be "accounted" for.

One of the pervasive traps of materialism is functionalism—the hunch that every element in the social totality exists because it *does* something to reproduce the social totality. Sometimes this veers into a kind of social democratic conviction that the lack of recognition for a particular function is an injustice requiring correction. I think these tendencies are present in Eric Drott's recent article on music as social reproduction, in which he argues that the restorative and mood-managerial affordances of music might increase the productivity of workers.[17] There is nothing in principle *wrong* with this idea, and Drott does not claim that it is the *only* way to explain music. But the suggestion throughout the article is that theorizing the "function" of music is an inherently materialist approach.

In some way it is. But identifying the way it is allows us to distinguish between historical materialism and the materialism of the thrifty capitalist, which Drott's article better represents. Drott wants us to realize that music produced as an unpaid form of labor (e.g when performed, generally by women, as domestic labor) or a commodity purchased as entertainment by a worker (e.g. as a Spotify subscription, a Walkman) might be reckoned as a means to increase the output of workers. This may be true, but if it is, it is also as banal as recognizing that factory machinery increases the output of workers. Marx didn't write the famous chap-

[17] Eric Drott, "Music in the Work of Social Reproduction," *Cultural Politics* 15, no. 2 (July 1, 2019): 162–83.

ter on machinery in *Capital* to explain that machines made more commodities in less time, he wrote it to explain how *machinery*—along with the *forms of science* they entailed—were entailments of the commodity form itself, and thereby also riven with its contradictions.

Bryan Parkhurst and Stephan Hammel attempt to bring Marx's theorization of technology to bear on the questions of pitch, tone, and note in their contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Concepts in Music Theory*. But like Drott, their article engages in a kind of accounting, albeit of a historical kind. We learn, for example, that our conceptions of the fixity of a note in equal temperament is a product of the interests of piano manufacturers. Perhaps this is partially true. But to overemphasize it means regarding actuality as something like a conspiracy perpetrated by the capitalists, rather than as a struggle between various participants. It means slipping on a second, related banana peel.

2. The belief that we understand aspects of music adequately only if we regard them as cultural effects of economic causes.

I've gotten this language from Parkhurst and Hammel themselves.

> [T]he fact that the principal unit of significance in most music-theoretical inquiry remains the musical work—an assumption so ubiquitous, and so entwined in the practical warp and woof of music theory as an institutionalized activity, that we may forget to see it as an *explanandum* that stands in need of an /explanans/—is a fact that can be understood adequately only if it is recognized as a cultural effect of an economic cause.

Like any usable heuristic, this neat division between "culture" and "the economy" conceals as much as it reveals, and also speeds past the century's worth of debate among Marxists about how to make sense of the relations between base and superstructure. A satisfying materialist account would demonstrate, not how a "unit of significance" corresponds to an economic once, but how contradictions at the level of significance relate to contradictions elsewhere, including in what could provisionally be termed "the economy," including the distinction

between the two levels, and including especially why and how *this* "economic" contradiction finds the kind of stability it does at the level of significance. Otherwise, we find ourselves in the bind that Marx pointed out in his "Theses on Feuerbach," in which the supposed materialist is somehow always-already in possession of a true view onto knowledge that everyone else lacks. But "the educator must himself be educated": both the naive *and* critical perspective must be induced by the given.[18] We must not *dispense* with the old explanation—we must begin with it. In other words, we must avoid a second third and final banana peel:

3. The belief that our habits of mind and received forms of knowledge are barriers to materialist inquiry.

This is also suggested by Drott in the article just mentioned, which attributes the uneven development of Marxism in music scholarship to the latter's disciplinary divisions:

> The trouble that Marxian or materialist accounts have encountered in gaining a foothold in music studies is also due to dynamics specific to the discipline. Crucial in this regard has been its historic division along racialized and classed lines into a series of distinct subdisciplines, with Western art music the province of musicology and music theory, traditional and/or non- Western music the province of ethnomusicology, and popular music the province of a relatively new interdisciplinary formation, situated somewhere in the interstices of cultural studies, media studies, and music studies.

I don't necessarily quibble with this characterization of the field, but I want to suggest that the argument moves too fast when it proposes that these divisions are ultimately redrawings of "racialized and classed lines," and also moves too fast when it proposes that coloring deliberately outside of the lines—by taking up what Drott calls a "praxiological" approach—is the way out of the impasse. We have reached the other side of the problem we encountered with Theo Gracyk above. Where Gracyk flailed in distinguishing art music from popular

[18] Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 422.

music, here Drott suggests that these distinctions are more incidental "historic constructions" than bearers of meaning. But it is the vocation of historical materialism to ask about concepts, to see how the logic of the concepts themselves is related to relations—groupings, arrangements—between people.

4.3. The Logic of the Concepts Themselves

Does this phrase even mean anything? *I* think it does, but to be perfectly candid, I don't know how much money I would wager on it. Nevertheless, I think that the only possibility of having a rigorous way of relating music to the "social" world is by having a strong view on the reality of concepts. In other words: to believe—or at least to proceed as if we believe—that concepts are implicated in historical reality in determinate ways; that our empirical possession of determinate concepts reveals—albeit in perhaps circuitous ways—an actual historical reality. This is only to repeat the thought that opened this essay—that concepts, as mental happenings which group together units, are children of actual groupings in the world.

So long as we begin with individual concepts and hunt for their social equivalents, our methods will always be *ad hoc*, circular, or reductive. We need to begin with musical categories *as distinctions*, which is only possible if we study them in relation—as together comprising something like systems of categories; or as transformations within a sequence of categories. Moreover, I suggest we begin more or less where Gracyk and Drott throw up their hands—by thinking through the commonly made distinctions between "folk" (or "traditional"), "popular," and "art" music. Generally speaking, people writing on musical categorizations have tended to agree that these form the three essential divisions, and, as Drott has already pointed out, they accord (in some way) with the division of music scholarship in

America.[19] I also think that the division is true: that these three terms name the limits on the *kinds* of music that there are, although, as I will argue, not necessarily because there are limits on music, but because there are limits on the way we can *think* about music—limits that are historically given. But let me first offer some provisional "definitions," which I hope are not controversial. These definitions aim to capture the meaning-in-use of the concepts—not to argue for their validity.

Folk music emerges from—which is always to say: folk music is *imagined* or *theorized* to emerge from—a *Gemeinschaft* social formation, often a pre-capitalist or residual one. It assumes an organic and stable relationship between practitioners and laypeople with little division of labor. "Folk music" is the music *of a people*; and, moreover, a people understood to be essentially like a *family* with traditions, customs, habits—*ways* of life; distinct, and often peculiar ways of looking at the world. Folk music is "just so" music—to ask why a note falls in a certain place in a certain performance is either to miss the point or to call into existence a complex theoretical edifice—like say, Lomax's cantometrics—that also seems to miss the point.

Popular music, on the other hand, can only come into its own as a concept if there exists a mass audience formed by market relations. If the concept of folk music is genetically related to the concept of a *Gemeinschaft* people, the concept of popular music is related to a *Gesellschaft* people-*as-aggregate*. The *people* that popular music is aimed *at* is a mass of ticket-

[19] The question of religious music might initially recommend itself as a fourth category. (Philip V. Bohlman, for example, writes: "In many western models […] folk music […] forms a stratum apart from, yet contiguous with, art, popular, or religious music.") Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*, 88. But I think it would be difficult to defend the idea that Bernstein's *Kaddish* belongs the same category as, well, the *Kaddish*. I am hoping that this tripartite typology is familiar to you, but for a few instances of this musical typology in use, see Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 3–7; David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 19; Peter Manuel, *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World: An Introductory Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1–23; Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 26; Frank Howes, "A Critique of Folk, Popular, and 'Art' Music," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 2, no. 3 (1962): 239–48.

buyers; song-sheet purchasers; radio listeners; record shoppers; television viewers; and so on. A fairly complex division of musical labor must exist if such an audience—which often mediates its own enjoyment through its conception of itself being an audience—is to exist. Against the "just so" nature of folk music, some sort of rationality may be said to govern why popular music takes the form it does, even if it is only the rationality of the marketplace.

"Art" music is probably the most controversial category in this typology. (It's so scary, I put those "scare" quotes around it!) And to be sure, there are many accounts that resolve it into one of the previous categories, treating it as either merely the traditional "folk" music of an elite caste, or the "popular" music bought and sold by members (or aspiring members) of a powerful social class. Art music can therefore only come into its own as a concept if a certain imagination exists to support it. Where folk-music *emerges* from *a people*, and popular music is *aimed* at *people (in general)*, art music is *addressed* to *the people*—that is, the public that one is told began to emerge somewhere in the 18th-century—that popular element in history which is the "popular" in "popular sovereignty"; the "people" namechecked in the preamble of every liberal constitution—the "we" *the people*; the "peoples" of the "people's republics." If art music can be sustained as a distinct concept, it can only be because some conception of this *the people* is lingering somewhere. Accordingly, the main value of art music is *freedom*; or more precisely, *autonomy*. It may be construed as a negative freedom—from the limitations of the marketplace; from received opinion; from cliché; from *anything* constituted—but it may just as easily be rendered in positive terms: as the capacity for total self-expression.[20]

[20] Obviously, this picture assumes a kind of historical necessity to the musical modernist autonomy that found spokesmen like Theodor Adorno, and more recently Jamie Currie and Seth Brodsky. But the historico-empirical fact that musicians and musical ideologists in the "European art music tradition" came to regard their work as contiguous or identical with the political project of freedom is why Eric Drott is wrong to dismiss terms like "schools" and "movements" as simply the term "genre" in disguise. , Drott, "The End(S) of Genre," 8; James Currie, "Music After All," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62, no. 1 (April 1, 2009): 145–203; James R. Currie, *Music and the Politics of Negation*, Musical Meaning and Interpretation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Seth Brodsky, *From 1989, or European Music and the Modernist Unconscious* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

The reason why many accounts of "art music" fail—as Gracyk's, quoted above, does—is because of their parochial determination to regard European concert music as an ideal type. But "art" tendencies appear in various musics, and are recognized as such. People have tended to make distinctions between, for example, Duke Ellington and Glenn Miller; or between the Beatles and the Archies; or between Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Rather than get delayed by arguments about their relative value—which is frequently how the notion of "art" is litigated—we ought to just recognize that these respective musicians and their audiences are involved in different practices.

