

stances or experiences, jazz easily turned the minds of French critics from antebellum America to sub-Saharan Africa and the colonial project at its height in the interwar years. For the French, jazz was "jungle music" more often than "plantation music."

As many scholars have pointed out, the French response to Africans was contradictory at best. The image of Africa in the French imagination already had a long and convoluted history by the 1920s, much of it based on misunderstanding.⁹³ For centuries, ideas about Africa were created through myth, rumor, and legend without much direct contact between the French and Africans. As colonial interests expanded at the end of the nineteenth century along with an increasing attention to economic exploitation, scientific research, and political experimentation on the African continent, knowledge of its people became more widespread, even if that understanding was not always more accurate. Those within France who hoped to exploit Africa for its resources frequently presented Africans as "noble savages" and the Dark Continent as an unspoiled territory waiting to be explored. But this attitude changed in the wake of African resistance to French colonial advances in the late 1800s. Africa soon began to seem like a territory with a vicious race of people that needed to be conquered and controlled.⁹⁴

During World War I, relations between the French and Africans from the colonies became increasingly complicated. France welcomed colonial soldiers to its soil because they were seen as valuable members of a Greater France and were fighting on behalf of the nation and its values. At the same time, though, many French workers feared that laborers from the colonies could threaten their jobs, and the resulting resentment sparked race riots, which themselves helped to bring about more highly politicized perceptions of race in the 1920s.⁹⁵ Unrest within the colonies from educated Africans demanding French citizenship after the war added to the French desire to keep a reasonable distance between themselves and their colonial subjects by employing a policy of "association."⁹⁶ Also in the wake of World War I, eugenics, social hygiene movements, and pronatalist concerns about declining birthrates all stressed a more clearly biological conception of racial categories, including those in the colonies, and emphasized the need to protect the French "race" by preventing racial decline or dilution.⁹⁷ Therefore, by the time of jazz's arrival, foreigners in general, and Africans in particular, could seem at least as dangerous as they were exotic.

The most basic fact about jazz to most French listeners was that even though many white musicians played it, the music was still *la musique*

nègre. Writing in *La Revue musicale*, musicologist Blaise Pesquinne, for example, argued that "in spite of its popularity in Europe and in all the countries of the white race, one must not forget that jazz is, for us, an essentially exotic product. . . . Jazz is by no means an internal phenomenon from within Western music, it is the artistic manifestation of a race that is different from our own."⁹⁸ Underlying this common idea of a distinct *musique nègre* was the notion that it was an expression of a universal category of blackness—an essential set of qualities common to all people of color—that transcended the individual experience of each musician. "*Les peuples nègres* are particularly known for being endowed with a musical aptitude," remarked musicologist Julien Tiersot in the introduction to his collection *Chansons nègres* (1933), which brought together the music of folk tunes from black America, Africa, and Oceania. Even though the musicians from these diverse locations were not "*de race pure*," he argued that "*négritiques ou métissés, mullato or creole . . . their songs have taken a different shape than those that Europe has produced.*"⁹⁹ *La musique nègre*, as many French saw it, contained certain special qualities peculiar to all black people because of its beginnings on the Dark Continent. Music critic Émile Vuillermoz put it simply in 1923 when he wrote that "the black race possesses a musical sense of a rare subtlety and an instinct of rhythmic suppleness of which we have the right to be jealous."¹⁰⁰ Many commentators made the music an emanation of the black soul—"l'âme nègre," in the words of music critic René Dumesnil and others.¹⁰¹ The rhythm that distinguished jazz was linked directly to its African past because, some asserted, rhythm was part of life in Africa and therefore ingrained into black musicians throughout the world. The "imitative nature" of Africans was "endowed with a highly sharpened musical sense, sensitive to the least percussion in the middle of a thousand noises in the forest," according to one author, and now this element had seemingly reemerged thousands of miles away in the sounds of jazz music.¹⁰²

One supposed proof of this link with Africa that many French critics offered was the sense of nostalgia that they perceived in jazz, the musical expression of a longing for a world that had been lost. Nostalgia had been, since its conception in the seventeenth century, a medical diagnosis describing a feeling of intense homesickness, but by the nineteenth century, it also came to explain in France a more general "crisis of civilization" that people underwent as their lives changed.¹⁰³ Modern technology and the movement of populations from the countryside to cities took people away from home and familiar surroundings and "civilized" them, but it stripped

something of their old self in the process. Turning from a peasant into a Frenchman meant giving up an identity that could become the object of nostalgic feeling. Nineteenth-century physicians often claimed that such homesickness for another place and time would be cured by the very processes of modernization that created the condition itself. Railroads and communications technology took people away from their native soil while still allowing them to be psychologically close to home. But for cultures or individuals believed to be caught in the middle of the process, longing for another time and place was seen as common. Nostalgia linked life in the present with a memory of the past.

