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ARTICLE

Hearing the Americas: Understanding the Early Recording Industry with Digital Tools

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Abstract

This article describes the methods and arguments of *Hearing the Americas*, a digital public history project that illuminates the history of popular music and the recording industry from 1890 to 1925. We argue that the use of digital tools allows the website to integrate sound directly into writing on music and thereby explicate a series of historical arguments. The article examines three arguments advanced by *Hearing the Americas*, showing in each case how digital tools generate new insights. The first case uses mapping to reveal some of the specific ways in which the economic and social context of Jim Crow shaped the experiences of Black performers; the second integrates sound and text to reveal the origins of certain blues conventions in the racist stereotypes of minstrel shows; and the final case uses digital tools to argue that the marketing strategies of the recording industry throughout the Americas helped produce a key shift in patterns of globalization.

Keywords: digital history; recording industry; popular music; Black musicians; globalization

Introduction

Hearing the Americas (*HtA*) is a digital public history project launched in August 2022 that combines interpretive text and primary sources, particularly audio recordings, to help the user understand the history of the early recording industry through sound. The project illuminates the history of popular music in the Americas from 1890 to 1925, a period known as the acoustical era of sound reproduction, when sounds were recorded and played back using mechanical devices rather than electrical amplification. As a digital public history project, it offers the public a new way to engage with the earliest years of recorded sound, but also with the larger context in which these recordings were embedded. This article argues that the use of digital tools allows *HtA* to integrate sound directly into writing on music and thereby advance and explicate a series of historical arguments. It describes the digital strategies used by *HtA* and then offers three case studies from the

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website to demonstrate how these elements come together to invite users to listen in new and deeper ways. In the first example, we address the history of technology and capitalism by situating the experiences of Black performers in the economic, political, and cultural context of Jim Crow America. In the second, we demonstrate how blues conventions that signaled Black authenticity were derived from minstrel shows and racial stereotypes. In the third case, we examine the transnational context of popular music in the Americas and reveal a key shift in the pattern of musical globalization.

HtA engages with this early period of sound recording to locate the music industry's origins and guide users past reductive cultural narratives about American popular culture. As Jonathan Sterne argues in his foundational work on the history of sound reproduction, "technologies that came to be organized as sound media emerged from a small, industrializing field of invention that was in continuous flux from the 1870s to the 1920s."[1] Focusing on the second half of this period, *HtA* shows our audience how sound reproduction technology became a popular medium. The project foregrounds the way recorded sound developed within larger economic and cultural contexts, allowing users to interrogate their assumptions and expand their knowledge about the origins of the American recording industry (Figure 1).

Sound reproduction and the music industry that developed from it must be understood "in the tumultuous context of turn-of-the-century capitalism and colonialism."[2] *HtA* centers recording within these broader projects and explores sound as both a historical source and an agent of historical change. As a source, recorded sound bears the traces of these larger processes and can bring the period into higher fidelity. At the same time, recorded sound was an agent of historical change that influenced the evolution of American culture and society. Considering sound on these multiple levels allows the project to communicate the complex histories of race, nation, class, and gender at the turn of the century.

Scholarship in the fields of music history and sound studies examines the social and cultural construction of the senses, revisiting the sensory experience of the past in more fluid, uneven, and historically contingent ways.[3] Focusing on sound decenters the primacy of visual culture and text in the understanding of modernity, and highlights how the senses worked in tandem to develop a kind of co-construction of social and cultural changes. This work is wide-ranging, exploring the historical construction of listening as a social practice, as well as the way sound, technology, and capitalism converged to create new kinds of products, markets, and music.[4] Still other scholars focus on the ways sound has shaped new social and cultural practices and helped reorder and reinforce group identity.[5]

HtA develops a new methodology for music history and sound studies by using digital tools to better integrate sound into historical scholarship.[6] Many scholars encourage readers to listen by including discographies or playlists in physical or digital form, but they have yet to take full advantage of the potential of music itself as primary source material. Music historians and musicologists have excelled at analyzing how sounds encoded on shellac discs expressed socioeconomic, political, and ideological influences. A scholar of jazz, for example, identifies in Louis Armstrong's early records the musical impact of migration from the plantation South to New Orleans.[7] Historians of Brazilian music uncover the roots of samba in the socioeconomic and racial characteristics of Rio de Janeiro.[8] But scholars have not tended to move in the opposite direction, using recorded music as evidence for arguments about socioeconomic or cultural change.