So far I have said nothing about the way these musics *sound*, and little about how they are made.[21] And that is because the relations between their ideal, sonic, and practical aspects are inessential. We are free to receive and think through any instance of music in terms proper to any of these categories. In fact, much creative musicological thinking is achieved precisely by reversing the ordinary polarities; looking through the other end of the telescope; mixing and matching the customary objects with the customary lenses. One can treat the rational free agents at IRCAM as natives, as Georgina Born does in *Rationalizing Culture*.[22] One can treat a popular dance music genre from South Africa as an emancipatory imagining of a future freedom, as Gavin Steingo has done in *Kwaito's Promise*.[23] One can, like Nadine Hubbs, treat country music—a professionalized music if there ever was one—as the music

[21] Booth and Kuhn, in their discussion of this typology, also generally ignored sonic and musical properties, grounding the distinctions in "economic and transmission factors." But they were concerned with how to theorize actual musical entities ontologically prior to discourse, which I am deliberately bracketing here. My primary interest, on the other hand, is in the *idea* of folk music (or popular music or art music). Gregory D. Booth and Terry Lee Kuhn, "Economic and Transmission Factors as Essential Elements in the Definition of Folk, Art, and Pop Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (1990): 411–38.

[22] Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See also Harris Berger' folkloristic treatment of conservatory studies in Harris M. Berger, "Locating Stance," in *Stance: Ideas About Emotion, Style, and Meaning for the Study of Expressive Culture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

[23] Gavin Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

of a misunderstood folk culture known as the "white working class."[24]

Despite the promiscuous nature of these categories, my claim is that we are not really free to think beyond them. Not because God or nature made them—they are social constructions, to be sure. But like the social constructions of money and clock-time, they have more power over us than we do over them. And here is my first big claim. The reason for this potency is that when we think through music in the categories of folk, popular, and art (whether or not we are aware we are doing so), we are also actually thinking through the basic spheres of modern social reality. To borrow the terminology of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: the spheres of family, civil society, and the state, respectively.

4.4. Family, Civil Society, and the State

4.4.1. Apology

I am about to provide an exposition of Hegel's social theory and soon after, the critique of Hegel made by another little-known writer named Karl Marx. Before I go on, let me make plain how and why I will be drawing on them. I am appealing to their status as astute observers and thinkers of modernity—not necessarily their status as master thinkers. As we are still in the grips of modernity—or of capitalism, which was Marx's word for it—I think that their thinking is just as contemporary as it ever was, and in some cases probably more so. Nevertheless I have no interest in discipleship or in the expert manipulation of a hallowed vocabulary. Many of the ideas that I find in their work can be found in the work of other theorists and writers, and I will not hesitate to make those connections when I am able.

I offer this apologia mostly to head off criticisms that I have misunderstood Hegel and Marx. Certainly I have—they're hard to understand! But also because I want to be clear that I am appealing to a conception of reality that you and I might share, not to the conceptions

[24] Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*.

of reality that appear in the scripture of great thinkers. (Scripture that I have no qualms about misreading.)

For despite the fact that they were both astute observers and thinkers of modernity, and despite the fact that the theoretical work of the latter was in many ways conditioned by the philosophical system of the former, there is a basic, essential difference between the two which I think is a useful way of slicing up reality into knowable, rearrangeable, debatable, chunks. And the difference—summarized in a cartoonishly succinct form—is as follows. Hegel attempts to speak (and thought he had succeeded in speaking) the language of the present in the *first person*. Marx attempts to speak the language of the present in the *third person*. For Hegel, anyone who is in the position to be philosophical—which, as we will see, is not everyone—will be by necessity a member of a signifying community that they can recognize their belonging to. For Marx—at least the Marx I will be representing—one can only put oneself in the position of being philosophical—in knowing the truth—by temporarily estranging oneself from the normal processes of the signifying community. For example: we don't—and can't—learn the truth about money by using it, nor even by thinking about it as economists typically do; but rather by showing how certain problems (estrangements) show up in the process of circulating money and also in the texts of economists.

Actually, Marx learned this method from Hegel. The story of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is the introduction to his *finished* system of philosophy, is an account of how history is a sequence of signifying communities temporarily estranging themselves from their normal processess and reconstituting them in more durable ways. What Hegel thought was that this sequence had come to a final rest. He thought that a community—as we shall see, represented ultimately in the form of a new kind of state—had been constituted in which human life could be stably reproduced. Marx, of course, disagreed with this. At the fiery heart of Marx's writing—the core of it that continues to attract—is a conviction that the world not

only will but *has* to be reconstituted. One of the basic questions of political thought continues to be (although not necessarily posed in these terms, with these thinkers): who was right? *Has* the world been reconstituted since the beginning of the modern period, or have we only seen changes in the surface? Will the changes we would like see *count* as a reconstitution? Or will they be in substance actually the fuller expression of the "true" aspects of the present community?

Because these questions are to a large extent open, I include both the perspective of both Hegel and Marx. With Hegel we can think the thinkability of the present. With Marx we can think its unthinkability.

4.4.2. OK. Down to business.

I am claiming that when we encounter music as folk, popular or art music, we are intuiting what Hegel intuited—that our practical life divides into the three basic social forms of the *family*, *civil society*, and *the state*. For Hegel, these three terms name the spheres in which a human comes to be a *person*, which is to say, in which a person comes to be *free*. In Hegel's picture—which again, I think is substantially ours, whether or not we realize it—one can only be a free person as a citizen in a good-enough state—a state that provides the laws and fora where people can recognize themselves as both different (that is, individual) and yet equal (that is, universal).[25] But this is only possible if there are other spheres that respectively guard the values of individuality (the family) and equality (civil society).[26]

The family is the sphere of *feeling*, of *immediate substantiality*. We can imagine a heteronormative-monogamous couple-nuclear family being the family (and Hegel probably

[25] "The individual attains his right only by becoming the citizen of a good state." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), sec. 153.

[26] Despite the critique that Marx mounts against Hegel, it is important to note that both regarded the emergence of civil society as the signal modern fact. For Hegel it served as mediating sphere between the family and the state.

would have thought of it that way), but we are not obliged to. In fact, I think this form of affinity is perfectly descriptive of how candidates for "folk communities"—or ethnic communities—are regarded, at least from the outside. More to the point: because this sphere is a "just so" sphere—in Hegel's jargon: "the immediate substantiality of spirit"—it cannot produce an account of itself. All accounts of it have to be made from the outside. The concept of "culture" in its modern sense as a "whole way of life" is most at home here. And so it can be said that anthropology and often ethnomusicology is the discipline that takes the family form as its basic remit. But this also means that the individual enjoys only a kind of dawning existence in this sphere. While we might find extraordinary examples of hero-figures, mundane, prosaic individuality is less apparent. Properly speaking, it is the family that has an individual existence, and it confronts other—potentially infinite—individual families with their own "just so" features.[27] The children are born, join new families, and die; the family lives on.So long as we regard a music as a folk music, our habits correspond to this picture. The place of individual musicians recedes in favor of a view of the whole formation; the justification of particular musical features are arbitrary.

Civil society. In order to come into its own and attain a particular existence, the individual must leave the family and enter the networks of civil society—the exchanges of labor and skill for money. And so its own ends become the means of others to their own ends.[28] While civil

[27] "The family disintegrates, in a natural manner and essentially through the principle of personality, into a *plurality* of families whose relation to one another is in general that of self-sufficient concrete persons and consequently of an external kind." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, sec. 158.

[28] "The concrete person who, as a *particular* person, as a totality of needs and a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness, is his own end, is *one principle* of civil society. But this particular person stands essentially in *relation* to other similar particulars." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, sec. 182. "Initially, the family is the substantial whole whose task it is to provide for this particular aspect of the individual, both by giving him the means and skills he requires in order to earn his living from the universal resources, and by supplying his livelihood and maintenance in the event of his incapacity to look after himself. But civil society tears the individual away from family ties, alienates the members of the family from one another, and recognizes them as self-sufficient persons. Furthermore, it substitutes its own soil for the external organic nature and paternal soil from the individual gained his livelihood, and subjects the existence of the whole family itself to dependence on civil society and to contingency. Thus, the individual becomes a *son of civil society* which has many claims upon him as he rights in relation to it." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, sec. 238.

society is the society of private persons—not yet the citizens they will be in the state—these persons will still tend to form larger corporate bodies. As opposed to the sphere of the family, which had no necessary forms of inner differentiation—there is in principle no limit on families; nor any essential relation between them—the sphere of civil society differentiates itself into systemic functions necessary for its reproduction.[29] Agriculture, industry, and what Hegel calls "the universal estate"—bureaucracy, police and courts of law—emerge as essential differences that mediate the totality of civil society.[30]Yes: the civil bureaucracy, the courts, and the police are for Hegel all creatures of civil society, maintaining the universal and personal property relations that undergird it.[31] This point must be emphasized in order to draw out exactly how peculiar his account of the state must be if the functions we commonly grant to the state—law and order and "infrastucture"—belong in Hegel's account properly to civil society.

The state. What, then, is the state for Hegel? It's not entirely easy to say! What distinguishes the state from the prior two spheres is that only in the state is the person both *free* and *equal*—that is, a citizen. Both in the family and in civil society, the person is limited by their responsibilities and duties. The family is inevitably composed of hierarchical and

[29] "The infinitely varied means and their equally infinite and intertwined movements of reciprocal production and exchange *converge*, by virtue of the universality inherent in their content, and become *differentiated* into *universal masses*. […] In consequence, the whole complex evolves into *particular systems* of needs, with their corresponding means, varieties of work, modes of satisfaction, and theoretical and practical education—into systems to which individuals are separately assigned, i.e. into different *estates*." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, sec. 201.

[30] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, sec. 202. Within Hegel's estates, we find a fractal recapitulation of the higher-level distinctions. Agriculture is the *substantial* or *immediate* estate, and so corresponds to the family. Trade and industry, as the reflecting, formalizing, coordinating estate, corresponds to civil society. And the universal estate corresponds to the state. Marx will find this very fishy, and this is one area where we can actually see a Marx turning a Hegel on its head. Marx's ultimate claim will be that Hegel is right to discover this mini-trinity within civil society, and wrong to think that it exists outside of it. In other words, the spheres of the family and the state cannot mediate civil society—they are civil society's mediations.