Depicting jazz as sounding nostalgic often reinforced an understanding of its origins not as distinctively American but African. Having been uprooted from Africa by slavery, American blacks expressed through their music a sadness and longing for an idyllic past before their forced emigration to the United States, in the view of French commentators. Blacks, as Pesquinne put it in his *La Revue musicale* article, for example, were "nostalgic and unhappy in the towns [of the United States and] did exactly what the Russian immigrants did in the various capitals of Europe: they came together to sing."¹⁰⁴ From this point of view, jazz was the music of exiles whose real home was Africa, and depicting jazz as nostalgic emphasized the essential racial nature of the music. Demonstrating the partially civilized state of black Americans, one author stated of jazz: "From this duality, the tam-tam and the fever of the combustion engine, a fantastic humor, sometimes a little monkeylike, alternates with a tragic nostalgia of exiled slaves curiously corresponding to that of an extreme civilization bullied by the machine culture."¹⁰⁵ Black Americans, many French observers concluded, were therefore only partially civilized, so their music retained much of the primitivism of African music.

The most important argument for the deep racial origins of jazz music came in the 1926 book *Jazz* by André Cœuroy, an editor of the journal *La Revue musicale*, and ethnomusicologist André Schaeffner. Cœuroy and Schaeffner's reputation on the subject had been at least partly established by the time of *Jazz*'s publication because elements of their argument had appeared in the musical journals *La Revue musicale* and *Le Ménestrel*. In 1925, they had also surveyed musicians, artists, critics, and intellectuals for their opinions about jazz, printing the results in a running column in the newspaper *Paris-Midi*. Once Cœuroy and Schaeffner's *Jazz* was published, it quickly became a standard citation in later French writings about the music. Their book was a landmark not only because it was the first French

text that purported to be about jazz as a musical form but also because it drew together some of the other critical writing on jazz up to that time from articles in France and the United States, and it linked jazz with other musicological discussions.

Yet Cœuroy and Schaeffner did not attempt to explain the musical qualities of jazz as it existed in the 1920s. Rather, they placed jazz at the end of a larger history of la musique nègre and focused on where jazz had come from rather than what it was actually like in their day. Asserting both jazz's African roots and its connection with other kinds of black American music, *Jazz* was more an early ethnomusicological study of a racially based musique nègre than an exploration of jazz. In fact, their book was really not about jazz music at all but rather the musical qualities that nègres, regardless of when or where they lived, possessed. These traits, Cœuroy and Schaeffner asserted, had led up to the modern phenomenon of jazz.

In *Jazz*, Cœuroy and Schaeffner maintained that "at each moment, each people only has one music through which it prays, dreams, or dances," yet there were essential underlying elements that continued across generations.¹⁰⁶ Distinctions between musical genres produced by a single race therefore made little sense since each kind of music only expressed variations of deeper, racially determined qualities. The music of Africans and African Americans should be seen as part of a single black musical continuum of which jazz was simply the latest form, they asserted. "The violent music of Africa to the planting songs of the Antilles or Louisiana, to *spirituals*, finally to *jazz*," were all members of the same musical family.¹⁰⁷ In this scheme, there was no significant difference between black Africans and black Americans, who remained united above all by ancient and ultimately immutable characteristics. Blacks were united in particular by a love of music and dance with a special affinity for rhythm, they suggested. Much of their book traced the development of la musique nègre as a background to jazz, and it cited the observations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travelers as evidence of the longevity of a specifically black style of performance. They also followed the history of various instruments, such as the drum and banjo, along with the traditions of song and dance that they believed defined black music.

