

Soundscapes of Liberation

AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC IN

POSTWAR FRANCE CELESTE DAY MOORE



Soundscapes of Liberation

BUY

Refiguring American Music

A series edited by RONALD RADANO, JOSH KUN, AND NINA SUN EIDSHEIM
CHARLES MCGOVERN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

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For my parents, Susan and Thad,
with gratitude

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Abbreviations

ABSIE	American Broadcasting System in Europe
AEF	Afrique Équatoriale Française
AFCDJ	Association Française des Collectionneurs de Disques de Jazz
AFM	American Federation of Musicians
AFN	American Forces Network
AFNOR	Association Française de Normalisation
AMSAC	American Society of African Culture
AMGOT	Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories
AOF	Afrique Occidentale Française
ASE	Armed Services Editions
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DOM-TOM	Départements d’Outre-mer–Territoires d’Outre-mer
ECA	Economic Cooperation Administration
ETO	European Theater of Operations
FLN	Front de Libération National
JMF	Jeunesses Musicales de France
MJC	Maisons des Jeunes et de la Culture

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OCORA	Office de Coopération Radiophonique
ORTF	Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française
OWI	Office of War Information
PAO	Public Affairs Officer
PWD	Psychological War Division
RDF	Radiodiffusion Française
RFE	Radio Free Europe
RN	Radiodiffusion Nationale
RTF	Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française
SAC	Société Africaine de Culture
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SORAFOM	Société de Radiodiffusion de la France d'Outre-mer
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
USIA	United States Information Agency
USIS	United States Information Service
USO	United Service Organizations
VOA	Voice of America
WPA	Works Progress Administration

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INTRODUCTION

Making Soundwaves

Over the course of five days in October 1961, Ray Charles gave six electrifying, sold-out performances at the Palais des Sports in Paris.¹ Although Charles had been relatively unknown in France just a few years earlier, his fame had skyrocketed in the previous months. Thanks to the commercial success of his recordings and the transnational media networks that broadcast his music, Charles's concerts attracted a record-breaking thirty-five thousand attendees, who squeezed into the sports stadium to hear and see him, now accompanied by a sixteen-member band and the backing vocals of the Raelettes. Charles's triumphant debut in Paris, however, came close to being canceled altogether. Until the eve of the first scheduled concert, the Palais des Sports served as a temporary detainment facility for seven thousand people arrested on October 17, 1961, in the midst of the Algerian War. That night, the Paris police descended on tens of thousands of North African men, women, and children as they attempted to demonstrate peacefully in the city center, killing dozens and detaining (and torturing) fourteen thousand people at sites across the city.² Two days later, fearing the public outcry and financial repercussions if the concerts were canceled, officials moved the detainees from the Palais to the nearby Parc des Expositions, where thousands of North Africans remained detained.

On Friday, October 20, the Palais opened its doors, guarded by a phalanx of police forces and still reeking of disinfectant. For Ray Charles, as well as the

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twenty performers who accompanied him, the hours leading up to the concert were disorienting. Charles himself claimed later that the Algerian National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, or FLN) assured him and the band they would have safe passage to the Palais, while tenor saxophonist Leroy Cooper recalled their terror in anticipating the invasion of armed police at any moment.³ Even though one report noted the “impressive deployment of police,” who seemed better suited to “quell demonstrations of a political nature than the enthusiasm of the spectators,” there was no mention in contemporary accounts of the detention center at the Parc des Expositions.⁴ Likewise, few concertgoers recalled the sounds of the nearby detainees, though latecomers could have heard their hymns of resistance. Instead, they thrilled to the sounds of Ray Charles and his big band, who performed nightly for a largely—but not entirely—white crowd in the cavernous space of the Palais des Sports.

The big band began each night’s performance with musical arrangements by Quincy Jones, Charles’s longtime friend and collaborator, before Charles himself appeared on stage, prompting an explosive response from the restless audience. In the concert recordings, the audience can be heard singing joyfully along to lyrics likely memorized after constant radio play and repeated listening to records distributed in France. Each concert ended with an encore performance of “What’d I Say,” a call-and-response song whose play on the secular and spiritual was deepened by the accompaniment of the Raelettes, whose vocal responses to Charles helped re-create the dialogic sound of the gospel tradition.⁵ An unofficial civil rights anthem in the United States, the song now thrilled a European crowd less than a hundred yards from an illegal internment site holding several thousand of their fellow citizens. The intimacy and immediacy of the soundscape created in the Palais des Sports were then broadcast over state-run networks to transistor radios throughout France and North Africa, where combatants on both sides of the war listened to the evening transmission.

While the immediate coverage of the concerts made little mention of the ongoing violence in Paris, Charles’s performances themselves soon became a medium to express injustice. A few weeks after the concerts, a group of Algerian students published an open letter critiquing the French belief that a love of African American music exempted its audiences and critics from accusations of racism.⁶ Instead, they argued, the conditions for this particular performance had simultaneously buttressed and obscured the state’s enactment of racial violence. The concerts—and their attendant sounds and silences—echoed throughout France and its crumbling empire.

I begin here, in the transnational and imperial soundscape of the Palais des Sports, to introduce the conceptual and methodological stakes of *Soundscape of Liberation*, which tracks the transatlantic networks of musical production, distribution, and performance that converged in postwar France to make African American music a signifier of power and protest. Surveying a wide range of musical genres, forms, and media, this book shows how African American music became a critical means for French and Francophone audiences to comprehend the transformations of the postwar period—in particular the convergence of decolonization, the expanding global economy, the Cold War, and worldwide liberation movements.