[31] Great bourgeois thinker that he was, Hegel was frequently actually quite clear-eyed about the world that civil society creates. Unlike many ideologists of market society, he did not think that it could eliminate poverty, and he also did not think it could exist without colonizing populations in search of new markets and industries.Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, sec. 248.

qualitative relations. There, one is recognized without being equal. In civil society, on the other hand, one achieves a form of equality—every contract applies equally to all parties; every purchase is a sale;— without achieving recognition. Only in the state can we do both. Which is also to say that only in the sphere of the state can we make claims about what is *right*. The "just-so" family and the "rational market" civil society were domains of "is." The state is where we determine what *ought* to be.

There is a lot to be dissatisfied with in this picture, and I will introduce Marx's particular dissatisfactions in a moment. But first let us entertain how plausible Hegel's account is; and also how evocatively it maps onto the musical typology. One of the most effective ways to demonstrate the explanatory grip of Hegel's account of modern practical life is to note how far short of it we are currently falling; and yet how convincingly his terms can describe what is going wrong.

Perhaps one way to describe our current morass is that we do not possess an actually-existing state—not even a defective one. Perhaps there is currently no sphere of life in which we confront one another as equal citizens. Perhaps there exists no power that guards the interest of the human qua human. And while it is possible that the configuration of forces in the West in the middle of the twentieth century briefly yielded a state worthy of the name—albeit a defective one, to be sure—it also seems likely that the practical life produced by neoliberal capitalism consists merely of the decomposed functions of *civil society* masquerading as a *state*.[32] (Didn't the COVID-19 pandemic made it abundantly clear that the "state" exists primarily to guard "the economy"?)

Perhaps the state as envisaged by Hegel has never actually existed. Perhaps, for example,

[32] Recall Margaret Thatcher's famous (among Marxists at least!) line: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families." In Hegelese, she was actually asserting the non-existence of the state—the absolute convergence of all interests as a unity. On the happy marriage of neoliberal individualism and neoconservative "family values," see Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

the U.S.S.R. also represented a civil bureaucracy masquerading as a state. Perhaps, as many interpreters have suggested, the various strains of authoritarian and fascist states have represented efforts to masquerade the family as a state. But wouldn't it still be nice to live in a Hegelian "state"? Doesn't it still speak to a live strain of utopian thinking that true freedom would mean we *could* escape the *social* determinations of race, class, and so on?

Moreover, it strikes me that the actual tenuousness of the state goes a long way toward explaining the actual tenuousness of art music—the form of music in which freedom is valued. The high point of art music in America—that is, the moment of its most intense investment as a good—might well be the moment of total serialism, which no one would mistake for a folk or popular music, and which was pursued—or hoped to be pursued—upon principles so rigorous they could be taught and therefore democratized? No surprise, then, that the wheels of art music—at least art music as we knew it in the Euro-American experience—came off around the same historical moment that the historical state receded as a definite project of emancipation!

Furthermore: doesn't there exist a definite tendency within "popular music" (civil society as music) towards the universality and freedom that are the hallmark of art music? Canonical examples being bebop and the later Beatles? And isn't there just as vividly a tendency for composers of "art music" to hunt outside their own sphere for content? Canonical examples being the folkloristics of a Smetana, a Bartok? But also equally the neo-classicism of a Stravinsky? Or the "ragtime" of a Stravinsky? Or the "ragtime" of an Ives? Or the "ragtime" of an Anthony Braxton? In other words, just as the realms of family and civil society press forward into the state which ultimately grounds their distinct forms of existence, so do folk and popular forms of music routinely press forward into a sphere of "art" *from* which the distinctions of folk and popular are significant. And just as the Hegelian state, as the stage of freedom, seems to ultimately lack a specific content, so does art music—along with its

theorists (like Gracyk above)—seem either to flail for some form of reference; or, like some species of modernist, make the fact of negativity, of determinant absence, of reference-lessness *into* a principle?

4.4.3. Marx's Critique

This observation that I have been elaborating—that Hegel's State has a "spectral" nature—is a good jumping-off point for Marx's early critique of Hegel's political philosophy. As Linus Recht has recently observed, this critique was not quite carried out by the Young Marx—"the true critique of Hegel would have to wait for the concept of capital."[33] A little theoretical sculpting and some borrowing from the older Marx therefore goes a long way towards elaborating it. It is clear that Marx aimed at an "immanent critique" of Hegel—that his goal was to out-Hegel Hegel by showing how Hegel misrecognized and failed to recognize Hegel's own though. There are, therefore, some shared background assumptions—as well as broad points of agreement—which need to be stated.

1. For both Hegel and Marx, reason—that is, the development, elaboration, and testing of concepts—is eminently *practical*. Although Marx gets the credit for theorizing things like "historical materialism" or the "critique of ideology" or the "base and the superstructure," the truth is that both thinkers agreed that all knowledge—even philosophical knowledge—is situated in a community that sustains and reproduces meanings in collective forms of understanding that are embedded in everyday activities, divisions of labor, etc. in other words, the "relations of production." What Wittgenstein later wrote—"To understand a language is to understand a form of life"—can stand equally as a motto for Hegel and Marx.

[33] Linus Recht, "Understanding Karl Marx's Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'," *Science & Society* 85, no. 4 (2021): 498.

2. Furthermore, for both Hegel and Marx, practical life is structurally antagonistic; and history is the unfolding and reconstitution of new antagonisms on new bases, (or at least history is only made meaningful by understanding it as such.)

3. Finally, for both Hegel and Marx, the principle event of modern history is the emergence of civil society. While Hegel places the State last in his *logical* unfolding of concepts, within his *historical* presentation, it is the *mediating* sphere of civil society that permits the good State (along with the good Family) to finally emerge.[34] In other words, although the word had not yet been minted for use, both Hegel and Marx agree that *capitalism*—or, at least, the social form produced by capitalism—is the signal aspect of modern life.

The essential difference in perspective relates to their respective views on the relationship between civil society and the state. For Hegel, civil society is ultimately, merely "the 'Phenomenon' of the State"—the worldly, sensible (but also, therefore, transitory) existence of supersensible truth.[35] For Marx, it is almost precisely the opposite: it is the state that is the "halo" of civil society. Where the Hegelian story is the emergence of civil society as the mediating principle between the absolute particularity of the family and the absolute universality of the state, and therefore the triumph of reason *qua* Spirit *qua* social practice, the Marxian story will ultimately be the emergence of the social relations governed by the commodity-form, a form which possessess its own logic and autonomy, and whose real abstractions in the process of exchange engender the dreams of equality and universality that find expression in the fetish-form of an actually existing State. The progress from the family through civil society to the State is actually a through-a-glass-darkly view of what remains to

[34] Antigone remained Hegel's image of the kind of tragedy that human life was consigned to when the local right of the Family (Antigone's plea for her brother's proper burial) confronted only the local right of the State (Creon's defense of the distinction between traitors and loyalists.)

[35] Jean Hyppolite, *Studies On Marx & Hegel* (Basic Books, 1969), 109.

be accomplished in history: the progress from pre-capitalist (family) social relations through capitalist (civil society) rationalization to the post-capitalist—i.e. *communist*—State, in which the ends of a universal humanity, hitherto only contemplated by philosophers like Hegel, can *actually* be realized.

In other words, what both Hegel is intuiting in his division of practical life into the family/civil society/state-complex—and by extension, us, in our division of music into the folk/popular/art-complex—is the historical logic of the commodity form, which takes the "solid" forms of folk and family life, and through exchange melts these into the air of the future. Rendered in this materialist way, the triads become logics of history; subroutines in the grand algorithm of world capitalism. A collectivity defined by local and particularist folk or family "traditions" (or rather, retrospectively defined as emergent from such local and particularist situations) is shaped by its encounter with capitalism / civil society into a form—a community of proletarians; of colonized subjects; of chattel slavery—that ultimately makes a claim for its portion of universal right on the stage of history.[36] This is the historical subroutine of "emancipation." It describes the various nationalisms and anti-colonial struggles, as well as—to the chagrin of Marxists—various historical labor and communist movements. It is, I am claiming, the same subroutine we find in music when a local, particularistic musical community (or rather, a retrospectively-defined particularistic musical community) is shaped by the market into a form that can make a claim for art. The socio-political historical process *may* coincide with the musical process. (It is literally impossible to tell the history of the emergence of European art music *qua* art music without referring to the various emancipatory projects of the "long nineteenth century.") But—and this is crucial—it need *not*. And here I am simply echoing a common observation: that music seems to frequently be the site

[36] I want to emphasize that in this view, the commodity form is the condition for the emergence of an emancipated music and an emancipated society. It is not a parasitical operation on some prior good holism.

of emancipatory projects that do not succeed on the stage of history.[37]

Now, there is a trouble that is very salient in the musical field which can be less apparent on the stage of history. And that is that because music is not tangible property but a matter of inward consciousness any forms of musical understanding can become forms for other musical communities. This is key to understanding why Charles Ives could convert ragtime *qua* popular music into modernist art music while Scott Joplin (only six years Ives's senior) could not; and why Scott Joplin could be converted into an art music composer *only* in the 1970s, alongside the brief appearance of ragtime *qua* idiom in the hands of anti-modernist composers like William Bolcom. And that is because ragtime—properly understood as a folk-popular-art musico-historical subroutine—was actually the project of a white American consciousness that required the representation of black music. When Joplin's dream of an art music founded on the "folk music" of African Americans *was* realized, it took the form of jazz—which, as Amiri Baraka recognized in the middle of the twentieth century, could only emerge after a complex social stratification of black America had occurred.[38] (In fact, it was the consolidation of an art music conceptualization of jazz that permitted ragtime to be retrospectively claimed as a folk music—a primitive form of jazz!)[39] Moreover, this consolidation of jazz *qua* fine art was conditioned by forms of alienation proper to the sphere of civil society: as Howard Becker discovered in his ethnography of dance musicians —and also, his own career as a dance musician—the practical life of the professional jazz musician involved

[37] The classic version of this story, of course, involves Beethoven crossing out Napoleon's name on the manuscript of his third symphony. But see also George Lipsitz's treatment of 50s rock'n'roll as the displacement of the working class movement of the 40s; Frank Kofsky's account of post-Coltrane free jazz; and think also of the forms of creativity attained by rock music after the failures of '68. Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*; Frank Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 2013)..

[38] On this theme, see Section 2.1.2, above. To expand: Baraka's account of jazz is essentially congruent with the account I am essaying here — I cannot say I wasn't unconsciously inspired by it, although I have generalized it. For Baraka, jazz (in which the question of the black citizen is at stake) is the dialectical synthesis of ragtime (market oriented black music) and "dixieland" jazz (the "just-so" folk tradition of black New Orleanians around the turn of the century). Baraka, *Blues People*, 94.