HtA contributes a new model to a small but growing number of digital history projects that engage directly with sound.[9] It is not an encyclopedia that aims for comprehensive coverage of the early history of the recording industry. Rather, it is an argument-driven

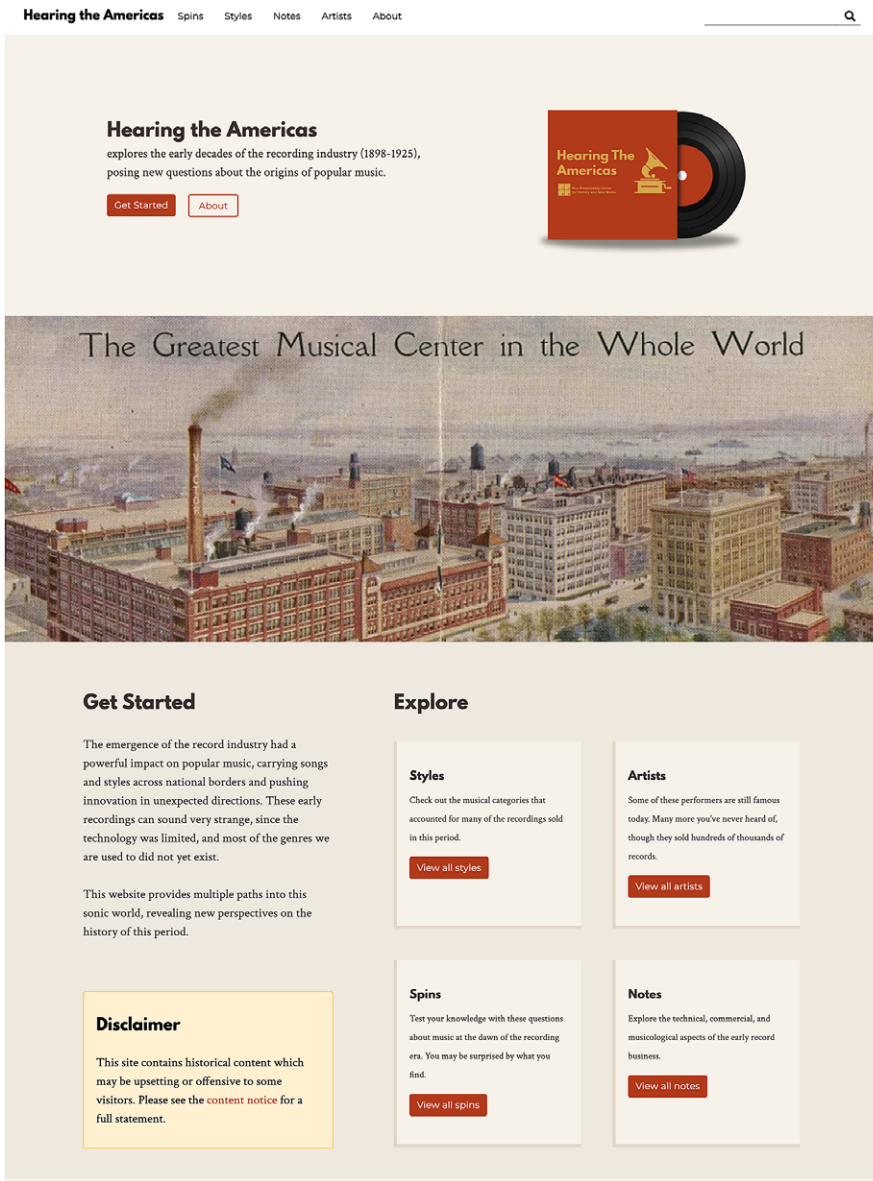


Figure 1. Homepage, Hearing the Americas. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/welcome.