Cœuroy and Schaeffner's views were not universally held. Readers of *La Revue musicale* were reminded of the importance of the racial basis of their analysis in a brief exchange between Schaeffner and music critic André Hoérée in 1927. Responding to *Jazz*, Hoérée argued that jazz music had

emerged from the European dances of the pre-World War I era rather than African roots: "I do not take jazz as an essentially black expression but as a black interpretation of an art of the white race of European origins."¹⁰⁸ Yet by ignoring the longer prehistory of jazz and focusing only on the dance steps that gave jazz its immediate form in the 1920s, Schaeffner countered, Hoérée had missed the larger point. "There is no example in the history of music, as in the history of art, of invention where several individuals, several races did not collaborate," Schaeffner conceded. He and Cœuroy had, indeed, talked about European religious music sung by black Americans as a precursor of jazz. "But," Schaeffner concluded, "the *inventor* is he who places his accent on it."¹⁰⁹ For Schaeffner, despite the contributions of others, jazz remained une musique nègre because it was permanently and indelibly stamped with a black style of playing that had come from the performers themselves.

Many listeners were attracted to jazz precisely because of its perceived blackness, including Belgian poet Robert Goffin, who became an important figure in early jazz criticism in France. By the time Goffin published his first critical book on the music, he had already made a valuable contribution to jazz-inspired literature with a book of poems titled *Jazz-Band* (1920) and articles in the journal *Le Disque vert*. His new book in 1932, *Aux frontières du jazz* (At the borders of jazz) reflected a decade of listening to and thinking about the music. In it, he did not seek to analyze the origins of the music, as Cœuroy and Schaeffner had done, but rather the music as he heard it in the 1920s.

Goffin's earliest experiences with syncopated music came, like those of many other listeners, during the Great War. While serving as an interpreter for a Canadian battalion, "among the soldiers," he remembered, "were some Americans who taught me their songs."¹¹⁰ Later, as a student, he listened to Belgian, French, and English orchestras perform music that they called jazz, but his real introduction to the music came when he encountered Louis Mitchell in Paris. Inspired by what he heard, Goffin wrote his early articles and poems "possessed immediately by a sort of frenzied lyricism."¹¹¹ Goffin took a few lessons from the black trumpeter Arthur Briggs in 1922 while playing in a "humble orchestra which some friends and I formed."¹¹² Experiences with Mitchell and Briggs confirmed for Goffin that jazz was a black music set apart by its players' unique expression. "How I prefer *les nègres*, the beautiful *nègres* who laugh with all their teeth," he proclaimed in *Le Disque vert* in 1922. By contrast, for Goffin, the music of whites was cold and overly rational.¹¹³ Jazz was about

feeling rather than reason, and for him black American musicians were in touch with the more emotional side of human experience.

Unlike Cœuroy and Schaeffner's book, which ended where jazz began, *Aux frontières du jazz* was the first book-length work in French to treat jazz as it actually existed in the 1920s. Goffin explored the general history and character of jazz before offering a series of miniature portraits of the various 1920s performers. He was among the first to praise Louis Armstrong at a time when white bands were experiencing their greatest popularity in Paris, and in doing so, he reemphasized the crucial contribution of black American musicians to jazz.¹¹⁴ The stress on musicians and the techniques of their performances also distinguished Goffin from other critics. Most French writers referred to jazz as a single musical entity with little distinction between bands or styles. They perhaps wrote about one or two musicians in order to make a larger musical point, but they did not usually recognize nuances within the evolving genre. Goffin, however, discussed an entire range of performers, commenting on their performances not as a general music critic but rather as a jazz critic using a specialized set of criteria to judge and elaborate on the music. Unlike most of those who wrote about jazz casually as amateurs or who saw it as simply one music among many, Goffin was an unabashed aficionado of jazz. He invested much of his time visiting clubs and record stores to study the music he loved. Rather than merely describing the unique use of rhythm, syncopation, or musical instrumentation, Goffin took those elements for granted and wrote instead about how musicians worked within the jazz idiom. "Open your dictionaries because here are the beautiful new words that France accepts as they are instead of translating them," he announced.¹¹⁵ "Jazz, drummer, lyrics, hot, break, chorus," were some of the new American terms that those who wrote and spoke of the music must use, declared Goffin. In doing so, his book helped to establish an emerging pattern for a specific literature of jazz criticism in France—one that a distinct clique of writers whose sole and serious focus was jazz were creating and would expand during the 1930s.