[39] See Chapter 2 above; for more on bebop and traditional jazz discourses, see Gendron, "Moldy Figs and Modernists."

developing the consciousness of a world of musical ends that was in essential contradiction to the world economic means.[40] Furthermore, it seems at least plausible that the black political consciousness that is expressed in black music—the forms of social imagining that find interpretation in the writings of Fred Moten, Fumi Okiji, and Daphne Brooks—actually *cannot* be redeemed on the social-political-historical stage that structure their possibility.[41]

4.5. Music and Race

There are two more features of this picture that I want to provide an account of before returning to questions I posed at the beginning of this chapter. One is why it is in *music*—and not in one of the other arts or spheres of life—that we find these historical energies playing such crucial but mysterious roles. The other is why it is that *black* music has been so important for non-black musical projects—like ragtime. As before, I think that recognizing a correspondence *between* these two features can form the premise of a possible answer. And as before, I think that drawing on resources within Hegel's system (reread with Marx's help) can make the answer plausible.

Hegel's treatment of music falls within his systematic philosophy of art—or, rather of *fine art*.[42] The distinction is necessary only because Hegel wanted to insist on—and I think we can also want to insist on—a qualitative difference between the attitude represented by the artistic production of, say, Ancient Greece, or the European Middle Ages, and the modern attitude towards art. The distinction is partially grasped by our typical narratives of the emer-

[40] Howard S. Becker, "The Professional Dance Musician and His Audience," *American Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 2 (September 1951): 136–44; Howard Becker, "Some Contingencies of the Professional Dance Musician's Career," *Human Organization* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 1953): 22–26.

[41] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Okiji, *Jazz as Critique*; Daphne Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2021). For a recent helpful appraisal of these writers on the terrain of musicology, see Martha Feldman, "Fugitive Voice," *Representations* 154, no. 1 (May 1, 2021): 10–22.

[42] William Desmond, *Art and the Absolute: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Paul Gordon, *Art as the Absolute: Art's Relation to Metaphysics in Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

gence of "autonomous" art; our citations of Kant's "purposive purposeleness." Somehow, somewhere in the European psyche on or around January 1, 1750, all practices of handicraft became subsumed under the category of Art; of which an account could be rendered (called Aesthetics); and which itself became emancipated from any *particular* function, offering instead experiences of the ineffable, the transcendent, and so on.[43]

Actually: not so for Hegel, who—despite hitching his phisophical wagon to a concept named *Geist*—was emphatically not a romantic. His account of art is ultimately a historical one, and, the history of art—like Hegel's philosophy of history in general—is a history of secularization and demystification. Unlike previous versions of ourselves, who tended (so Hegel says) to articulate in their statuary, etc. the presence of the divine, and only unconsciously rendered their collective forms of understanding; we moderns treat a work of art almost as if it were a person like us. We do not bow before it—or rather, we are not our best selves when we do. Instead, when confronted with a work of art—like a painting, a novel, a poem, a piece of music—we ask ourselves: "What is it saying? What does it mean?"

We are able to put ourselves in relation to art in this way precisely because (says Hegel) art is *not* mimetic. We do not actually judge a work of art by its fidelity to some rock-hard factical world. (For Hegel such a rock-hard factical world does not really exist—we live in a world we understand, a world we make meaning-*ful*.) Whatever forms appear in a work of art are forms which are already present in the shared space of meanings and representations that a community possesses. To put it in reductive, slightly cartoonish terms: the painted dog is not a painting of what a painter thinks a dog looks like; it is a painting of what a community thinks a dog is.

Hegel's account of art is therefore profoundly social—there is no real room for a "genius"

[43] This sort of account has, of course, been frequently challenged. Stephen Davies, "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*, by Stephen Davies (Oxfored: Oxford University Press, 2007), 51–67.

here—and, because it dispenses with mimeticism, it is flexible enough to describe all the forms of "abstraction" that came to be important in the post-Hegel history of art.[44] Every "crisis" in the series of crises that characterize this history—atonality, non-figural representation, linguistic confusion, urinals, theaters of cruelty, and so on—can be, on Hegel's account, regarded either as crises *actually* occurring in the community addressed by the work of art—moments in which meanings and representations are revealed to *not* be in common; or as extremely articulate aesthetic configurations of forms of common experience that remained otherwise unrealized.[45] And these are, basically, the theoretical approaches available to anyone who wishes to interpret a work of art that does not find immediate sanction among the community it addressess.

Because Hegel's account of art is implicated at such a basic level with the collective forms of understanding that render it possible, each of the individual arts comes to correspond to a distinct form of what we might call collective subjectivity.[46] When we listen to a piece of music, for example, we participate in a different *kind* of collective subjectivity than we do when we read a poem. It is for this reason that Hegel thinks he can arrange the various forms of art in a sequential history which corresponds to the sequence of forms of collective subjectivity which define actual history. Because we no longer live in the Greek polis, we cannot be satisfied with statues: the meanings and representations we share with one another—senses of what a person is; what is fit for representation; what relation something like "the divine"

[44] Hegel's account is even more collectivist than Howard Becker's account of art as collective action. Becker was interested in showing how many people were involved in the function of author; Hegel is not really interested in the author-function at all—he takes for granted that, given the right conditions, someone's going to do it. Howard S. Becker, "Art As Collective Action," *American Sociological Review* 39, no. 6 (1974): 767–76. See also Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[45] Leaving aside, that is, those who do defend art as the sphere of the ineffable and so on. C'mon guys—knock it off!

[46] Hegel's term, of course, is "geist," or "spirit." I'm deliberately not using this term because I think it makes people snicker, and I think we often make reference to the same concept with different names. Anahid Kassabian's name for *geist*, for example, is "distributed subjectivity." Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

actually has to something like "the everyday"—simply cannot find adequate representation for us in carved stone.[47]

This might sound philistinish, limited, strange. But let's take it seriously. There are, in fact, good reasons to think that our modern collective sense of what a person is *might* be difficult to render in stone. For one thing: we moderns—and let me flag in advance that this "we" is a very tenuous construction—tend to believe that a considerable portion of what makes a person a person belongs to what we describe as our interior lives. What made Perseus *Perseus*, for example, was that he slew Medusa and carried off her head. What makes me *me*, on the other hand, is that I have a specific set of personality traits related to infantile frustrations I suffered at the hands of my well-meaning mother. (Or whatever.) How do you show that in stone by arranging my unmoving body in space? Where would you put my hands?

But our modern senses of what a person is (says Hegel) *could* be depicted in painting, in music, and above all in writing. And again, I think we'd have to admit that Hegel—if we forgive him for failing to predict motion pictures—got the modern history of art broadly right. Statuary *has* remained a marginal aspect of modern artistic production—it has a place in "public art," performing functions of *monument* that are distinct from art in general; and Degas's bronze dancers are exhibited *alongside* his painted ones.[48] But the spheres of painting, music, and literature have been battlegrounds where controversies over what could count as each seemed to carry grave stakes.

Painting, music, and literature. Family, civil society, the state. Hegel never seemed to discover a collection of concepts with a cardinality greater than three. Although he inveighed frequently against philosophical formalism—castigating those thinkers who chopped up reality to fit their systems rather than think from the ground up—I won't pretend that there

[47] Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[48] And, of course, in an influential essay it was said that over the course of the 20th-century sculpture "[…] ceased being a positivity." Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (1979): 36.

isn't a whiff of it here. Nevertheless, by following the correspondences between the triads, we can see the kind of sense they make, and quick. Like the family form, painting—and let us keep our feet planted in the midddle of the 19th-century for the moment—can render the person as a concrete external "just-so" individual. And literature—by being reality rendered in language, the actual element of collective subjectivity—is closest to the native tongue spoken by citizens of the good state. Music, in between these two poles, is the art form that addresses (and is answered by) the general, universal, but not individual self—precisely the mode of subjectivity in which we dwell in the domain of civil society.[49]

Unlike later German philosophers like Schopenhauer or Nietszche (or Adorno, for that matter), Hegel tends to see more danger than promise in the experience of music. Its aconceptual character does not testify to a primordial status or a utopian elsewhere. Its fluidity does not prophesy a more integrated form of society. Instead, in its absolute interiority—its "object-free immanence"—the musical experience can tend toward solipsism; a radical rupture between private and public modes of being; an ironical, nihilistic disposition incompatible with the requirements of a good life.

Hegel belongs, then, to the club of philosophers who essentially fault music for being an inferior form of language.[50] But his story has a slight twist, which is that *all of art*, for Hegel, is essentially an inferior form of understanding, which we can expect to see wither way as we become more and more at home in modernity; and develop the forms of culture that are more appropriate to *citizens*. Hegel thought this chiefly because he regarded all art as a

[49] "Sound in contrast to the material of the visual arts is wholly abstract. Stone and colouring receive the forms of a broad and variegated world of objects and portray them as they actually exist; sounds cannot do this. On this account what lone is fitted for expression in music is the object-free inner life, abstract subjectivity as such. This is our entirely empy self, the self without any further content. Consequently the chief task of music consists in making resound, not the objective world itelf, but, on the contrary, the manner in which the inmost self is moved to the depths of its personality and conscious soul." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 891.

[50] Lawrence Zbikowski, *Foundations of Musical Grammar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–5.

kind of *fetish* form—a misplaced concreteness; an investment of social power in an object.[51] As our forms of collective understanding—articulated in language—become more-and-more consonant with the reality we collectively experience, we will tend to look back on things like Dutch portraiture much like we do cave paintings—as charming but mysterious expressions of forms of experience we have left behind us. A social form that is transparent to itself will not allow its circulating meanings to coagulate into idols *or* works of art. Becoming actually autonomous ourselves, we will not misrecognize artistic products as themselves autonomous. The regime of Art is in fact a kind of hiatus in history before the final achievement of the good state.[52]

This is not to say that there won't be painting or music or literature (or for that matter, any of the forms of art that Hegel thought were already passé, like sculpture). It is just to say that we will tend, over the long term of the future, to not discover depths in them that we once did. And again—was he *clearly* wrong? Hasn't there been a general disinvestment in the belief in Fine Art—at least amongst those who formerly believed? Moreover: perhaps the endless debates over the aesthetic status of mass culture—including the debates we encountered above in Chapter One; but also the Frankfurt School theory of "the culture industry"; Huyssen's "great divide" of high and low culture; and so on—are actually symptomatic of Hegel's prediction that artistic products would be returned to use (if they had ever been removed in the first place).[53]

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[51] The word "fetish" would have been very helpful to Hegel — it perfectly describes the way his historical forms of consciousness organized themselves and their worlds, because implicated in the very idea of the fetish is the concept of autonomy. The autonomy of the master is a fetish autonomy; the autonomy of the thing for the empirical philosopher is a fetish; the French Revolution's conception of freedom is a fetish, and so on. For an important discussion of the significance of the fetish for European intellectuals, see William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 9 (1985): 5–17. and William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 13 (1987): 23–45.