While the French interest in African American culture is most often associated with the interwar period, when Josephine Baker's performances in *La Revue nègre* thrilled Parisian audiences, this book presents a new narrative of African American culture's appeal. Baker's performance may have epitomized the dynamics of interwar negrophilia—and the vogue for Black performance and culture in Paris—but the historical currents that defined the postwar period are discernible in a very different set of historical actors and venues: the US military's own wartime record and radio distribution, the translation and promotion of "racial passing" memoirs, the French record industry's catalogues of blues, jazz, and R&B recordings, the emergence of a provincial choir that specialized in Negro spirituals, and the millions of listeners stretching across the French empire who heard jazz programs hosted by US State Department officials. These moments exemplify the historical and material conditions that defined an era when new sound technologies, expanding media networks, and changing political climates radically transformed French encounters with African American music. These new conditions, and the changing terms and technologies, helped African American music sound like liberation, but in contradictory ways that simultaneously undergirded state power and insurgent protest.

In making sense of the sounds and silences that defined the postwar world, I turn to the conceptual framing of a soundscape, which has offered scholars a way not only to consider the specific conditions of an acoustical environment but also to show how that same environment in turn transforms the means and modes of perception.⁷ This scholarly tradition echoes Jacques Attali's own formulation that music might be understood not simply as an "object of study," but instead as a "way of perceiving the world."⁸ Likewise, *Soundscape of Liberation* is committed to uncovering the material conditions of musical production, casting a wide net to reconstruct the different technologies, networks, and producers who created specific soundscapes and acoustical spaces in which

listeners encountered African American music.⁹ Within these soundscapes, African American music was not simply a sonic diversion or background music to the tumultuous events of the postwar period. It demanded new modes of discernment and perception, conjured distinct racial visions and fantasies, bolstered competing notions of liberation and freedom, and trained the “listening ear” to distinguish African American music from the “noise” of a dying colonialism.¹⁰ Through the analytical framework of the soundscape, we thus not only discern the structural dimensions of sound production and distribution but also comprehend how these same spaces formed competing notions of liberation in postwar France.

These soundscapes, I argue, were constructed by a cohort of cultural intermediaries—record and radio producers, book publishers, translators, writers, and educators—whose fluency in French and familiarity with African American culture gave them privileged positions from which to interpret, disseminate, and racially encode this musical tradition for Francophone audiences.¹¹ Some, like record producer Nicole Barclay and critic Boris Vian, were motivated by personal gain. Others, like educator Louis Achille and radio producer Sim Copans, imagined a different political future sustained through intercultural and international dialogue. While the work of these intermediaries was firmly embedded in the new media technologies and political circumstances of the postwar world, I contend that these intermediaries were inheritors of mediating traditions that were formed within the Atlantic world and its transatlantic brokers, interlocutors, and *passeurs*, as well as by the Black Atlantic, whose paths, routes, and grooves were critical to the circulation of Black music in the twentieth century.¹²

Whether by creating a print market for Black literature, launching new record companies to distribute jazz and blues LPs, introducing US State Department–sponsored programs on jazz to the French radio, or redefining the political power of Negro spirituals within the burgeoning networks of postwar and postcolonial Black internationalism, these mediating figures were instrumental in defining the sonic and political power of African American music after World War II. Compounding—and at times misreading—complex musical meanings as they conveyed it across national and imperial boundaries, these intermediaries imbued African American music with new racial value and political power.¹³ Conscious of their own inability to fully embody the African American musical tradition, they often accomplished their interventions through nonmusical means: photographs, liner notes, prefaces, artwork, and physical gestures. With the addition of visual, experiential, aural, and discursive clues, they demonstrated both their fidelity to African

American culture and their commitment to racially “marking” this cultural tradition and making it legible to audiences in France and beyond.¹⁴

It was the work of these intermediaries that made possible the emergence of distinct yet overlapping soundscapes of liberation, in which African American music gained new meaning and value. Some of these were formed in physical spaces: the villages of liberation-era Normandy in which jazz was broadcast from mobile broadcasting trucks, the provincial concert halls that welcomed touring blues and gospel performers in the 1950s, the Lyonnais classroom where students gathered to learn and perform Negro spirituals, or the Parisian *foyer*, where African laborers gathered to hear performances by the Art Ensemble of Chicago in the early 1970s. Other soundscapes were constructed through Cold War, commercial, and colonial media networks, which brought these sounds into the everyday lives of listeners across the nation and empire: in the *disquaires* and jukeboxes that sold recordings of blues, jazz, and R&B; the millions of listeners who tuned in nightly to hear US State Department–sponsored jazz programs on the French radio; and the Caribbean and African students who listened to these same programs and concerts while noting the contradictions that defined postwar and postcolonial France. Within these new media, African American music no longer simply implied the slippage between the modern and the primitive for French audiences, as it had in the interwar period.¹⁵ It instead simultaneously connoted the threat of American hegemony, the growing ubiquity of mass consumerism, the waning influence of French colonialism, and the cultural power of a minority population.

Performance and Power

Though attentive to these intermediaries’ privilege—and their particular empowerment within the conditions of the postwar world—*Soundscapes of Liberation* also shows how their power was experienced and contested.¹⁶ White French audiences may have comprised the majority of consumers and listeners, but these networks of musical mediation also reached Black and other non-white Francophone audiences, whose sharp observations, interpretations, and interventions would further transform the political power and value of African American music.¹⁷ Moreover, while cultural intermediaries and audiences may have invested liberatory potential in African American music, Black musicians, interlocutors, and performers recognized that this was distinct from any investment in Black liberation. Put simply, listening to African American music did not necessarily entail a heightened consciousness of (or commitment to) Black people’s struggles for liberation.¹⁸ Nevertheless, African American, African,

Caribbean, and Afro-European observers found ways to navigate these spatial spheres of influence. In some cases, Afro-European musicians found that adopting the African American musical tradition could be a means of claiming expertise or an “authentic” musical identity, even if they were viewed by white contemporaries as facsimiles of “real” jazz performers. At other moments, African and Caribbean listeners, writers, and performers used the vibrant public discourse surrounding both jazz and African American identity to initiate different (and at times riskier) debates about the nature of French colonialism and racism. They did so in a nation and a language that was resistant to conversations about race, rendering the discourse that surrounded African American music a key mode of expression and dialogue.