Jazz also fascinated anthropologist and author Michel Leiris, who, as a young man in Paris in the 1920s, was also cultivating an interest in African art and cultures. As part of the intellectual and literary avant-garde drawn to exploring exotic peoples, Leiris sought to investigate realms outside of traditional Western experience, whether in Africa or within himself. Indeed, the two became closely intertwined in his ethnographic writing in which he cast aside the objectivity of scientific inquiry in favor of an in-

tensively psychological engagement, both with himself and his subjects. Leiris's depictions of jazz blended the richness of an ethnographic study with the confessional self-revelation and "personal ethnography" for which his writing is known, as if the music had penetrated to that deep level as well.¹¹⁶

Leiris remembered his first encounter with jazz in 1918 during the intermission of a music hall program at Le Théâtre Caumartin, where one of Louis Mitchell's bands, the Seven Spades, performed. In the following years, as jazz grew in popularity and moved from a music hall intermission to a headlining act, Leiris became an enthusiastic fan. He visited various nightclubs around the city and participated in surprise parties that brought jazz into people's homes. Josephine Baker's performance in *La Revue Nègre* fascinated him, as it did so many French intellectuals, because of its provocative blending of "primitive" images with modern music and themes.¹¹⁷ Leiris was drawn to jazz as part of his search for something new, disgusted as he was with what Europe had become by the early twentieth century. "What is certain," he recalled in an interview later in life, "is that I enjoyed jazz as something exotic and non-European, as an affront to European music and art."¹¹⁸ Like many intellectuals and artists in the interwar years, Leiris thought that cultures outside Europe offered the hope of regenerating a seemingly dead Western imagination that had been exhausted in the war.

Goffin and Leiris were not alone, but in spite of the widespread love for music performed by African Americans, many French commentators continued to praise white bands. The role of white musicians seems to raise a contradiction in the racial aspect of the music because jazz often did have a white face in interwar Paris, particularly in the music halls, where many of the famous white U.S. and British bands performed to larger audiences than could crowd into any nightclub. Despite their admiration for jazz because it was une musique nègre, many critics and journalists frequently appear to have preferred, or at least did not withhold compliments from, the jazz performed by U.S. bandleader Paul Whiteman, Briton Jack Hylton, and other white performers. Music hall composer Vincent Scotto, for example, claimed that jazz played by black musicians left him "suspicious," but listening to Whiteman "completely destroyed this apprehension."¹¹⁹ For one journalist, Hylton's band was "the model, the paragon of jazz bands, the supreme flower of American music."¹²⁰ Cœuroy and Schaeffner themselves, in spite of having traced the black roots of jazz, felt Whiteman to be "currently the most complete jazz band."¹²¹ By 1926,

Cocteau claimed disparagingly that "now the elite admire the bland orchestra of Whiteman, academic, official jazz."¹²² Hoérée continued to argue for a greater emphasis on the white origins of jazz. Jazz was the product of "several races and crystallizes the contribution of several apparently irreducible aesthetics," he suggested. Given the tremendous blending of styles that had made jazz, Hoérée believed that only the "blues" was really black. Otherwise, he said, "all the production that we know, that which attracts us, not only by its rhythms but also by the suppleness and the unity of its writing, the haunting subtlety of its harmonies, this production is uniquely of the white race."¹²³ By the middle of the decade, bands like Whiteman's and Hylton's were among the most popular and highly touted, as we will see in the next chapter.

One can begin to account for this seeming paradox between the frequently proclaimed African origins of jazz and appreciation of white musicians by noting that although many writers praised white bands, they still recognized these orchestras' reliance on African American musical forms for their initial inspiration. Because of this background, many white bands were still heard as wild and chaotic. One reviewer called Hylton "a little nègre."¹²⁴ Hylton himself stressed the blackness of the music he played when he argued that it came from "mysterious Africa."¹²⁵ Of course, with black music in vogue, publicizing any sort of jazz as une musique nègre might simply have been good business. Nevertheless, one composer, Raoul Laparra, offered a "hierarchy" of jazz in which Turks, Spaniards, and Parisians did not play jazz as well as white Americans, who were inferior to black Americans, who were themselves not as good as their ancestors. Thus, he reasserted the African roots of jazz while also acknowledging the albeit lesser talents of white musicians.¹²⁶

Whiteness sometimes introduced another racialized issue into the debate over jazz because Jewish composers, such as Irving Berlin and George Gershwin, wrote many of the Tin Pan Alley tunes popular among jazz and dance bands of the 1920s. Many French writers referred to Berlin as the "king of Jazz." But critics also frequently depicted Jews as a special kind of white musician. In a 1932 speech, French writer Gérard Bauer explained that "in these crossroads of the towns of America where blacks expressed their great nostalgia, other melancholy voyagers passed through, capable of understanding the persecution and endless travel: Jews from old Europe who emigrated to the new world."¹²⁷ French jazz musician Ray Ventura agreed, arguing that "the two races were oppressed" and hence could understand each other.¹²⁸ In other words, Jews were believed able to

translate African American feelings into written words and music. Just like black Americans, Jews were between two worlds—the modern world of 1920s Paris and the primitive one of Eastern Europe—and their music captured the same quality.