project that synthesizes a range of analytical approaches from existing scholarship to make specific claims about this era in music history.[10] It is also a public history project that pairs these analyses with multimedia primary sources and presents them to a broad and diverse audience in new and engaging ways. The project was funded by two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 2017, we were awarded a one-year Digital Projects for the Public: Discovery Grant that allowed our project team to do

preliminary research, plan site functionality and design, and identify our primary audiences. In 2020, we were awarded a three-year Digital Projects for the Public: Production Grant. Drawing on the work we did during 2017, we began to build the digital project. This funding was pivotal to the success of *HtA*, giving us the planning-and-production time we needed to develop a strong and sustainable project.

Like many digital projects, *HtA* is a collaborative effort from a team with a wide array of specializations. The project was developed at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) within the History and Art History Department at George Mason University. The project team includes history faculty, RRCHNM staff, graduate students, and a team of external content advisors.[11] This collaboration model brought together the content expertise of faculty and graduate students and the technical expertise of RRCHNM staff to produce a project in which the digital and historical elements reinforce one another. All team members were involved in every stage of the project and were encouraged to offer ideas or suggestions about content or digital design. This model of respectful and nonhierarchical collaboration strengthened the project and made the process of creating the website an edifying process for all involved. We modeled this collaborative process in the construction of this article itself. While this first section offers a site-wide examination of the project, each case study is written by one of the three authors of this piece, two faculty PIs and one graduate student affiliate, who have been involved with the project since its earliest stages.

The *HtA* team developed the website with several key audiences in mind. As the project's first director Sheila Brennan argues, a digital public history project "requires an intentional decision from the beginning of the project that identifies, invites in, and addresses audience needs in the design, as well as the approach and content."[12] To this end, the project team conducted in-person and online user outreach with a variety of potential audiences to learn about their interests and expectations. The data we collected from this process led us to focus on three main audiences: music fans, musicians, and music history enthusiasts. Throughout development, we engaged in additional user testing that gave potential users a stake in our design decisions. Maintaining an audience-centered approach allowed us to anticipate the kinds of knowledge audiences would bring to the site and how we could design the project in ways that invited users to explore their assumptions and engage with sound in its larger contexts.

HtA draws on the affordances of the Omeka S platform to integrate sound and text within the same web browser. Omeka S is a free and open-source content management system designed for digital humanities projects and particularly well suited to historical work. The most basic elements of an Omeka S site are *items*, which consist of uploaded media, including sound, images, or video, along with accompanying metadata. Metadata is simply data about data, the descriptive and reference information that helps one discover and locate sources in a library catalog or archival finding aid. This structure allows for basic functionality that users expect, such as the ability to keyword search across the system or filter results by specific features. Uploaded items can be pulled into web pages along with interpretive text to provide deeper context on the major topics and themes of the website.

HtA uses the items functionality to incorporate primary sources: audio recordings, but also photographs, advertisements, news articles, and sheet music covers. Bringing sound and visual media together demonstrates for users how they worked in tandem to create social and cultural understandings of race, nation, and technology in the early twentieth century. Currently, the site contains nearly three hundred items roughly divided into three main types: person, image, and sound. Person items highlight people who were

crucial to the development of the industry, including performers, songwriters, publishers, and recording scouts. They include at least one, if not several, photographs that reflect that person's contribution to the music industry, which can be pulled into various parts of the website (Figure 2). Omeka S also lets us include image items of sheet music, advertisements, and articles, since marketing was a crucial development in the history of sound culture.