The stakes for African American musicians were different. Some musicians, like blues pianist Memphis Slim and drummer Kenny Clarke, came to France to secure a steady income and a life that was free of the constraints imposed by anti-Black US racism. Others, like the actress and pianist Hazel Scott, traveled to Paris after being blacklisted in the film and recording industries during the McCarthy era. Unlike her contemporaries Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois, whose passports were revoked, Scott was able to live in Paris for three years, a period of “much needed rest, not from work, but from racial tension.” Scott went on to clarify, “I do not mean that I never run into racism. . . . I’m not going to say that France is paradise, but I will say this: You can live anywhere if you’ve got the money to live.”¹⁹ For Scott, Paris offered a space in which to create and to construct a different kind of life.²⁰

While Scott found that her experiences with French racism were mitigated in part by her success as an African American performer, others were less convinced. In the course of an evening’s conversation at the Café Le Tournon, where Richard Wright, Art Simmons, Larry Potter, Ollie Harrington, James Baldwin, Gordon Heath, and Chester Himes would often gather to drink, reconnect, and swap stories, William Gardner Smith transcribed a lively debate about life in France. After Wright offered the group his well-worn aphorism that “there’s more democracy in one square block of Paris than in the whole of the United States,” they all began to share their own perspectives on expatriate life.²¹ In response to one man’s claim that all white people were “potential crackers or Afrikaners if you put them in the right circumstances,” conductor Dean Dixon replied: “Probably. But the thing is, we don’t have those ‘right circumstances’ here at the present time. So you and I can live in relative peace for a change. That’s already something.”²² In this, Dixon underscored the “relative” conditions of success for African American expatriates, who recognized that they were living on borrowed time.

And indeed, the lived experience of racism in France was shifting throughout the postwar period alongside departmentalization and decolonization. While interwar Paris was populated by a relatively small number of African and Caribbean students, the postwar period was marked by increased migration from the newly formed departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana as well as from the African continent. Following decolonization in Africa and the formation of the Bureau pour la Migration des Départements d'Outre-mer (Bumidom) in 1962, the number of migrants from the Caribbean and Africa soared, establishing in France for the first time a Black working class.²³

The centrality of these transformations, as well as the ongoing battle for colonial power in Algeria, was not lost on African American musicians, who closely observed the similarities and differences between racism in the United States and France. Tenor saxophonist Frank Wright, for example, perceived the effect of heightened racism during the Algerian War, noting the “police patrolling the streets, stopping mostly Algerians and Africans.”²⁴ However, the increased migration also meant that African American musicians had more opportunities to work with African and Caribbean musicians. For Nina Simone, for example, these collaborations were musical and diasporic, offering her a way to “create my own Africa in the heart of Europe.”²⁵ Similarly, African American drummer Famoudou Don Moye, who performed regularly in Paris with the Art Ensemble of Chicago, was especially drawn to partnerships with African drummers and opportunities to raise money for African municipal workers.²⁶

Sidney Bechet, whose own journey has been defined as a kind of archetypal narrative for jazz in France, found in postwar France a critical space not only to perform but to craft his own account of jazz history. Through his long-standing relationship with the French record label Vogue, Bechet purportedly averaged fifty thousand dollars a year from recording royalties as well as from his extensive tours throughout Europe, France, and its overseas departments.²⁷ When Vogue hosted a free concert in Paris at the Olympia Theater in 1955 to celebrate the sale of over 1 million copies of the 1950 hit record “Les oignons,” more than five thousand people crowded into a concert hall meant to hold only half that number.²⁸ But even as he relished his success, Bechet was loath to romanticize postwar France as either racially colorblind or as an idyllic space for artistic production. While he too found in France a link to his imagined African past—describing his life in France as “closer to Africa”—he was critical of its colonial policies.²⁹ He explained to an *Esquire* interviewer in 1958: “I live in France because that’s where I can make a living. If I could make out with money back home, I’d be back in New York tomorrow.” Moreover, he maintained, “The

French have no call to crow over Americans. I've told them so. I've told them I've been in Dakar and I've seen what they do to Negroes there, and Frenchmen are no better than anyone else."³⁰ Clear-eyed in his accounting of French racism, Bechet still recognized in France a market that could not only sustain the last stages of his career but also give him access to the necessary financial, symbolic, and cultural resources to write his own autobiography.³¹

While their reasons for living in France varied, African American musicians were frequently read as emblems of resistance, for their identities were already defined within a global economy that traded in representations of their suffering, political consciousness, and liberation.³² They remained, of course, performers who determined their set lists, performance styles, and creative output. But their own musical and aesthetic decisions were made within a shifting discourse in France, some of which they understood and some of which was translated (or mistranslated) for them. While Ray Charles and Sidney Bechet occupied vastly different positions in the French musical landscape, each found himself invoked in the service of a range of narratives, some affirming color-blindness and some directly defying it. The popularization of African American music depended on the presence of musicians, but these musicians were excluded from the mechanisms of mediation. The products of their labor—and the mobility of their musical creations in a global marketplace—frequently depended on the musicians' own immobility within French society.³³

To succeed, African American musicians needed to navigate the complex conditions of musical production and distribution in France. Sometimes they directly challenged how their artistic creations were redeployed. In other cases, their responses required more restraint but nevertheless became what Stuart Hall has described as sites of "strategic contestation," comprising a range of "subterranean strategies of recoding and transcoding, of critical signification, of signifying."³⁴ Performing at the Salle Pleyel in 1969, jazz saxophonist Julian "Cannonball" Adderley introduced his quintet to the crowd. The dulcet tones of Adderley's distinctive voice would likely not have prepared his audience for his comments. Adderley said: "Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I could say something like 'it's so wonderful being back in Paris again' or 'it's a pleasure being here playing for you' when obviously everyone understands that it's our pleasure being here because we are *employed*. We are being compensated for our presence, so naturally it's wonderful."³⁵ Improvising on the script of expected pleasantries, Adderley clarified instead that his own enjoyment derived from compensation and employment. In so doing, he located himself within a system of commerce and claimed (for himself and his bandmates) the right to create, define, and control the musical creations of African Americans.