[52] Strange to say, Hegel's subterranean critique of romanticist ideologies of genius and the work-concept anticipate the "New Musicological" and "Marxist" critiques of musicological formalism of the 1990s.

[53] Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Pippin, *After the Beautiful*; Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (2008).

There is, however, another reason why Hegel though that Art would tend to disappear. (Actually, it is the same reason, just stated a little differently.) As we are more incorporated into the good state, the more prosaic and free of conflict our external lives will become. As our external lives become more prosaic and free of conflict, there will be fewer occasions for tragedy, and therefore fewer actual experiences fit for artistic representations. Both Antigone (the historical personage) and *Antigone* (the tragedy by Sophocles) were products of a social formation in which the absolute *right* of the family—because unmediated by civil society—could come into contradiction with the absolute *right* of the state. Such situations will tend to recede in the perfection of the modern state. The historical wave of *Geist* will crest, leaving behind it clumps of more-or-less happy bureaucrats. And how, wondered Hegel, can you make such people fit for artistic presentation?[54]

Now, I have been careful to say that it will be our *external* lives that will tend to be free of conflict as we are incorporated into the good state. Our *internal* lives will not be spared. In fact, for Hegel, the historical contradictions that have produced our good modern subjectivities are actually experienced by a healthy modern subject in the course of their development—only *internally*. In other words: anyone who is now a citizen has already been (on the inside) a slave to some form of master; a sister in some sort of patriarchal family; a man from some sort of province; and so on. But the fact that this experience is more and more an inner one makes its representation problematic.[55] This flailing for external references is in fact more or less what I claimed in Chapter 1 was occurring in the 19th-century American parlor song. The good Protestant bourgeois subject lacked for ways to mediate his inner experience, and so grasped frantically for dead family members in order to sense the limits of his life. Until, that is, he discovered—with Stephen Foster—the semiotic utility

[54] Of course, the arationality of bureaucracy would become—not only with Kafka—a major theme of European literature, proving in its own way that the advent of the Hegelian citizen was not in fact nigh, and that artistic depictions still had work to do.

[55] Again—where would you put my hands?

of the black slave.[56] And here we can begin, with Marx, to read Hegel backwards.

Hegel assumed that art, lacking forms of contemporaneous external contradiction, would have to draw resources from manifestly prior periods in order to depict the interior contradictions that define the modern person. This proves that Hegel made the same mistake that many Marxists would later make in assuming that history would be defined by ideal-typical capitalisms covering the globe—that over time every country (kind of mysteriously assumed as a unit) would incubate its own little form of capitalism. It is actually a bit mysterious that Hegel *would* make such a mistake, for (to his credit) he *had* discovered the logic of colonialism, as well as a permanent structural "rabble," within the form of civil society itself! Nevertheless, it is a mistake. We can feel certain by now that capitalism as a world system is perfectly happy to both retain and reproduce islands of unincorporated people. Capitalism modernizes and proletarianizes, yes—but it also implants new feudalisms when it needs to, and also continually compels new waves of emigration which force people to live in improvised structures outside of civil society.[57] There is therefore a constant flow of (locally) not-yet-incorporated peoples as well as a constant stock of (globally) un-incorporateable people. And so that class of incorporated people—or rather, that class of people who take themselves to be incorporated—has a reservoir of material with which to externalize their own inner experience: they do not need to forage their past—they can simply mine the differences and contradictions defined in the present. And so the "shared" language of art, clinging to a realist impulse, becomes in large part a matter of ethnic stereotype, and forms of "cultural appropriation"—both from "within" and "without." The most vital resource for understanding the experience of people within society becomes the experiences of those kept (often violently) outside of it. A paradox of sorts, to be sure. But not, as I hope to have shown,

[56] See section 1.1.4 above.

[57] In other words, the movement of capital yields both interior and exterior forms of difference—in Dipesh Chakrabarty's famous theorizing: a History 1 and a History 2. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

inexplicable.

Furthermore: IF (agreeing with Marx) the good state is **not** (as Hegel thought) actual, or even in the process of becoming, but is in fact (at best) the utopian dream of a world in the ongoing process of capitalist transformation; or (at worst) merely the ideological cover for the steering committee of the capitalist class—then we have no reason to think that the experience of art is dying with the birth of the citizen. And we therefore have good reason to recognize musical experience—against other forms of aesthetic experience—as a profoundly realistic means of representing the *actual* forms of subjectivity—partial, fractured, mutilated—that our *actual* form of life produces. The experience of music *qua* art—and recall again that this does not refer to any particular instance of music—is not the romanticist retreat into an imagined but un-actualized community. It is the *realistic* musical representation of our actual un-actualized community.[58] In other words: something of the contradiction between civil society and the state—the contradiction between the domain of humans as means; and the unrealized domain of humans as ends—is frequently given to us in the raw experience of music.[59]

4.6. Wait a minute, pal.

To *us*? Who is *us*? There is, of course, no actually existing "us" in the absence of what Hegel (and Marx) presumed would soon appear—an actually existing state of equality and freedom. But the fact that a plausible "us" does not exist does not mean the dream of it hasn't played and doesn't continue play an important orienting role in any thorough-going system of thinking (not to mention systems of political hegemony!) The dream of an "us" is the dream of the

[58] "[Hegel's] treatment of music as a central romantic art in particular is faithful to, even emphasizes, the thought that rational-expressive freedom in and through cultural life remains an ideal that is neither empty for us nor yet quite perfectly actualizable." Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel and the Arts* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

[59] This is more or less Adorno's position, I believe.

unity of first-person and third-person perspectives; German Idealism's dream of the vaunted subject-object; in the mythology of American heterosexual romantic comedy, the dream of a good marriage; in the official discourse of American domestic statecraft, "bipartisanship." These are all active figures of universality. But so long as social domination exists in whatever form, any uncritical appeal to universality can be justifiably scorned as parochial, chauvinistic, and so on.

Nevertheless, *we* are *all universally* subject to the tendencies of capital; and it is moreover crucial to the functioning of capital that it produce forms that assert claims to universality — various "us"-nesses. It is trivial to show that any putative universality is in fact parochial. What is perhaps more interesting is to entertain the notion that there is a logical structure to the emergence of particular "us"-nesses, and in particular one of the more scorned theses of Marx — that the future of modern life would be governed by the consolidation of two "us"-nesses confronting each other—a class of bourgeois appropriators on the one hand, and a class of potentially revolutionary proletarians on the other. This latter class would tend to produce its own account of its "us"-ness—its own *consciousness*—and this consciousness could enable a contest for political power, and the elaboration of its own terms of right across historical space and time.

In some ways, it sounds very antiquated. But, as Immanuel Wallerstein pointed out, this thesis was entirely borne out by the actual history of the twentieth century.[60] There is no longer a peasantry or an aristocracy of any salience for the total functioning of a now even-more-global world. Moreover: despite the rise of living standards produced by capitalism's mid-century golden age, Marx's prediction of the increasing immiseration of the value-producing working classes has also been borne out—a truth that is obvious as soon as we remember to look beyond the national borders that capitalism is always itself exceed-

[60] Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race*, *Nation*, *Class*, 115–24.

ing, and remember that class—unlike other forms of distinction—is not essentially hereditary. For while it may be true that, for example, the present-day working-class English dweller of Manchester enjoys a better quality of life (however you might specify this) than the textile-workers in their 19th-century family tree—just as, for example, the Americanized descendants of 20th-century European garment workers are mostly more comfortable than their forebears—it seems likely that the people who do the same work in the factories of Bangladesh and Vietnam and China, for example, are working under conditions that are far more brutal and hopeless than their forebears. More brutal and hopeless, perhaps, because they may be bearing the brunt of another of Marx's scorned theses: that the value production capacity of capitalism would ultimately collapse. A hope of generations was that this secular trend could herald the coming of communism. Many contemporary accounts are more pessimistic. What seems more likely is a reversion to feudal forms of sheer domination.[61] Just as one must be emancipated from the "just-so" family into the rationalizing (though not "rational") sphere of society in order to acquire truthful consciousness, so does the experience of "just-so" sheer domination, by its very nature, inhibit the forms of consciousness that political action requires.

4.7. In Search of Ragtime

By contrast, the epoch that ragtime music musicalized—in both grand and minor ways—was one in which value production could be secured, at least in part, on a specifically capitalist basis. The rationalization of the labor process, the division of mental from manual labor, the application of machinery—all aspects of the Taylorist moment that was the backdrop to

[61] This is a general theme among mostly Anglophone Marxists. For a recent survey, see Javier Moreno Zacarés, "Euphoria of the Rentier?," *New Left Review*, no. 129 (June 15, 2021): 47–67. Moishe Postone's theory of present-day capitalism's search for wealth as an "autoimmune disease" is also frightening. Moishe Postone, "The Current Crisis and the Anachronism of Value: A Marxian Reading" 1, no. 4 (October 2017): 52.

early ragtime—these produced staggering gains in productivity. But this achievement in turn posed two problems. One: expanded output required an expanded demand. This meant that the total social wage bill had to increase, either in the form of higher wages or more workers. Two: the workplace struggles involved in Taylorizing the labor process—increasingly monotonous "deskilled" labor; increasingly authoritarian managerial oversight—produced labor unrest which was only aggravated by periodic economic crises spawned by difficulties in coordinating output and demand.[62]

A long-term (though temporary) resolution to these problems would only appear with the opportunities granted by two world wars, which permitted capitalists the freedom to build from the ground up the conditions that would be favorable to balanced capital accumulation. The "Fordist" society of the mid-century—which attempted to stabilize growth rates across industrial sectors through both high levels of coordination and increasing "vertical integration" of the labor process—was the result. But already in the early days of ragtime, as we saw in my first chapter, the strategic construction of job ladders and wage scales, were providing a longitudinal dimension to working-class life. And the strategic generalization of ownership, which, in extending formal property (though not property of the means of production) was already marrying workers to a social form that they might otherwise contest. "No man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist," promised William J. Levitt, the developer of Levittown.[63] When we add to this the eternal promotion of the nuclear family—which is also to say: the promotion of feminine unpaid labor—we can see how a plausible account of 20th-century American society could be "the triumph of the middle class." For a large swathe of the working class was, in fact, *incorporated* into official society, and was permitted—in the form of detached homes, automobiles, and unhappy mother-wives, a parody of 19th-century

[62] Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*; David F. Noble, *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1984).