The most important sources in *HtA* are sound items, which include discographic information as well as digital audio files of recordings that constitute the essential evidence for the project's historical arguments. These items make the central innovation of the project possible, allowing us to weave sound directly into our historical interpretations (Figure 3). However, *HtA* is not a digitization project. Rather, the project pulls in digitized audio recordings from other archives across the web built through the efforts of librarians, archivists, and the public who have made early recordings available to new audiences, many for the first time in nearly a century.[13] As is shown in this issue by Carlene Stephens's exploration of how the topographical mapping method IRENE is used to digitize early cylinders, the creation of these digitized sound archives open up new avenues of inquiry in the history of recorded sound.

Although digitization projects have made these recordings much more accessible, it can be challenging for modern listeners to understand what they are hearing. As sound studies scholars remind us, listening is not an ahistorical practice but is rather bound to the context in which we listen and the technologies we listen with.[14] Whereas the original audiences of these recordings were just learning how to integrate them into their everyday lives, recorded sound is ubiquitous in today's media environment. Nevertheless, the sounds on *HtA*—while digitally delivered—challenge modern ears accustomed to clear, high-fidelity recordings. In addition, the styles, genres, and conventions of musical performance during this period sound starkly different from today's popular music. *HtA* encourages users to hear past the hisses and pops by focusing their listening within larger historical contexts. By unpacking the musicological and marketing conventions that structured the music of this period, the website makes these unfamiliar sounds intelligible. It reveals the very different historical context that produced this music, even as it asks users to consider how the origins of the music industry might still inform aspects of our soundscape today. By explicating and historicizing selected recordings from these rich digitized archives, we can guide users' listening in productive ways.

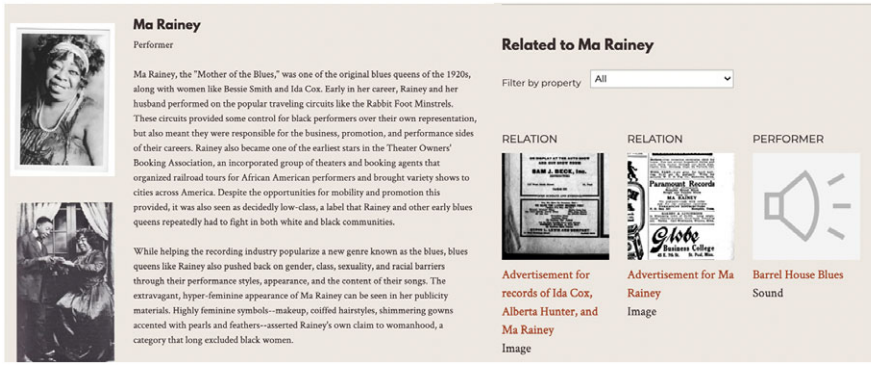


Figure 2. Person Item page for Ma Rainey. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/item/262.