While this book is transatlantic in its narrative arc and archive, it is grounded mainly in France, which has long claimed a special—and in some ways foundational—place in the history of African American music and culture.³⁶ This history has its roots in *la belle époque*, but it was the outbreak of World War I that ushered in a new era for African American expatriates and culture in France. Beginning with the arrival of James Reese Europe's Harlem Hellfighters band, African American performers were phenomenally successful in interwar Paris, where Josephine Baker and Ada "Bricktop" Smith attracted fervent audiences. Against this backdrop, African American artists, musicians, and writers found in Paris not only opportunities for financial success and artistic creation but also a space of diasporic connection and collaboration. These overlapping histories are perhaps most vivid in the lives they shaped: writers like Richard Wright, Angela Davis, James Baldwin, and Chester Himes; performers like Hazel Scott, Memphis Slim, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago; artists like Loïs Mailou Jones, Herbert Gentry, and Barbara Chase-Riboud; as well as the less-publicized sojourns of journalists, soldiers, chefs, and students. Each of these figures helps to reveal how the contours of African American history have been influenced by the real and mythical voyage to Paris, where racial codes and violence did not determine every life decision. Reflecting on the African American investment in this narrative, Tyler Stovall has argued that the history of exile in France has served as an important "success story" for African Americans and a rejoinder to the traditional narrative of Black impoverishment and struggle.³⁷ In these cases, Black Paris was a significant *lieu de mémoire*, a site of memory and critical archive of a moment, life, or career in which American racism did not triumph.³⁸

While it is clear that France has played a critical role in the lives of African American performers and writers, this narrative has unfortunately upheld a set of mythologies and misunderstandings that are endemic to French history and historiography.³⁹ Indeed, as Stovall himself and others have noted, the romanticization of French colorblindness (even when used strategically by African Americans) has obscured the extent of French racism and the impact of colonial racial ideology on all dimensions of French society.⁴⁰ This was clearly evident to African American observers, who took note of the parallels and correspondences between their experiences, whether in the treatment of colonial troops, the racial division of labor, or the state-sanctioned violence against African and North African communities. The recognition of French racism, and its parallels to other imperial and settler colonial systems, was likewise critical to the emergence of decolonial, anticolonial, pan-African,

and Black internationalist movements.⁴¹ While these converging movements developed a global critique of colonialism and empire, their own insights were frequently ignored in France, where a range of power brokers sought to minimize the significance of race and racism in discourse, politics, and policy.⁴²

For a long time, the dominant myth of colorblindness was woven into the histories of jazz in France, where, in James Baldwin's memorable phrasing, audiences imagined that all African Americans arrived "trumpet-laden and twinkle-toed, bearing scars so unutterably painful that all of the glories of the French Republic may not suffice to heal them."⁴³ This exceptionalism in turn hindered the construction of the kinds of critical readings that defined the scholarship on "global jazz"—including work on Great Britain, Germany, Japan, China, and South Africa—whose national histories are not as weighted by narratives of rescue and liberation.⁴⁴ In recent years, however, a range of scholars, including Jeremy Lane, Andy Fry, and Eric Drott, have debunked this narrative and drawn attention to the intersections of jazz fandom and performance with structures of colonial racism and racist policies in France.⁴⁵ Their insistence on the centrality of French colonialism to jazz history has strengthened an already rich scholarly field, which has illuminated not only the lives of individual musicians but also the range of debates that occurred within the world of jazz criticism.⁴⁶ This work has effectively demonstrated how these internal quarrels—which focused on questions of jazz authenticity and ownership—reflected concurrent social and political debates in France. However, as Fry has argued, the focus on processes of integration, acculturation, and civilization tends to replicate and reproduce the narratives of assimilation that have long defined French politics and culture.⁴⁷ Given that, it may be less important to locate the precise moment in which jazz was assimilated into French culture than to pay closer attention to how (and why) African American music occupied a changing—if continually contradictory—position in French society throughout the twentieth century. These contradictions have been at the center of recent scholarship, including work by Elizabeth MacGregor, who considers how jazz intersected with a range of postwar social questions, and Tom Perchard and Rashida Braggs, who have brought attention to the performers and performances that challenged the nationalist and racist narratives of jazz.⁴⁸

While indebted to this work, my book takes a different approach to historicizing the twinned discourses surrounding African American music and racial consciousness in France. First, while jazz has been the focal point in most discussions, this book looks at a wider range of musical genres. I discuss jazz but also track the history of other genres—blues, spirituals, gospel, rhythm and

blues, and soul—which proliferated alongside other forms of French popular music. In broadening the frame, I am informed not only by musicians' own critiques of these market-driven taxonomies, but also by a range of scholarship that has foregrounded the shifting discursive terrain for defining and selling African American music in the United States.⁴⁹ Second, this book seeks to move beyond the world of jazz critics to uncover the material history of musical production and distribution, whether in the construction of radio networks, the production of records, or the development of political and social institutions. In forming this methodological approach, I draw on the rich social and cultural histories of African American music in the United States that have offered important strategies for historicizing the materiality of music and sound.⁵⁰ While the dynamics in France are distinct, these US-based studies have offered critical insights into how the changing social, political, technological, and economic conditions for musical production can give rise to new forms of racial consciousness and political activism.⁵¹

This book is also committed to expanding its analysis beyond metropolitan France. It builds in part on critical interventions in French and French colonial historiography, which have clarified not only the troubled history of departmentalization and the unequal allocation of political power in the postwar period, but also recent work that has brought attention to the ways in which decolonial thinking preceded *and* followed the formal end of empire.⁵² The broader push for liberation occurred throughout the French empire, where the linked demands for sovereignty, human rights, and the end of empire were frequently met with violence and intimidation. In these spaces, Afro-European activists built political movements that simultaneously claimed citizenship rights and diasporic belonging, remapping what Annette Joseph-Gabriel has described as the “geographies of resistance.”⁵³ Within this context, liberation was given new meaning as an emancipatory, anticolonial, and anti-racist project.