[63] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

bourgeois culture.

But this incorporation—again, an incorporation *necessitated* by this phases of capitalism—did have limits. Full employment is an impossibility under any species of capitalism, as Marx proved in the first volume of *Capital*, and it is often useful for capitalists if the "reserve army" of the unincorporated and unemployed coincides with a pre-existent and socially disempowered group.[64] Though a stratum of Black Americans did find a foothold in this mode-of-production—a foothold without which there would be no jazz as the century came to know it—the general coincidence of Black ethnic identity with economic disarticulation gave a new meaning to "race" in this period. In addition to irrational and gratuitous forms of racial hatred and prejudice, the tight connection between poverty, unemployment, and the "creative destruction" of the old cities with Black America permitted the entirely rational disorders native to capitalism to appear as irrationalities—products of either racialized hatred or racial inferiority. In any event, the actual un-incorporation of large swathes of Black Americans made for a large stock of unincorporated music that could be the music for this society's people-in-general. As I argued above, using Hegel, art under capitalist social relations *requires* content from unincorporated zones of experience.

Why am I insisting on this theme of incorporation? Because it grounds the immense significance that music attains in this process. Because music is a mode of sensing the relation of one's self to the general self. Because knowing how to move to a rhythm or how join in a chorus are ways of knowing how to be *bodily a part of*. In a very literal way, music is a technology of incorporation. Under this phase of capitalism, music was sometimes a means of enjoying one's incorporation, as it was for the vaudeville audiences of the coon song, or the later TV audiences of Welkite ragtime. Or a means of sensing one's dispossession, as it was for counter-cultural Black American musics like bebop. Or a means of affirming one's

[64] Herbert Roof Northrup, ed., *Negro Employment in Basic Industry: A Study of Racial Policies in Six Industries*, v. 1 (Philadelphia]: University of Pennsylvania, 1970).

disaffection, as it was for Bleshian critics of bebop and swing; or members of the ragtime underground. Could easy-listening as a musical phenonemon emerge in a society without 30-year fixed-rate mortgages? Would Lawrence Welk have been on TV if there weren't a need to continually stimulate constant consumption of automobiles?

Throughout this epoch, ragtime was the music of incorporation—or, maybe better, the *fantasy* of this incorporation made musical. As a temporary popular music, ragtime incorporated Americans into civil society at the turn of the century, when it was introduced on the Northern urban variety stages of the nascent culture industry as a music brought by white interlopers from Southern Black musicians. As an attempted folk music, it was the music of incorporation when it was played on the variety TV soundstages of the 1950s as the family heritage of the incorporated white, so-called middle class; or when it was played by Bleshite pianists as the disavowed heritage of this social bloc. As an attempted art music, ragtimers tried to make good on the political implications of incorporation by adducing the grounds to hear Scott Joplin on his own terms—as a citizen of an (integrated) musical state.

Each of these ragtime incorporations failed, for the same general reason that this phase of capitalism and its other forms of incorporation failed. Because any mode-of-production—any long-term strategy to stabilize a profit rate—is beset by contradictions it cannot manage. The perpetual self-identical accumulation of capital is as impossible as a triangle with four sides. And because simple social reproduction is impossible, so too is spiritual reproduction. We are not a family: therefore our music can never be a folk music. We are not even a *we*: therefore our music can never be an art music. We are stuck in the uncivil society of capitalism, therefore stuck in between the zones of family and state, which are themselves only imperfect apparitions of the social forms we'd need to make capitalism fit for human life.

More specifically: the history of ragtime is likely over because it entailed an incorporated

white American working class that is not likely to be possible again. To embrace the music means to have some sort of access to the kind of "us" that the music implies—but that "us" is long gone. (This is not to say that there won't be minoritarian ragtime factions, just that its capacity for a *general* grip on musical consciousness is almost certainly over.) Even if the rumors are true, and a reshored Fordist economy is on the horizon, the new working-class this shift might consolidate would not resemble its 20th-century predecessor.

I will close the dissertation with one last thought that seems to me to be a result of my argument. As the history of ragtime is likely over, so too is Black music, at least in the sense it bore for the white majority over the course of the long twentieth century. Since the days of vaudeville, it has been possible for ideologists of American popular music to narrate its history as stylistic periods in the musical culture of Black Americans, a mode of presentation that we generally continue to observe. It seems correct to say that America's popular music is articulated as a sequence of appropriations, beginning (I've argued) with ragtime, and passing through the appropriations of jazz, rhythm and blues, hip hop, and so on. But as I've claimed, this process depended on a social process of incorporation that is no longer active in an increasingly stagnating capitalism. More and more of us can expect to live lives of precarity outside of the wage-system and therefore of "official" society. In other words, more and more of us will be, as James Boggs wrote in 1963, in the strange social position that Black Americans have long occupied—of being a post-industrial people in the industrialized world.[65] This, by necessity, will constrict the growth and dynamism of mass popular music. Which may indeed be coincident—as left-wing critics of mass culture have argued, though for different reasons—with a new growth and dynamism in the sphere of politics.

[65] James Boggs, *The American Revolution Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*. (New York: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1968).

5 Appendix

Table 5.1: "Coon Songs" Studied

Song	**The "troubled": either a first person narrator (typically male) or a community**	**The romantic partner (typically female)**	**The social antagonist ("coon") (third person)**	**Index of social status**	**Introduction of the chorus**	**Chorus; typically reported sppech; third-person-become-first-person**
Bob Cole and Billy Johnson, "I Wonder What Is That Coon's Game," 1893	Every coon in Coontown's feeling mighty funny		'Bout a strange yaller coon	with an awful lot of money	So every coon's crazy and whispering around:	"I wonder what is that coon's game!"
Barney Fagan, "My Gal Is a High-Born Lady", 1896	Sunny Africa's Four Hundred's gwine to be thar	To do honor to my lovely fiancee		When the parson gives the dusky bride away		My gal is a high born lady, She's black, but not too shady

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Ernest Hogan, "All Coons Look Alike to Me," 1896	Talk about a coon having trouble	It's all about ma Lucy Janey Stubbles	Thar's another coon barber from Virginia	In society he's the leader of the day	These words she did say:	"All coons look alike to me!"
George Maywood, "Ambolena Snow," 1896		You really ought to know Miss Ambolena Snow		A girl of pedigree, as dark as she can be		Oh Ambolena Snow, the boys all love her so
Dave Reed, "I'll Make Dat Black Gal Mine," 1896	has promised fo' to marry me	A gal of mine, named Caroline,	Dar's some swell coon, who's come to spoon		Case I'll win dat gal or die, Oh!	My, oh my, my coon blood will soon be boilin'
Charles Trevathan, "May Irwin's 'Bully' Song," 1896	I'm a lookin' for		dat bully dat's just come to town	No red-eyed river roustabout		When I walk dat levee round, round, round, round
Paul Clarendon West, "I Want Dem Presents Back," 1896	Shook me good and smart	My gal Tildy	She skipped out wif a low down nigger	Ain't got half mah stack	I don't care whar she gwineter, But I want my presents back	I want dat bran new cook stove…

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
S.B. Alexander, "An Awful Wicked Nigger," 1897	An his curves I done got onter, He cut me out completey wid	ma gal	Was a coon he lived down yonder			I's an awful wicked nigger, Dats' what I am, Yes I am!
Bob Cole and Billy Johnson, "I Hope These Few Lines Will Find You Well," 1897			Did you hear about that coon from Tennessee	with high ambition	He turned to the other coons and then began to sing:	"I hope these few lines will find you well"
Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson, "No Coons Allowed," 1897		said to his baby "My Lulu gal we'll go and cut a shine"	There's a dead swell gentleman of color	Saved up all the money he could find	But that coon almost went blind When he saw a great big sign up o'er the door which read "No coons allowed"	"No coons allowed"
A.F. Dannic, "I'm the Warmest Member in the Land," 1897	Well of all the coons you've heard about there's no other one like me	and I've brought my colored queen		To the black Four Hundred I belong the swell society	For I'm the warmest member in the land. Oh!	I'm the warmest member in the land