Although many in France were attracted to the blackness of jazz, for others this quality, drawing on the dangerous aspects of the stereotype about Africans, was precisely the music's problem. La musique nègre was frequently seen as part of a more general l'art nègre that, for some, threatened to turn black everyone around it. "If the *'folie noire'* is not stopped soon," declared one critic in an article that rejected everything black in-chasing jazz, "in a few months, I won't see any whites!"¹²⁹ In a 1930 article titled "Progress toward the Simian," another author argued that because of jazz, "the reign of the Negro is nearly finished. The reign of the monkey is starting again."¹³⁰

Critikons of the blackness of jazz begin to make sense against the larger backdrop of other concerns in the interwar period, especially fears of racial degeneration. Particularly important during the 1920s were eugenicists' concerns about how the presence of foreigners would effect the "quality" of the French people.¹³¹ Already troubled that an invasion of immigrants in the postwar period might weaken France physically, many French critics also saw jazz as the symptom and a further cause of such degeneration. They cast the music in terms that emphasized its potential for producing nothing but the basest physical responses in listeners. Writing in *La Revue musicale*, critic André Suarès called jazz "an orchestra of brutes with nonopposable thumbs," saying that it "is all excess." Jazz contained a purely visceral element since it was made, Suarès argued, "from five or six formulas, two that are useless and two [that] make one want to vomit: jazz is the music of the stomach and of all that carry their soul between the liver and the thigh."¹³² Playing jazz as the black musicians did, some critics suggested, constituted a step backward and away from civilization toward the jungles, and echoed the fear of "going native" that some observers voiced about the French in their African colonies.¹³³ "Is one still in Paris?" asked one critic in desperation on hearing the sounds of jazz. "Is one still in a civilized country?"¹³⁴

The case of jazz in Paris helps to clarify and emphasize some French views of blackness in the 1920s and 1930s. Whether or not the French were racist in the interwar years, it is clear that they, along with most Westerners, thought in increasingly racialized terms.¹³⁵ And as the history of interaction with colonial subjects indicates, French racial attitudes evolved

through a series of often competing responses depending on historical circumstances, perceptions, and the needs of the moment. Jazz could evoke many such racialized reactions depending on whether one heard it as friendly or frightening, especially when linked with colonial Africa. Observers of jazz perceived blackness as a biological category that produced cultural manifestations. Musical qualities like rhythm emanated from supposedly inborn traits, even though the unique history of African Americans had played a role in shaping how jazz developed and sounded. Most important, whether one liked jazz or despised it, the music's blackness—like its Americanness, although for different reasons—made it alien to French traditions.

FRENCH CIVILIZATION

In spite of the apparent differences between these two ways of characterizing jazz—American music linked with economic and cultural influence and la musique nègre based on a racial category—both pointed to still larger challenges. One question centered around the influence that foreigners and foreign cultures were, for better or worse, exercising in postwar France. As a music that blended the symbolism of both the United States and Africa, jazz was doubly foreign and therefore a touchstone of debate about how France interacted with those from beyond its borders. This debate itself was double-sided. Many in France celebrated the seemingly new and refreshing influence of foreigners. Others, however, decried the erosion of what they deemed to be a more traditional French culture by immigrants, feeding the xenophobic nationalism for which the interwar era is already well-known. Those on both sides of the debate about jazz employed the terms *American* and *black* to their own ends.