In addition to rethinking the boundaries of France and its real—and imagined—power in the postcolonial Francophone world, this book also reassesses the linked histories of modernization, decolonization, and Americanization.⁵⁴ As Penny Von Eschen has shown, it is not possible to consider the global impact of African American music without paying attention to the networks of US diplomatic power in the Cold War, wherein the linked fates of anticolonialism and civil rights were brought to the fore.⁵⁵ While attentive to diplomatic infrastructure and archives, this book shows how the work of US State Department officials was embedded within French cultural

institutions, including those in metropolitan France but also those whose influence extended into Francophone Africa. In so doing, *Soundscapes of Liberation* joins a range of historical work that has contested conventional histories of US power—particularly those that privilege US sources and archives—to focus instead on the dialogic reproduction of American culture and identities overseas.⁵⁶ Within this expanded history of diplomacy, this book clarifies how and why African American culture was a critical venue in which the “American century” was constructed and contested.⁵⁷ Broadcast within these overlapping networks, African American music was linked to American and French power, which simultaneously sustained a French belief in France’s own antiracism and a US belief in the liberating power and democratic vigor of American music.

While the power of African American music was frequently co-opted through these different political networks and agendas, the transatlantic routes of production and distribution nevertheless made its deployment especially resonant to listeners within the African diaspora. As Ron Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan have argued, sound was not only produced by imperial and Cold War structures—which helped to “modify and produce qualities of hearing”—but also played a key role in hastening the dissolution of those same powers.⁵⁸ Likewise, the presence and active participation of African American, African, and Caribbean musicians and critics in Francophone and Cold War cultural networks reminds us that while this story was given its initial shape by a cohort of (largely) white intermediaries, it is still one that belongs in the global history of Black culture. As scholarship by Alexander Weheliye, Shana Redmond, and Paul Gilroy has shown, the sonic has a privileged place in African diasporic histories.⁵⁹ Whether by revealing the persistent exclusion of Black people from narratives of progress and technological innovation or by underscoring the myriad forms of “sonic Afro-modernity” that have defined Black politics, culture, and sociability in the modern era, this work has demonstrated that sound is critical to understanding the liberatory projects formed within Black histories. This book shares that commitment to writing a diasporic history of Black music but shifts the focus to colonial, commercial, and Cold War networks of musical production and distribution. This infrastructure, I argue, was not simply background or context; instead it can serve as a means of expanding the accepted boundaries of Black cultural production. Indeed, the networks of mediation that defined this world—and continue to refine and regulate the meaning of African American culture—were likewise redefined by Black artists, writers, and performers, who found in them new sites of contestation and creation.

Shifting Soundscapes

The narrative begins in 1944, when US military officials transformed the sonic and racial experience of liberation through new recording technologies and radio networks. Rather than accept the preordained relationship between jazz and liberation, this first chapter instead interrogates the space in which this symbolic connection was forged. In particular, the chapter tracks the broadcasts of US military and diplomatic officials, who reintroduced jazz as an American cultural form through performances by segregated military bands, the distribution of military-issued Victory Discs, and the widespread diffusion of the American Forces Network. In this context, alongside immense sexual, racial, and retributive violence, as well as the mobilization of an unprecedented number of African American and French colonial soldiers, the military imbued jazz with new racial and political value and helped enshrine it as a symbol of postwar freedom. In this, African Americans played a limited yet critical role, frequently desired as a means of authentication yet continually surveilled—and in some cases punished—for crossing racial lines.

Building on this new value for African American music—and simultaneous anxiety about the role of Black people in constructing this valuative system—the second chapter examines the integration of jazz narratives, and their links to African Americans, into postwar intellectual culture. I focus on two books, both of which drew on the authors' own purported links to African American spaces and subcultures to sell their "insider" accounts of African American identity. The first, French jazz critic Boris Vian's novel *I Will Spit on Your Graves* (1946), popularized the social practice of racial passing. The second, Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe's memoir *Really the Blues* (1946), was translated into French in 1950. Featured prominently in the postwar media landscape, the books made African American subjectivity both visible *and* salable in postwar French culture. While the authors themselves were critical to this process, this chapter reveals how those around it—the coauthors, publishers, translators, and publicists—made African American music sound like a path toward existential and political liberation for a range of readers.

This new marketability of African American identity and culture would in turn transform the record industry, whose unprecedented profits are the focus in the third chapter. Two record labels—Vogue and Barclay—transformed a small, niche industry into a mass market for jazz, blues, gospel, and spirituals. In so doing, however, they were not simply selling records; rather, they marketed these commodities as conduits to African American culture and the Black freedom struggle. The new valuation was again facilitated by the work of a range of intermediaries, whose knowledge of international regulations,

fluency in English, and familiarity and intimacy with African American musicians gave them a privileged position through which to sell African American music in France and its overseas territories and departments. In considering the critical yet sometimes obscured role played by African American musicians in this industry, this chapter challenges accepted narratives of African American musicians' success in France. Some African American musicians did benefit from these developments, which offered new opportunities to tour and record, and even revitalized or launched some careers. But many others were excluded from profits while French producers and moguls capitalized on their musical creations and racial identity.