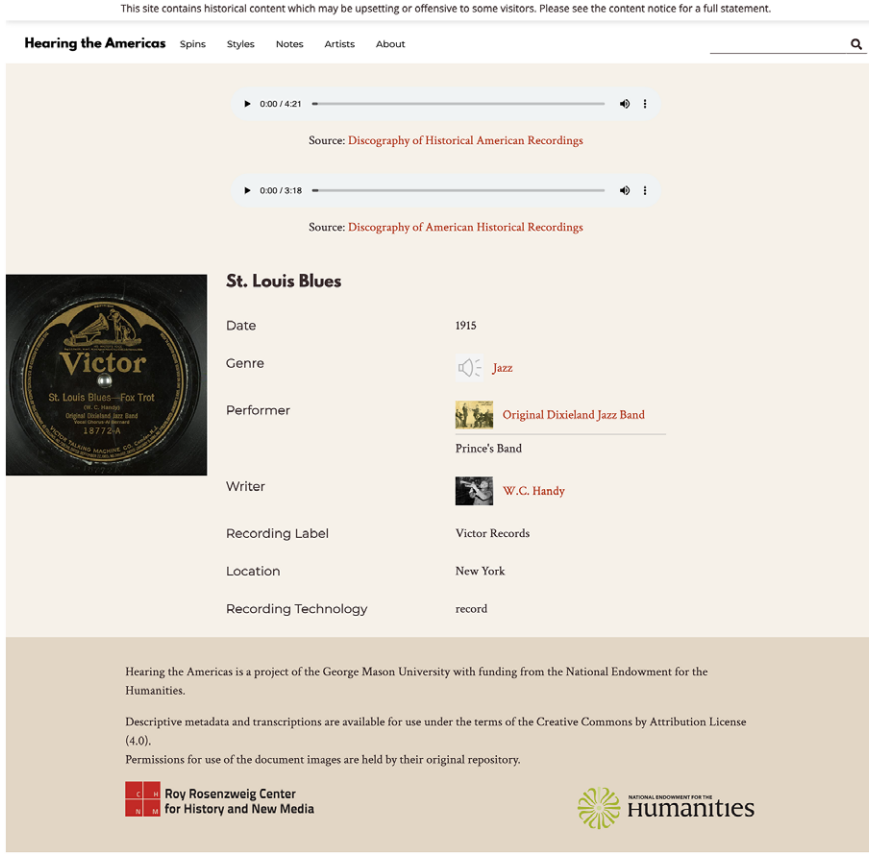
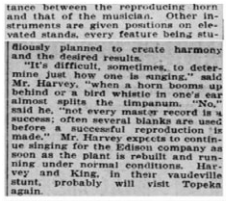


Figure 3. Song Item page for St. Louis Blues. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/item/70.

HtA advances its historical arguments in three central ways: embedding argument into item metadata, creating pages that integrate primary sources with interpretive text, and embedding sound into the text itself. Although not typically a concern central to historical scholarship, metadata plays a crucial role in the development of this project so that the user can place primary sources within their original contexts. Instead of only including generic metadata or encyclopedic information that can be found elsewhere, we create customized metadata fields for each item type that incorporate the larger arguments of the website. For example, a user who navigates to a sound item page will see descriptive metadata about the song such as title or date, as well as contextual information to guide their listening and interpretation of the recording, as can be seen in Figure 4. The functionality of Omeka S also allows us to link certain metadata fields together, allowing the user to navigate through items based on their own interests while keeping the project's arguments central to their discovery.

This approach to metadata also ensures that sensitive items included in the project, particularly those revealing the centrality of ethnic or racial stereotypes in the early recording industry, are never presented to the user without context that explains their inclusion. To this end, we also integrate content warnings on the homepage and


tance between the reproducing horn and that of the musician. Other instruments are given positions on elevated stands, every feature being studiously planned to create harmony and the desired results.

"It's difficult, sometimes, to determine just how one is singing," said Mr. Harvey, "when a horn booms up behind or a bird whistle in one's ear almost splits the timpanum. "No," said he, "not every master record is a success; often several blanks are used before a successful reproduction is made." Mr. Harvey expects to continue singing for the Edison company as soon as the plant is rebuilt and running under normal conditions. Harvey and King, in their vaudeville stunt, probably will visit Topeka again.

Morton Harvey Describes Recording

By the mid 1920s, electrical amplification and microphones had made it possible to dramatically improve recording quality. Here are excerpts from two recordings of the Nile duet (from Aida) with ▶ Giovanni Martinelli from 1924, then the 1926 remake, ▶ recorded with electrical equipment. Not only is there less mechanical noise, but the singer's low and high end is much more apparent.

Figure 4. Using Soundcite to guide user listening. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/note-technology.


Castles Are Coming to Show Omaha Dances

Advertisement for Vernon and Irene Castle's performance mentioning the tango

Newspaper advertisement

Date	April 19, 1914
Source	Library of Congress Chronicling America
Type	Newspaper advertisement
Related to	Vernon and Irene Castle

This article advertises Vernon and Irene Castle's upcoming performance in Omaha, Nebraska, but more importantly emphasizes how influential the Castle's were in popularizing and changing public perceptions of the tango dance. The author states, "those who once thought the tango naughty have changed their minds after seeing the Castles." This provides evidence for some historians who claim that the Castles performed sanitized versions of the tango.