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Lew Dockstader, "I Want My Lulu," 1897	I	had a gal and her name was Lou	But with another coon she flew		Somebody hollored from inside, "Who do you want?" and I replied:	"I want my Lulu, My baby Lou"
Lee Johnson, "Ma Caroline," 1897	Ise	won a cullud lady	Dem sporty nigs and high toned coons my gal try to steal	she's de belle of Mobile	Yes,	She's my Caroline, ma sweetness devine,
Irving Jones, "Take Your Clothes and Go" 1897.		and his yaller gal, done had a fallin' out	A big black burly coon		Now these words this gal to you must say:	"Leave this house when you get your trunk packed…"
Irving Jones, "Get Your Money's Worth," 1897.	Last time the darkies gave a ragtime ball		A coon named Ragtime Jimmy was the man who ran the dance		You paid for a good time so let your voices ring:	"Get your money's worth"
Irving Jones, "Honey You're the Warmest Gal In Town," 1897		Have you seen Miss Hannah Brown		When she struts by at night, you'd think she was white	When she goes by you'll hear the darkies shout:	"Honey you sure look right!"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Theo Metz, "Do Your Honey Do," 1897	What am de use for to tarry and toil And to save up all your dough When you feel in your bones	Dat de gal you love	Is another big nigger's beau			And I done him, cause I loved her, I carved him long
James O'Dea, "She's Mah' Wah'm Baby," 1897	There are many coons that sing about Their babies and their honeys I've	the sweetest gal that's out		She has just been herE about a year From Georga's land so sunny	And she soon will be my queen	She's mah' wah'm baby
Dave Reed, "Lady Africa," 1897.	And fairly paralized de coons	A handsome creole lady lately landed in dis town		She's known as Lady Africa […] De Queen of colord aristocracy		They shout hurrah for Lady Africa
Dave Reed, "Enjoy Yourselves," 1897	Last night de darkies had a jubilee		But now an' then de babies got too frisky	An' parson	yelled out to de crowd	"Enjoy yourselves, Keep all yer razors in yer inside pocket"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
J. Frank Walsh, "I Aint 'bliged to Stan' No Nigger Foolin," 1897		He done gone stole my baby	Talk about a gem'man coon		I'll just show dat coon how	I ain't 'bliged to stan' no nigger foolin'
Ned Wayburn and Stanley Whiting, "Syncopated Sandy," 1897.	I'm		a bold bad nigger crook	The judge sent me to jail to stay	But first these words did say:	"Syncopated Dandy. The Daredevil dandy."
Bert Williams, "I Don't like No Cheap Man," 1897.	[Bill Johnson] bought de seats in de gallery	Miss Simpson had always been considered		de finest gal in town	She said:	"I don't like no cheap man"
Nathan Bivins, "Gimme Ma Money," 1898						
Bert Williams, "I Guess That Will Hold You For A While," 1897.	The coons in this town, they're all gone wild	'Bout this black gal of mine	This gal caught me with a yaller gal called "Eve"	She's black I know, but she gets the dough	"I'll tell you now […]	"So I guess that will hold you for awhile"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
George M. Cohan, "I Guess I'll Have to Telegraph My Baby," 1898		Lucy is a very gen'rous lady	A coon he left his happy home	He joined a colored minstrel troupe, he thought he'd be the rage	He sighed and cried and then he replied	"Well I guess I'll have to telegraph my baby"
Robert Cone, "When the Parson Makes Miss Mandy Johnson Mine," 1898		Dar's a color'd girl named Mandy		She's a model of propriety And moves in good society	And dat is when the parson makes Miss Mandy Johnson mine	When the parson makes Miss Mandy Johnson mine
Arthur Dunn, "I've Got Him Dead," 1898.	Talk abou a gal hav'n	a coon, dead		Monday he got me a seal skin cloak		I've got him, dead, dead, dead, dead gone you see
Jackson Gouraud and James T. Powers, "Keep Your Eye on Your Friend Mister Johnson," 1898	I've got a little flat up town	And I live dere wid my wife	I took a friend to live with me, he is a colored gent		And dese words were whispered in my ears most ev'rywhere I went	"Keep your eye on your friend Mister Johnson"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Jackson Gouraud, "She's a 'Spectable Married Colored Lady," 1898	I'se	he's gwine for to steal my wife	Dars a new coon blew into town Been a gambler all his life	De deacon of de church	But,	She ain't his gal […] She's a 'spectable married cullud lady
Ben Harney, "You May Go But This Will Bring You Back," 1898		with his gal	A gambling coon had a fuss	She had no right for to fuss and fight for ev'ry dollar home he'd bring	When he saw her follow the trunk out and loudly he did shout:	"You may go but this 'er will bring you back."
Leonard K. Hirshberg, "He Won't Come Back No Never," 1898	Me an	ma big burly coon went out the other night	Whn I saw a bowleg'd coon with her eyes much out of tune		An now he's done forgot his babys love	He wont com' a back no never no matter what I do
Irving Jones, "You Don't Handle Nuff Money For Me," 1898.	Of all cheap coons that's in this land	The swellest gal in coon town	Bill Jackson takes the prize	Wears second hand clothes from head to feet	But I want you to hear me say:	"You don't handle nuff money for me"
Lee Johnson, "The Belle of Honolulu," 1898	The ladies sigh, de doons all wink dere eyes;	A high toned gal has won me		For style and grace ma lady is ev'rything that's swell	the natives they all cry:	"She is a dream, ma Honolulu queen"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
William Osborn, "Nig-Ger, Nig-ger, Never Die," 1898	When I was a pick-aninny My Mamma sent me to school		All the other kids were white		All the white kids at me yell, "Oh	"Nigger nigger never die, black face and china eye"
Dan Packard, "I Love Dat Man. A Coon Song," 1898	I have admiration	For a handsome black man		He was juggling with the truth I will admit		I don't care who knows it, I love dat man
Harry Rogers, "A Dead Fly Coon," 1898	Now I'm a		Colored gentleman as you can plainly see	I know I'm not a white man, tho' I hope to change some day	And when the white folks shout who is dat coon now dis is what I say:	"My name's Pete Johnson, I can do a coon cake walk…"
A.B. Sloane, "When You Ain't Got No Money, (Well You Needn't Come Round)," 1898	Ise had hard luck, worst ever struck	Went down to tell my cullud belle How I was broke			Den dat on'ry niggar gal she said:	"When you ain't got no money, well you needn't come round"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
A.B. Sterling, "Just Come Up and Take Your Presents Back," 1898	You all know me, my name's Tildy	and I used to love a kinky headed coon	But I threw him down then he ran around the town		Then I yelled come up and take your presents back	Take your cheap old oil stove Coon and begone
Ned Wayburn, "He Ain't No Relation O' Mine," 1898	I beat	mah wife		An' den in de police court I stood	An' in dat court dese lines she read	"He ain't no relation of mine"
Bert Williams, "No Coon Can Come Too Black for Me," 1898	I've had more trouble […] than any coloured person could use	One of them was a pretty yaller man	The other was a rale-headed ankle faced freak and was as black as he could be	he has commenced to pay all my expense		"No coon can come too black for me"
Bert Williams and George Walker, "Why Don't You Get a Lady of Your Own," 1898	Sam Johnson was a suitor u8989p8oy797tgt=–9	for Miss Maria's hand	He introduced her to a friend, a swell young man		So when he met this coon next day, why to him he did say:	"Why don't you get a lady of your own?"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Anonymous, "I Cert'nly Love My Yaller Gal," 1899	Ah used to be	'Cause Ah met mah yaller gal	a bad coon	but now Ah am a glad coon		Ah loves mah yaller gal
Armstrong, "Lady with the Rag-Time Walk," 1899	She's got the coons all hypnotized	There's a wench that's raising Cain			You'll hear dem cry, When Jane comes down the line:	"Here comes that lady with the ragtime walk"
Sam Bennett, "I Cert'nly Was a Very Busy Man," 1899	The coons for miles around collected in that festive hall	Last night my babe and I took in a fashionable culled ball			The folks around us knew:	I certn'ly was a very busy man
Ernest Bowman, "I've Got Chicken on the Brain," 1899	There's coons round town […] Would rather have a poke chop […] But I likes	my chicken				I've got chicken on the brain!
Will T. Cobb, "I Don't Care To Be Your Lady Friend No More," 1899	I've gone and lost my	Little Lou, the gal I thought was mine	There's a han's'mer Coon plays in her yard		For she says to me, When she took away ma key:	"Well I don't care to be your lady friend no more"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
George M. Cohan, "Hannah's a Hummer," 1899	All the coons around admit	My Gal is the queen of coons			The whole day long some song she's humming (hum)	Hannahs a hummer warmer than summer
Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson, "The Luckiest Coon in Town," 1899			Have you heard about the lucky coon	He dresses well but don't dress swell But he seems to have the dough	And if you get close to that coon You'll hear him mumbling low	"I got a place to eat I got a place to sleep.."
Albert H. Fitz, "Now I Wants Ma Pay," 1899		Missus Jackson keeps a model laundry	Bill Jones hung around de neighborhood	An' he never seemed to work but he always looked good	When she says "Mister Jones, now I'll have it understood …"	"Now I wants ma money"
Billy Jackson, "My Gal Done Quit At Last," 1899	Me	an' my gal had a terrible fuss	Twas all about one trifling coon	Who works on the levee in a common saloon		All coons are satisfied my gal done quit at last
Dave Reed, "Leave Your Razors at the Door," 1899			A big burly nigger by de name of Brown	For to mingle in de grand sasshay	For this is what he plainly read:	"Leave your razors at the door"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Ed Rogers, "The Oriental Coon," 1899		On the Grand Midway stood a wench, one day, […] said "I could do dat style of dance."			Ma Burly coon, I will teach you soon, if you'll join my Orient	She is an Oriental Coon!
Chas Shackford, "Good-Bye Ma Baby!" 1899		done had a gal called Cindy Who used to work from morn till night to buy this nigger bread	A lazy good for nothin' coon		And then to her he said:	"Good-bye ma Baby Goddbye ma lady love"
Adelaid Sullivan, "I'se Got the Warmest Baby of Them All" 1899	You talk about your warm black babies, Say I'se	got one that will make your heart beat fast […] right from the state of Alamaba		I took her to a champagne dinner	And I mean to win her too	I'se got the warmest baby of them all
Harry von Tilzer, "I've Just Received A Telegram From Baby". 1899		And telegraphed his baby for some coin on Saturday night	A coon sat in his lonely cell		Abd he said "I've got more money now than I know how to use. For I've	"just received a telegram from Baby"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Hughey Cannon, "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home?" 1900		The lady love of old Bill Bailey was hanging clothes on de line	She married a B and O brakeman	In an automobile A great diamond coach and foot man	She yelled out loud:	"Won't you come home Bill Bailey"
Bob Cole, "Pickin' on a Chicken Bone," 1900			Eph Green's	ambition was to get a position as de leadin' musician in de Coontown Band	And dis is what de darkey had to say	"I can't play no Violin…"
Bob Cole, J. Rosamond Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson, "I've Got Troubles of My Own," 1900	Since I been a deacon in de Babtist church, I'm bothered 'most to death		De darkies come a-rounbd me wid der hard luck tales	Out o'money, done lost his job, he had two months houserent for to pay	But to Mister Brown I had to say:	"I've got troubles of my own!"
Gene Jefferson, "Coon, Coon, Coon," 1900	Although it's not my color, I'm feeling mighty blue	My gal she took a notion Against the colored race		She said if I would win her I'd have to change my face	And now I am shook, yes, good and hard Because I am a coon	Coon! Coon! Coon! I wish my color would fade

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Irving Jones, "I'se Sorry Dat I Left Ma Happy Home," 1900		Miss Jackson left her happy home	To wed a cheap minstrel coon	The coon said: "If you'll wed me babe, You'll be a great actress soon"	That gal then took her pen in hand And wrote a letter home which read:	"I am awful sorry that I left my happy home."
Irving Jones, "My Money Never Gives Out," 1900	I am a coon			who is a financier, I'm known as the ragtime million-aire		My money never gives out
Paul J. Knox, "Ma Daf-fodil," 1900	I	know a colored lady, she's a winner every-where			For she's ma	Dusky Lil, ma sweet-est Daffodil
Dave Reed, "Cindy, I Dreams About You," 1900		a dusky Miss	A darkey loved		These were the words he said:	"Cindy I dreams about you"
A.B. Sloane, "Ma Tiger Lily," 1900	I'd frow down any coon	for her	I'm proud to leave her in a crowd, And see dem crazy niggers spoon.		Fur she's ma	Lily, my Tiger Lily