The profit motive behind the commercial industry is put into sharp relief by the fourth chapter, which considers how the diasporic network of Black internationalism cultivated new venues for postcolonial musical performance and debate. This history begins in the interwar period of Black internationalism, but follows its influence into the postwar period, when Black internationalist politics were reshaped by new media and political pressures. This chapter illuminates the work of Martiniquan educator Louis T. Achille, whose ties to the *négritude* literary movement and experience teaching at Howard University in Washington, DC, helped form a lifelong commitment to translating and performing the African American spiritual in postwar France, where it connoted both French and diasporic identities. Although Achille shared some of the characteristics of other intermediaries in this book, his experience was unique; his own racial identity simultaneously enabled and constrained his capacity to embody the African American musical tradition. Building within and through this ambiguity, he sought to transform the Negro spiritual into a means of achieving spiritual freedom and liberation in the Francophone world.

Turning from the Black internationalist sphere, the fifth chapter considers the history of African American music in the context of the Cold War, when visual and aural representations of African American culture became important tools with which US officials propagated a vision of America as colorblind, universal, and equitable. In this chapter, I deepen this history of statecraft by attending to the radio, lecture, and print networks that linked Cold War diplomacy to the colonial interests of the French government, which itself broadcast US State Department jazz radio programs nightly to millions of listeners across the French empire. The central figure in this chapter is Sim Copans, the Voice of America's official delegate to the French radio, whose radio programs and lecture tours introduced millions of listeners in metropolitan and overseas France to jazz and spirituals. Copans's voice in particular shaped the French encounter with African American music, whose Blackness was understood in

relation to his own white, authoritative, and American accent. In this capacity, Copans made clear African American music's potential political value for US State Department officials as well as for state and nongovernmental officials in France. While invested in propagating the liberatory potential of African American music—and indeed affirming its global roots and routes to Africa—Copans still partook in a political project that sought to constrain and limit the possibility of African self-determination in the postcolonial period.

Building on these case studies, and the increasingly global frame in which African American music was produced, the last chapter represents, to some extent, the culmination of the processes detailed in the previous chapters. It demonstrates that the economic, political, spiritual, and cultural value once ascribed to African American music in postwar France was incorporated into postindependence sites of political and cultural expression. This included well-known events like the 1966 First Festival of Black Arts in Dakar and the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers but was also visible within other media and spaces: the postcolonial and Cold War radio networks, which broadcast the voice of DJ Georges Collinet; the construction of commercial sites and informal trading networks; and the individual performances of musicians like Duke Ellington, Archie Shepp, and James Brown, whose success depended on a range of political and commercial interests. Yet even as commercial interests and diplomatic authorities envisioned—and traded on—a particular understanding of the racial meaning and political power of African American music, there were competing sounds, unexpected encounters and alliances, and new listening practices of African audiences who were attuned to this musical tradition in different and unexpected ways. In this regard, the final chapter also represents a point of departure, a tentative step in understanding how these same transatlantic routes of musical creation in turn shifted the conditions for diasporic encounters.

By centering on France, and the intermediaries who worked within its national, imperial, and diasporic structures, this book reveals a wider web of forces that defined African American music after World War II. It revises the older narrative of African Americans in Paris—and the associated tropes and mythologies that have sustained a narrative of exceptionalism—to instead argue that France is a unique locus and a rich source from which to consider how the racial meaning, political power, and economic value of African American music were transformed in the twentieth century. While honoring the labor of African American musicians to define the politics and value of their music, it calls particular attention to the intermediaries—the networks and agents whose mediating work encoded African American music in new ways.

By uncovering their work, as well as the responses, revisions, and radical reappraisals they engendered among African diasporic listeners and readers, *Soundscapes of Liberation* offers a new way of understanding the sounds and silences that have attended the production of African American music in the twentieth century. Recalling again the Palais des Sports, and the competing sounds that surrounded Ray Charles and the accompanying musicians, it becomes clear that African American music was not only shaped by the conditions of the postwar world but was also critical to perceiving—and ignoring—these same transformations.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION: MAKING SOUNDWAVES

1. For a full account of this concert series, and the disparate histories that converged at the Palais des Sports, see Moore, “Ray Charles in Paris.”

2. See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, 161–79; Cole, “Remembering the Battle of Paris.”

3. Ritz and Charles, *Brother Ray*, 278. Leroy Cooper quoted in Mike Evans, *Ray Charles*, 146–47.

4. Catherine Pierre, “Ray Charles a fait salle comble,” *Le Monde*, October 23, 1961.

5. Two concerts were recorded for André Francis’s *Jazz sur scène* program on RTF: “Ray Charles au Palais des Sports,” *Jazz sur scène* (Paris Inter, October 22, 1961), INA. The recordings are also available in *Ray Charles: Live in Paris 20–21 Octobre 1961/17–18–20–21 Mai 1962* (Paris: Fremaux & Assoc., 2014).

6. “Des étudiants algériens accusent,” *L’Étudiant algérien* (November 1961), reproduced in *Partisans* 3 (February 1962): 119–24.

7. On the analytical possibilities in soundscapes, see especially Thompson, *Soundscape of Modernity*; Schafer, *Soundscape*; Samuels, Meintjes, Ochoa, and Porcello, “Soundscapes.”

8. Attali, *Noise*, 4.

9. In thinking through sound, media, and listening practices, I draw on David Suisman and Susan Strasser, *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*; Stoevers, *Sonic Color Line*; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*; Bronfman, *Isles of Noise*; Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*; Sterne, *Audible Past*; Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality*; Kun, *Audiotopia*; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*; Vaillant, “Sounds of Whiteness.”

10. On the “listening ear,” see Stoevers, *Sonic Color Line*.

11. To define this mediating role, I draw from a range of work that has identified the importance of cultural gatekeepers, critics, and tastemakers in the twentieth century. See especially Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*; Green, *Selling the Race*; Frank, *Conquest of Cool*. I also guided by work on the mediating work of recording studios, including Meintjes, *Sound of Africa!*; Veal, *Dub*.