The issue of jazz's foreignness can be set against the backdrop of a wave of immigration into France that had begun during the Great War and changed Paris dramatically in the 1920s. Most of the foreign laborers and colonial troops that had come to France to assist in the war effort were repatriated, but some Allied soldiers did remain afterward. In the early years of postwar reconstruction, as we have seen, the government and businesses brought in new workers, largely from other European countries, to fill gaps in the labor force and as a way to increase the French population at a time when France feared a further decline in its numbers.¹³⁶ France had been especially willing to accept refugees during and after the war, and exiles from the Russian Revolution as well as the politi-

cal and economic chaos of Eastern Europe soon established their own immigrant communities in the neighborhoods of Paris.¹³⁷ Official immigrants to France numbered between 150,000 and 200,000 each year of the 1920s with only three years of the decade falling below these figures. The number of foreigners residing in France more than doubled between 1911 and 1931.¹³⁸ Although foreigners were never a large percentage of the population—between approximately 4 and 7 percent from 1921 to 1931, after which the number dropped off somewhat—their increasing presence in the 1920s aroused a wide range of responses, from interest and sympathy to suspicion and fear, and each reaction became intensified as their numbers grew.¹³⁹ Immigrants were nothing new to French society, of course, but the influence that foreign populations had during these years seemed more profound than in the past, in part because of the new languages, food, music, and lifestyles that they brought to Paris as visible symbols of their presence.¹⁴⁰ Neither Americans generally nor African Americans more specifically were the most numerous foreigners in postwar Paris, and their numbers were not large compared to the overall population of the city. But because of their economic impact and visibility in the arts, these particular individuals from outside France signaled to many a significant change in the postwar era.

As a foreign music, jazz was also a powerful reminder that in the twentieth century, France would have to exist in a different relationship with other cultures and peoples than it had in the nineteenth century. Distances and differences were shrinking between countries, and the effectiveness of political boundaries to keep national traditions separated was eroding more quickly than ever. Airplanes and automobiles allowed people to travel faster and farther as well as to cross borders easily. Radios facilitated long-distance communication at the same time that films and phonographs could bring music like jazz from one country to another with surprising ease. The war itself had done much to break down boundaries. It expanded the theater of battle across much of Europe and also around the world through espionage and intelligence that took place beyond the belligerent nations themselves.¹⁴¹ It also brought to the center of the international stage the two powers that would dominate twentieth-century history, the Soviet Union and United States, thereby beginning to shift the international balance of power out of Europe for the first time in the modern age.¹⁴²

Another issue underlay the discussions about foreigners and jazz, however. In particular, the perceived modernity of the United States and the

so-called primitivism of la musique nègre both threatened to erase a more traditional notion of French *civilisation*, one important element of how many people in France conceived of their nation. By virtue of their language, their Cartesian heritage, their Enlightenment and revolutionary roots, and their purported clarity of ideas, the French claimed a cultural leadership within Europe. And they had been exporting those values, along with the accompanying idea of “mastery” of self and others coupled with a belief in the moral power of improvement, as part of their “civilizing mission” in the colonies.¹⁴³ World War I had been, for many combatants, a struggle on behalf of these traditional conceptions of what civilization meant, but the brutality and shock of the war had also called into question whether those values could continue to survive.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps poet Paul Valéry best captured the postwar sense of despair when he remarked, “We modern civilizations have learned to recognize that we are mortal.”¹⁴⁵ And in the 1920s, the perceived modernity and primitivism of jazz music forced many French listeners to ask whether their unique and privileged civilization was again being challenged, this time by foreign influences.

Bringing these ideas together in the 1939 *L'Age d'homme* (Manhood), an exploration of his youth and psyche, Leiris wrote that

jazz was a sign of allegiance, an orgiastic tribute to the colors of the moment. It functioned magically, and its means of influence can be compared to a kind of possession. It was the element that gave these celebrations their true meaning: a *religious* meaning, with communion by dance, latent or manifest eroticism, and drinks, the most effective means of bridging the gap that separates individuals from each other at any kind of gathering. Swept along by violent bursts of topical energy, jazz still had enough of a “dying civilization” about it, of humanity blindly submitting to The Machine, to express quite completely the state of mind of at least some of that generation: a more or less conscious demoralization born of the war, a naive fascination with the comfort and the latest inventions of progress, a predilection for a contemporary setting whose inanity we nonetheless vaguely anticipated, an abandonment to the animal joy of experiencing the influence of a modern rhythm, an underlying aspiration to a new life in which more room would be made for the impassioned frankness we inarticularly longed for.¹⁴⁶

This complicated and beautiful passage connects many of the themes in the debate surrounding jazz in the interwar years. Ultimately, it suggests that there was very little difference between the modern, machine-age qualities of jazz and the primitive, Dionysian responses that this music was thought

to bring out in people. As he described jazz, "modern rhythm" effortlessly met "animal joy." Leiris also coupled the search for new artistic inspiration in the postwar years with the belief that jazz drew from a timeless and transcendent culture of black people.

