



Paris Blues: African American Music and French Popular Culture, 1920-1960

Andy Fry

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The Jazz Age. The phrase conjures images of Louis Armstrong holding court at the Sunset Cafe in Chicago, Duke Ellington dazzling crowds at the Cotton Club in Harlem, and star singers like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. But the Jazz Age was every bit as much of a Paris phenomenon as it was a Chicago and New York scene.

In *Paris Blues*, Andy Fry provides an alternative history of African American music and musicians in France, one that looks beyond familiar personalities and well-rehearsed stories. He pinpoints key issues of race and nation in France's complicated jazz history from the 1920s through the 1950s. While he deals with many of the traditional icons—such as Josephine Baker, Django Reinhardt, and Sidney Bechet, among others—what he asks is how they came to be so iconic, and what their stories hide as well as what they preserve. Fry focuses throughout on early jazz and swing but includes its re-creation—reinvention—in the 1950s. Along the way, he pays tribute to forgotten traditions such as black musical theater, white show bands, and French wartime swing. *Paris Blues* provides a nuanced account of the French reception of African Americans and their music and contributes greatly to a growing literature on jazz, race, and nation in France.

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