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Andrew Sterling, "I've Got a White Man Working For Me," 1900	Jim Jackson got a dollar and a-half to shovel in a load of coal	But said unto a white man passing by […] "I'll give you just two dollars for the job"	A crowd of darkies came around	That lazy nigger cut a dead swell figure as he stood there with a sneer	These words he loudly said:	"I've got a white man working for me"
Shephard N Edmonds, "I'm Goin' to Live Anyhow 'till I Die," 1901	'		Now there's a coon down 'n Tennessee	He believed in social strife and hav'n a good time all his life	Ne nearly broke dat congregation when he said	"I'm goin' to live anyhow till I die"
Irving Jones, "St. Patricks Day Is a Bad Day for Coons," 1901	All coons should not forget (St. Patricks Day)		I met an Irish bunch who yelled "Let's massacre the coon."	Then he tried to pass for white.		St. Patricks Day's a bad day for coons
Irving Jones, "Life Ain't Worth Living When You're Broke," 1901	Most ev'ry coon in coontown has a hard luck stare					Life aint worth living when you're broke

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Scott Lawrence, "Educated Coon Is Best of All," 1901.	Well they don't count with me	My babe he is cultured	You talk about your swell coons	He's been through college too	You'll hear the people say "That coon can't be beat…"	'Cause he's an edicated baby
Theo Northrup, "She's the Real Thing, My Baby," 1901		You have to see the girl that is my baby		At all parties where she's seen, There she reigns as regal queen		She's the real thing, my baby
Arthur Porter, "I'm Drifting Further From You Baby Every Day," 1901		his wife	A coon was tiring	This colored man he went out west and there he cut a swell	When out in the street a small boy did meet and this is the note he sent	"I am drifting further from you baby drifting every day…"
John Queen, "Ain't Dat a Shame," 1901		his lady friend "Our dream of love is past"	Bill Bailey told		Oh listen to his mournful cry	"Ain't dat a shame, a measly shame, To keep your honey out in the rain.
Julia Smith, "I'm Living on 5th Avenue," 1901	All the other coons have wonder'd	I hustled for the winner and I saw him get there first		And now I am the president of a ragtime razar trust	And best of all I've bought a house down on 5th Avenue	I'm livin' on 5th Avenue

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Andrew Sterling, "The Queen of Charcoal-Alley," 1901	Coons may sing, praises ring, all about the gals they love	I know one takes the bun, Her name's Sal		Talk of style, blowed my pile, Bought the very best in town		No-one knows how much I love my Sally! She's the reigning Queen of Charcoal Alley
George H. Summers, "I'm Expectin' A Special Delivery," 1901	I called on	my gal one day last year		I asked her for to be my own	"Just wait a short time and I will write"	So I was expectin' a special delivry
Bert Williams and George Walker, "She's Getting More Like the White Folks Every Day," 1901	My troubles they just started tween me	and Miss Sally Horn		since at the big hotel she's stayed		She's getting mo' like the white folks ev'ry day
Ted S. Barron, "If Time Was Money I'd Be a Millionaire," 1902			A lazy coon a hangin' 'round heard Parson Jenkins say	He never done a stroke of work he was too big and strong (Never had a dollar)	When he heard dat time was money, dis is what he did say:	"If time was money I'd be a million-aire"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Irving Jones, "Home Ain't Nothing like This," Leo Feist, 1902			A half starved coon	once got a job as a valet for a rich white man	When the waiter brings the finger bowl this coon begins to sing:	"Home ain't nothing like this"
Alex Rogers, "The Coon With the Panama," 1902	We's getting mo' like white folks ev'ry day		But here's the gent'man with the style I wants to talk to you about			It's the coon with the Panama […] hat
Howard Whitney, "I Wants a Ping-Pong Man," 1902	Alphonso Jones	He had the swellest girl there was in Coontown	the latest fad	a gamblin' man	She said I'm sorry, we cannot marry, Till you has learned the latest fad	"I wants a man who can play Ping Pong"
Harry J. Breen, "Ev'ry Morn I Bring Her Chicken," 1903			A coon who was a waiter	in a swell hotel uptown	So he wrote these lines to it himself, and he sang when he got through	"Ev'ry morn I bring her chicken"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Al Fredericks, "Lazy Sam," 1903	"I wants a separation"	said a Missus Hannah Brown	"this great big coon he is the laziest man in town"	The judge he wiped his glasses "Must you shake him in this manner"	When Miss Hannah did thus begin	"Oh he's so lazy, He drives me crazy"
Ed Rose, "I've Got to Go Now, 'Cause I Think It's Goin' To Rain," 1903	Bill Henry is a short fat coon		one night he got mixed up with some other colored men	For a time he very seldom went	He grabbed his coat, made for the door And then they heard him cry:	"I've got to go now, 'cause I think it's goin' to rain
Harry Von Tilzer, "Good Bye Eliza Jane," 1903	Now I'm the laughing stock of the town	Look a'here, Liza listen to me	You went a driving with Mister Brown	I was the good thing while I had the "dough"	Now I must whisper low:	"Good-bye, Eliza Jane"
Nathan Bivins, "It Makes No Difference What You Do, Get the Money," 1904	I ain't gwine to work so hard, out in der white man's yard	When I told ma gal she sang this tune	I'm gwine to be just like a sporty coon	Dressed up all der time, drink der best of wine	When I told ma gal she sang this tune	"It makes no diff'rence what you do, Get the money"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Theodore Morse, "Great Big Chick-apoo Chief," 1904			a foxy coon [..] dressed up just like an Indian	Silently this coon was creeping to a chicken coop near by	Landed him in jail, and there they heard him wail:	"I ain't no chicken thief, I'm a great big heap much Chick-apoo chief"
Theodore Morse, "I've Got a Feelin' For You," 1904	Miss Liza loved	a bashful coon who'd keep a gazin' at the moon			And Liza heard him say:	"Way down in my heart I've got a feelin' for you"
Theodore Morse, "Can't You See My Heart Beats All For You," 1904	A little dusky octoroon gave all her love	to a certain coon			And he sang to her surprise:	"Cant you see my heart beats all for you"
Ed Wilson, "Can't Live on Atmosphere," 1904	A verry dark coon and a	brown-skin gal had a falling out	If dat yellow nigger dat keeps hanging round, Wouldn't leave town dat night	But de gal said no, he's got de dough	And dis nigger replies as he rolls his eys "Baby, you have throwed me down.	"Now my little baby let me tell you true, I never did think dat of you"
Tom Lemonier, "If Ma Babe Could See Me Now," 1905			There is a coon you all may know named Jim Jeepheus Brown	He had the finest job they say wid de rich white folks uptown	And seemed so tickled with himself till he yelled right out with pride:	"If ma babe could see me now"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Neal O'Brien, "Just Because She Had Dat Winnin' Way," 1905	I	think the meanest colored gal I ever knew	was one dat frowed me down a week ago	She never liked my style of clothes or shape of head	Still I would hang a round and call her mine	Just because she had dat winnin way
Chris Smith, "Good-Bye, I'll See You Some More," 1905	I'm all confused, I've been abused	Liza goodbye, I'm goin' away			Liza, I hope this will appeal to you!	"Liza, oh Liza"
Garnett Lee, "I'm a Lucky Coon," 1906			Bill Jackson was a hard luck coon	To the racetrack he did go	He left the track in an automobile and to his friends he cried.	"Porkchops no more for mine…"
Bert Potter, "Just Hanging Round," 1906	No one can tell just how he lives		In this town lives a lazy coon, Sam Jones is his right name	He hangs around from morn till night He never had no shame	You'll always find him there	Just hanging round, just hanging round
Harry von Tilzer, "Moving Day," 1906	I said	"wait until ma Bill comes home […]"	Landlord said this morning to me, Gimme your key this flat aint free	He'll have money cause he told me so this morning	If he don't pay, why out you go "Because its	Moving day, moving day

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Egbert Van Alstine, "I'm Going Right Back to Chicago," 1906	me		Jim Baxter was a Chicago coon	The sheriff told me so […] That Mister Baxter forgot to pay	every time he'd see a Cop look crooked he would shake with fear and cry, oh dear if fat man's after me	"I'm goin' back, back right to Chicago
Ramsey Wallace, "L A Z Y Spells Lazy," 1906		Said Sally Brown	Said Rastus Brown	I'll work all day Give you all my pay I won't shoot craps no more	She threw him our and right about, She started in to sing:	"L-A-Z-Y spells lazy"
Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson, "Sugar Babe," 1907	And dere's been a lot of ravin' bout	ma lady fair		livin in a side street	And Sugar Babe is her name	Sugar Babe, you sho' is sweet
Chris Smith, "Just an Old Friend of the Family," 1907	The whole blame town is upside down 'Cause old Bill Boue is about to sue	His Dinah for divorce	But Dinah claims she had the right for to kiss her friend of course		But he begged the gent'mans pardon when his Dinah did explain	"He's just an old friend of the family"

Table 5.1 Continued

Song	Narrator	Romantic Partner	Social Antagonist	Social Index	Chorus Transition	Chorus
Leo Edwards, "He's Just Plain Ordinary Man but Lord How He Can Love," 1909	Friends tried to tell her	Jesamine June loved	a bone headed coon	he wasn't the feller to be any lady's beau	But she shook her head then smilingly said There's some things you don't know	"He don't know nothing about theology…"
Bert Noble, "Hannibal. | Levy Music Collection," 1909		I'm awful glad I got a healthy wife	There was a coon in Tennessee	Who was as lazy as he could be	One that can wash for me, cook squash for me and say:	"Hannibal, cannibal, Hannibal, You're a carnivorous animal"
Lasses White, "Sweet Mama Tree Top Tall," 1920	The folks called her	Mary Euphonus Elizabeth Lee was known for many miles around	When Jasper Johnson arrived down there he acted like a yellow cur	The society belle way down in old Blackville town	this is what he said to her	"Sweet mamma Tree-top tall wont you kindly turn your damper down"

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