Like Leiris, some listeners appreciated the vitality of jazz because of its ability to cut through layers of old art and culture, thereby finding a new inspiration at the beginning of a new century. Even the conservative musicologist Lionel de la Laurencie recognized jazz as "the sound image of an epoch of realism, of brutal simplicity, destructive, and repudiating all romantic sentimentalism."¹⁴⁷ That it also appeared to have non-Western origins was all the better for many as the West seemed to have proved itself bankrupt in the war. In this pairing of the modernity of the twentieth century and primitivism of black Africa, fans of jazz invoked a liberationist fantasy implying that the nineteenth century could be shed by embracing the newest developments where "all that is solid melts into air" and, at the same time, returning to a golden past and the beauty of the noble savage. Writer and artist Sem, for one, put the second half of this formulation plainly when he maintained, "We have been civilized for too long, and this primitive music communicating to us its naïveté gives us once again for a moment the simple souls of children."¹⁴⁸ Both the modern and primitive in jazz promised its fans the ability to rebuild France and start life over in a new, modern world that was also a rediscovered state of nature like the imagined primitive society.

In this, both America and nègre represented modernity and primitivism at the same time. The United States could be both the height of technological advancement and the land where everything was starting anew. Likewise, blackness could represent both the primitive, savage world of Africa and the modern world that promoted change and novelty, that reveled in exoticism. The modern and primitive values that jazz emulated were simultaneous welcome attacks on the venerable institutions of French civilization—the mores, values, and principles on which many aspects of French culture had been built for so long, but that many now found oppressive and antiquated.¹⁴⁹

But to its enemies, both the modernity and primitivism of jazz were its worst qualities for the very same threat they posed to French civilization. "The last war has abolished the aesthetics as well as the ethics of the past," lamented conservative critic Henry Malherbe in language similar to that of jazz fans. "We have been obliged to return to the beginning of art and civilization," he claimed, and "with its elementary melody" and other

qualities, jazz was part of that process.¹⁵⁰ As much as anything, the criticisms of the Americanness of jazz were attacks on the modern, post-World War I world and the kinds of economic as well as cultural changes that France was undergoing. In that respect, jazz was a sign of the times. Jazz "continues its crazy song!" wrote one critic, "Crazy like the age in which we live."¹⁵¹ Yet the noise of the modern world and its psychological effects were, in the end, not far from what many called primitive; indeed, they were two sides of the same coin. The modern world—in its very desire for progress and renewal in the wake of the war, and as the result of technological change that eroded old ways of seeing the world—had become primitive again, stripping away all the previous morals, values, tastes, and rules to return to a new, and for many frightening, state of nature. And for many critics, jazz was the sound track of this era. Theater critic Gustave Fréjaville likened the effects of jazz to the events in the novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Once familiar instruments, mutated by the effects of jazz, had come to sound like monsters, he claimed.

One thinks that one hears a painful concert of curses and muffled maledictions, while the executioners, eager at their task, manifest their satanic joy with a savage gesticulation, and while, as it is common during the sacrifices of certain primitive cults, a man with a black face, a fanatic priest of this modern Baal that one calls Pleasure, unleashes an infernal racket by beating on the taut skins and bronze shields to stifle the cries of the victims.¹⁵²

Fréjaville made the link between the primitive and modern worlds, seeing a kind of racial and cultural degeneracy in both.

There were other related issues at stake that stemmed from such fears of jazz as both modern and primitive, as the harbinger of a new cultural order. Some felt, for example, that French taste, itself a significant component of the definition of civilization was in danger of being corrupted by jazz.¹⁵³ One author wrote that his good, French taste enabled him to see the truth about jazz, which was an "abominable mixture" that undermined more tasteful musical expressions.¹⁵⁴ "I do not see the slightest relationship between our beautiful art and the more or less black manifestations [of jazz]," argued Guy de Lioncourt, secretary general of the conservative music academy Schola Cantorum.¹⁵⁵ An editor from the south of France remarked that "we are many, very many, my friend, who are too full of jazz . . . [which] invades, deforms art, makes the senses stupid." Jazz, he believed, "is becoming a danger to taste and to public moral health."¹⁵⁶ Another feared that dance music like jazz "cannot justify

this complete erasure of our taste and our national personality, taste that had to be developed over the centuries," unlike that of the Americans.¹⁵⁷