12. On the historical precedents of intermediaries and the work of mediation in the Atlantic world, see Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*. On the Black Atlantic, see Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*; Weheliye, *Phonographies*; Dubois, *Banjo*.
13. On misreading and mistranslation in Black diasporic and internationalist cultural production, see Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*. This work also echoes what Vèvè A. Clark has described as “diaspora literacy,” which “implied an ease and intimacy with more than one language, with interdisciplinary relations among history, ethnology, and the folklore of regional expression” within the African diaspora. See Clark, “Developing Diaspora Literacy.”
14. Holt, “Marking.”
15. See Blake, *Le tumulte noir*; Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*.
16. I am mindful that the concept of “agency” can sometimes reproduce the logic of white supremacy, which is itself premised on the belief that African-descended people do not have agency or humanity. On this, see Johnson, “On Agency.”
17. For work that places African and African diasporic populations, as well as Black cultural production, at the center of sound studies and the global flows of media, technology, and culture, see in particular Weheliye, *Phonographies*; Jaji, *Africa in Stereo*; Stoever, *Sonic Color Line*; Chude-Sokei, *Sound of Culture*; Stadler, “On Whiteness and Sound Studies.”
18. As Richard Iton recounted in the US context, the “engagement with and interpellation of black life via cultural representations by (white) American citizens historically has been quite compatible with the marginalization and disenfranchisement of African Americans as political subjects and political members of the republic community.” Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 12.
19. Hazel Scott, “What Paris Means to Me,” *Negro Digest*, November 1961, 61.
20. In thinking through Scott’s experiences as a woman in the jazz world, I am indebted to the tradition of Black feminist scholarship on music-making, criticism, and collection. See in particular Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution*; Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free*; G. Wald, *Shout, Sister, Shout!*; Rustin and Tucker, *Big Ears*; Mahon, *Black Diamond Queens*.
21. W. G. Smith, *Return to Black America*, 59–60.
22. W. G. Smith, *Return to Black America*, 61. On Dixon, see R. Jones, *Dean Dixon*.
23. On this history, see especially Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic*; Childers, *Seeking Imperialism’s Embrace*; Marker, “Obscuring Race.”
24. Wright quoted in Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris*, 260.
25. Simone and Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 165.
26. Famoudou Don Moye, telephone interview with the author, March 12, 2020. On Moye and the Art Ensemble’s experiences in France, see also Drott, *Music and the Elusive Revolution*; Lewis, *Power Stronger Than Itself*; Steinbeck, *Message to Our Folks*.
27. “Along the Rue Bechet,” *Time*, September 20, 1954, 85. Bechet’s financial and business records are held in the Fonds Charles Delaunay (FCD), Département de l’audiovisuel, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Paris.
28. On this concert, see Fry, “Remembrance of Jazz Past.”
29. Bechet, *Treat It Gentle*, 45.

30. Ehrlich, "Old Man with a Horn."
31. On African American musicians' literary and textual interventions, see especially Porter, *What Is This Thing?*; Edwards, *Epistrophies*.
32. In thinking about emblematic and affective power of African Americans, I am indebted to a range of work, including Quashie, *Sovereignty of Quiet*; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Morrison, "Sound(s) of Subjection"; Campt, *Other Germans*; Layne, *White Rebels in Black*.
33. On the global mobility of racialized commodities and ideas, see especially Auslander and Holt, "Sambo in Paris." On the production of African American culture—and its intersections with global capitalism—see Rose, *Black Noise*; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*; Suisman, "Co-workers in the Kingdom"; S. E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street*; Green, *Selling the Race*; Tate, *Everything but the Burden*; Chude-Sokei, *Last "Darky."*
34. Hall, "What Is This 'Black'?", 108, 110.
35. Cannonball Adderley and His Quintet, *En concert avec EUROPEI, Salle Pleyel, 27 Mars 1969* (Paris: RTE, 1992), emphasis mine.
36. On the experiences of African Americans in Paris, see especially Stovall, *Paris Noir*; Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris*; Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris*; Fabre and Williams, *Street Guide*; Broschke Davis, *Paris without Regret*.
37. Stovall, *Paris Noir*, xv.
38. On Paris as a site of memory for Black Americans, see Bruce, "New Negro in Paris."
39. This occlusion has been thoughtfully explored in a range of scholarship, including Keaton and Sharpley-Whiting, *Black France/France Noire*; Hine, Keaton, and Small, *Black Europe*; Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*; Blake, *Tumulte noir*; Boittin, *Colonial Metropolises*. It has also been interrogated within work on the French Atlantic and Francophone world, see C. L. Miller, *French Atlantic Triangle*; Higginson, *Scoring Race*; Hill, *Black Soundscapes White Stages*; Braddock and Eburne, *Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic*.
40. See Stovall, "The Fire This Time," 189.
41. The field is too rich to fully capture here, but my own thinking draws in particular on West and Martin, *From Toussaint to Tupac*; Kelley, "But a Local Phase"; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*; Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*; Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*; Blain, *Set the World on Fire*; McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*; Putnam, *Radical Moves*; Byrd, *Black Republic*.
42. On the continued significance (yet silencing) of race and racism in France, see Ndiaye, *La condition noire*; C. M. Fleming, *Resurrecting Slavery*; Mitchell, *Vénus noire*; Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class*; Peabody and Stovall, *Color of Liberty*; Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*; Chapman and Laura Frader, *Race in France*; Davidson, *Only Muslim*.
43. James Baldwin, "Encounter on the Seine" (1950), in J. Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 87.
44. McKay, *Circular Breathing*; Atkins, *Blue Nippon*; A. F. Jones, *Yellow Music*; Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*; Ansell, *Soweto Blues*. While it focuses on a different genre and time period, Kira Thurman's work is especially instructive on the racialization of music in Europe. See Thurman, "Singing the Civilizing Mission."
45. See especially Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism*; A. Fry, *Paris Blues*; Drott, "Free Jazz and the French Critic."