Figure 5. Primary Source Item with interpretative descriptions and linked metadata. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/item/411.

throughout the site, especially when discussing particularly difficult or sensitive topics. We hope that these warnings along with our interpretive approach to metadata reduces the potential that any pages or sources being taken out of context or used for hateful or dangerous purposes.

HtA also uses the pages feature to present longer, more complex arguments to the user through interpretive text that incorporates various items from across the site (Figure 5). This functionality allows us to include sound recordings and other primary sources within the same page as the historical arguments that draw from them. This proximity between source and interpretation is one of the central innovations of *HtA*. It allows listeners to hear the musical sources we reference without having to visit an external source. Each page features interpretative text in the center with recordings pulled into the margins, playable with the click of a button. Clicking on the title of a recording will also bring the user to that item page where they can read the metadata, again allowing the user multiple pathways of discovery. We use hyperlinks to reinforce the website's central arguments, avoiding an encyclopedic model and instead building an interrelated, thesis-driven project that connects themes across various pages.

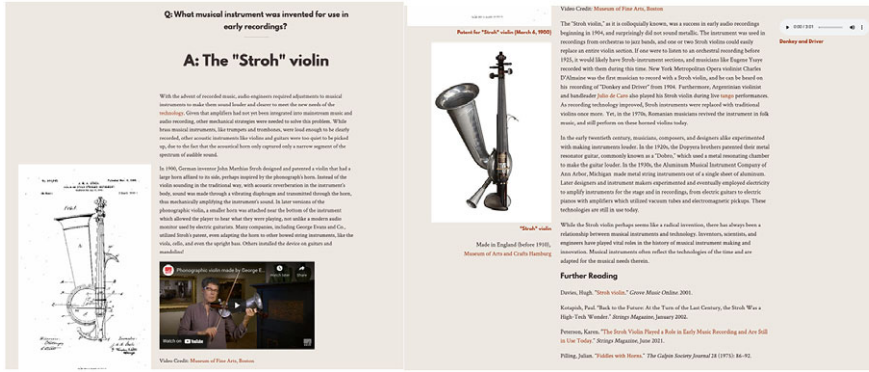


Figure 6. An example of a Spins page. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/stroh-violin.

Pages are divided into three types: styles, notes, and spins. *Styles* explore the development of musical genres and conventions, such as "Hawaiian music" or "tango." *Notes* cover more technical or musicological topics, such as "twelve bar blues" or "recording technologies." *Spins* are the primary vehicles for our historical arguments, providing complex investigations into the larger themes of technology and capitalism, transnationalism, and race (Figure 6). These are framed around questions such as "Where do the blues come from?" or "What was the most popular kind of band in America and worldwide in 1900?" that are meant to elicit interest from users. After clicking on a question, the user is taken to a multimedia essay that provides a nuanced answer. These essays use hyperlinks within the text to link to other items and pages. They also direct the user's attention to primary sources in the margins, which provide key bits of evidence for the essays' historical claims. Through text, sound, and image, these pages challenge reductive narratives about popular music in the Americas.

Finally, *HtA* uses an external tool called Soundcite to invite the user into even deeper analytical moments with sound recordings by embedding clips of digital recordings directly into the text of a webpage (Figure 7). After pasting the HTML scripts that Soundcite generates into Omeka S, our interpretive text is enhanced with transparent audio players that appear with the relevant phrases. This brings sound from the margins of the page into the text itself, creating an even more directed listening experience for users. We use this tool to isolate particular sonic moments that provide the evidence for our historical arguments about instrumentation, lyrics, rhythmic patterns, musical attributes, or vocal stylings. This tool is crucial to our effort to make audible larger historical arguments about race, class, gender, and nation. Soundcite invites our users to analyze these recordings as a way to think about history through sound and sound through history, honing a deeper, more critical listening practice.[15]

The rest of this article will provide three examples showing how we use the digital tools outlined above to make historical arguments. In all three cases, our claims rely heavily on existing scholarship. *HtA* offers a new synthesis of these arguments; it makes them audible in new ways and accessible beyond academic audiences.