For many others who lamented these developments, the problem went further than taste because gender roles and their supposed moral underpinnings were also in danger. Jazz went against older codes of conduct by encouraging wild dancing and enticing young ladies to go to nightclubs. The music became part of the new "flapper" image, thanks in part to Josephine Baker and others who provided a sometimes sexualized image of jazz music that rejected nineteenth-century morality. One author claimed that jazz "has invaded salons, dancing courses, dance halls where honest women can go," thus implying that only dishonest or corrupt women would enjoy jazz.¹⁵⁸ The threat of jazz to the morality of women became part of a larger political concern during these years as pronatalists, expressing panic over the perceived depopulation of France due to a declining birthrate, often criticized young women who preferred to spend their nights out on the town rather than at home raising children. Jazz, they asserted, was one more lure away from traditional female duties toward the lifestyle of the "modern woman."¹⁵⁹ Victor Margueritte, for one, depicted the erosion of traditional morality in his famous novel of the 1920s, *La Garçonne*. Using jazz to set the scene for the decadent age, he wrote, for example, that "the dance club pulsed deliriously to the savage rhythms of the jazz band."¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, as others suggested, women were not safe in dance halls that were filled with gigolos who sought only to take advantage of them. One critic's calls for police action were based not only on the "infernal rhythm" of jazz that he heard but also the corrupted—and like that of the garçonne—gender-bending lifestyle that he connected with it—one of "shameless ostentation." "All around us," he said of a jazz club, "were only pretty young men with tired gestures, with trailing voices, with eyes made languid by drugs and covered with mascara that waddled with a studied nonchalance. Each of their gestures is a replica or a caricature of women's gestures."¹⁶¹

Ironically, the attackers of jazz often used the same language as those who loved it. As a 1926 article began, for instance, "A group of blacks made their instruments howl wildly, giving off a humming sound." It continued to describe the pounding rhythm and "brutal force" of the instruments playing for dancers who were "elevated, driven, hypnotized, driven mad." Overall, the article, titled "C'est un enfer sonore . . .," argued for the hellishness of the jazz sound and denounced the music as "satanic."¹⁶² But for jazz's proponents, all of these qualities were precisely what constituted

the music's great value. Describing the music at a concert at Le Casino de Paris, for example, Cocteau, who throughout much of the 1920s not only enjoyed the music but also occasionally played drums in a Paris nightclub, praised "the brave blacks . . . [who] threw pieces of raw meat to the crowd in the trumpet blasts and the rattling."¹⁶³ Like the article that suggested jazz's hellishness, Cocteau invoked the animal, wild, and noisy side of the music, and this terminology was only one set of concepts used to describe it. None of the perceived elements of jazz—its supposed primitivism, its noise and rhythm, the emphasis on dancing, the challenge to older moral codes, or the powerful psychological effects of the music—were as much in dispute as what these qualities meant to listeners. Fans often expected jazz to open new areas of human consciousness and provide new social as well as cultural experiences through the impact it had on the mind and body of the listener. Opponents did not dispute these effects on the audience. Rather, they feared those very effects along with what they believed to be the negative consequences for both individuals and society. In the end, the actual portrait of jazz was not nearly as contested as its potential consequences and the larger issues for which jazz became a symbol.

By the end of the 1920s, France had been filled with jazz, both to the delight and dismay of many. But the situation began to change in the 1930s. Americans and other tourists began to go home with the onset of the depression, and the frivolity that had accompanied jazz in the crazy years began to subside. Jazz did not die out, however. On the contrary, it began to undergo a transformation. For some ten years, this music had been a foreign import, associated with alternatives to traditional French culture, whether nègre or American. French musicians had performed music called jazz, but few seemed to believe that they could play nearly as well as the Americans who were in much greater demand. In the 1930s, though, French musicians began to take this music up as their own, and they made jazz into a French music. In the process of doing so, French musicians had to confront the association of jazz with "America" and "blackness"—how could these defining elements of the music be reconciled with various elements of the French past? They did so in various ways, either blending the cultural symbolism of jazz with French songs or creating new ways of looking at the music. Some musicians replaced the so-called blackness of the music with a "Latin" quality. Others embraced the supposedly black elements as the true essence of jazz, which they believed also reflected something of France.