46. See Tournès, *New Orleans sur Seine*. On the interwar period, see Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre*; Martin and Roueff, *La France du jazz*; J. H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French*; Jordan, *Le jazz*; Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism*; Kenney, "Assimilation of Jazz in France"; Stovall, "Music and Modernity."

47. On the postwar period, see Fry, *Paris Blues*; Perchard, *After Django*; Braggs, *Jazz Diasporas*; McGregor, *Jazz and Postwar French Identity*; Nettelbeck, *Dancing with De Beauvoir*. On free jazz in particular, see Lehman, "I Love You"; Drott, "Free Jazz"; Cotro and Levallet, *Chants libres*. On music and globalization in postwar France, see J. Briggs, *Sounds French*.

48. See McGregor, *Jazz and Postwar French Identity*; Perchard, *After Django*; Braggs, *Jazz Diasporas*. For work focused on African Americans' own experiences and perspectives, see also Broschke Davis, *Paris without Regret*; Broschke Davis, "Art Simmons in Paris"; Haggerty, "Under Paris Skies."

49. On musicians' critiques of the limits of jazz in particular, see Porter, *What Is This Thing?* For more on genre, see K. H. Miller, *Segregating Sound*; E. Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock*; C. L. Hughes, *Country Soul*.

50. On African American music and the public sphere, see Neal, *What the Music Said*; G. P. Ramsey, *Race Music*; Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*; Lordi, *Meaning of Soul*. Placing the creation of jazz within economic and social histories also departs from the canonization of jazz as an anticommmercial art form. See DeVaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition."

51. On racial consciousness and music, see in particular Radano and Bohlman, *Music and the Racial Imagination*; Kun, *Audiotopia*; Werner, *Change Is Gonna Come*; G. P. Ramsey, *Race Music*; Baraka, *Blues People*; Neal, *What the Music Said*; Monson, *Freedom Sounds*; Weheliye, *Phonographies*; E. Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock*; Hamilton, *Just around Midnight*; Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*; Hughes, *Country Soul*; Pecknold, *Hidden in the Mix*. On race and sound, see Eidsheim, *Race of Sound*; Stoeve, *Sonic Color Line*.

52. On the temporal and spatial dimensions of decolonization, see Getachew, *World-making after Empire*; Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*; Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

53. See Joseph-Gabriel, *Reimagining Liberation*, 7. On race, decolonization, and liberation movements in the UK and Europe, see Perry, *London Is the Place*; Matera, *Black London*; Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*; Adi, *West Africans in Britain*; Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany*.

54. This moment is thus part of what Michael Denning describes as the "age of three worlds," which was dominated by "cultural industries and ideological state apparatuses." Denning, *Culture in the Age*, 3. On US power and decolonization in postwar France, see especially Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*; Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home*; Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*; Kuisel, *Seducing the French*; Pells, *Not Like Us*; De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*.

55. See Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*; Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*.

56. See, for example Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War*; Gienow-Hecht, "What Bandwagon?"; Blower, *Becoming Americans in Paris*; Schwartz, *It's So French!*

57. I want to thank Sandhya Shukla for sharpening my thinking on this point. In making sense of race and transnational histories of the twentieth century, and in particular the history of US imperialism, I draw on Kramer, *Blood of Government*; Renda, *Taking Haiti*; Singh, *Black Is a Country*; L. Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*; Man, *Soldiering through Empire*; Miller-Davenport, *Gateway State*; Singh, *Race and America's Long War*; Vitalis, *White World Order*; Kramer, "Power and Connection."

58. Radano and Olaniyan, *Audible Empire*, 7. On the transnational production of Black music, see especially Denning, *Noise Uprising*; Dubois, *Banjo*; Monson, *Freedom Sounds*; Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*; Redmond, *Anthem*; Jaji, *Africa in Stereo*; Garcia, *Listening for Africa*; Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*; Charry, *Hip Hop Africa*; Rollefson, *Flip the Script*; Putnam, *Radical Moves*; Veal, *Dub*; Chude-Sokei, *Last "Darky"*; Aidi, *Rebel Music*.

59. See Weheliye, *Phonographies*; Redmond, *Anthem*; Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*.

CHAPTER I. JAZZ EN LIBERTÉ

1. Chesnel, *Le jazz en quarantaine*, 47.

2. Chesnel, *Le jazz en quarantaine*, 57–58.

3. On the violence of the liberation, see Hitchcock, *Bitter Road to Freedom*; Wiewiorka, *Normandy*; Footitt, *War and Liberation in France*.

4. On anti-Black racism and rape accusations during the liberation, see especially Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*; Kaplan, *Interpreter*.

5. On Louis and World War II, see Sklaroff, "Constructing G.I. Joe Louis." See also Erenberg, *Greatest Fight of Our Generation*.

6. On Europe's band and the African American experience in World War I, see Badger, *Life in Ragtime*; Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*.

7. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 165.

8. On the interwar period, see Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris*; Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*; Blake, *Le Tumulte noir*; Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*; Ezra, *Colonial Unconscious*.

9. See Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art*. As Matthew Pratt Guterl argues, Baker was engaged in an entirely new kind of racial and cultural project by the 1940s. Guterl, *Josephine Baker*.

10. On *négritude*, see Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*; Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*; Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French*; Wilder, *French Imperial Nation-State*.

11. Fry, *Paris Blues*, 118. On some of these same questions of authenticity and creative ownership among jazz critics in the United States, see Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*.

12. Ledos, "Un demi-siècle de jazz," 29, 31. For more on interwar radio, see Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound*; Méadel, *Histoire de la radio*; Brochand, *Histoire générale de la radio*; Neulander, *Programming National Identity*; Hill, *Black Soundscapes White Stages*.

13. On the origins of the Hot Club, see Legrand, *Charles Delaunay et le jazz*; Conte, "Les origines du Hot Club."