Figure 7. An example of a Note page that uses Soundcite. Pressing the black triangles on the in-text audio player will play a chosen audio clip that allows us to make arguments using sound. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/syncopation.

Hearing Black Voices

HtA demonstrates for users how the early recording industry developed within a larger context of capitalism and technological change, and particularly how Black performers found creative space within this changing entertainment industry. As recordings moved from scientific invention to working-class novelty to a central feature in the middle-class parlor, the music industry provided new opportunities for performers to make recordings with emerging companies. At the same time, recording technology co-existed with older forms of media, such as sheet music and vaudeville shows. Using sound recordings and digital mapping, *HtA* invites the user to consider how technology influenced the soundscape of the period and to interrogate the contributions of Black performers to it.

We draw on the work of scholars who have explored the ways that the recording industry developed at the turn of the century. Some of this work focuses on the cultural dimensions of recording technology, and shows how new recording companies created "a new commercial class of music makers, including in one form or another entrepreneurs, inventors, manufacturers, publishers, sales agents, advertisers, critics, retailers, educators, and lawmakers."[16] Other work focuses on the ways that these records became part of the soundscape of modern leisure culture, first as a novelty in urban leisure districts like Coney Island and only later as serious music in the parlors of middle-class American homes.[17] Still other work focuses on the ways that consumers learned to integrate recorded sound into their lives, shaping "patterns of popular behavior, thought, emotion,

and sensibility."[18] These new technologies changed consumers' engagement with and expectations of musical performance, leading to "a new dissatisfaction with amateur music and, perhaps more significantly, a heightened engagement by amateurs with the experience of listening to professionals."[19]

HtA explores how Black performers worked within the technological shifts of the early recording industry and within the larger context of Jim Crow and racism. This is a lesser-known period of recording history, although it is when many of the central conventions of genre and style began to take shape. Apart from a handful of successful African American recording artists, record companies largely neglected Black performers and consumers in the early decades of the industry. The continued popularity of blackface in the entertainment industry meant that when Black performers were hired to make a record, they were typically hired to perform "coon" songs or other forms of racist comedy. In this way, the sonic stereotypes of nineteenth-century blackface resounded through the records of the modern recording industry. The few Black performers who found commercial success remained constrained by the tastes of white America and shaped their performances to these expectations.

For example, *HtA* includes a spin that features George W. Johnson, the first African American recording star (Figure 8). Johnson was likely born to enslaved parents in Virginia in 1846, although his specific origins remain unknown. After moving north, he worked as a street performer and became known for his ability to whistle a variety of popular songs, earning the attention of Victor Emerson who worked for the New Jersey Phonograph Company at the time. Emerson hired Johnson to record "coon songs," one of the most popular genres of this period, which capitalized on racist stereotypes developed through minstrelsy. In 1890, he made his first cylinder recordings of a song called "The Whistling Coon," written by white songwriter Sam Devere. This recording was followed by "The Laughing Song," which tied Johnson's identifiable laugh into the comedic tropes of minstrelsy. On the website, users can hear digitized versions of these early songs and are encouraged to listen for a variety of sonic information: Johnson's performance style, the quality of the cylinder recording itself, and the tropes of the coon song genre. In order to direct their listening, we use Soundcite to point out how the song makes racial stereotypes audible in a kind of sonic minstrelsy. We link to promotional photographs and sheet music to show how this music was marketed to consumers, as well as to other pages on the website that explore the history of minstrelsy more deeply.

HtA asks users to reflect on what Johnson's career can show us about the development of recording technology. Most of Johnson's recordings were made on cylinders, the earliest format of commercial recording invented by Thomas Edison. This technology reflected Edison's initial interest in the business applications of recorded sound, such as dictation. To record a cylinder, an artist would sing into a large horn and the vibrations would cause a stylus to etch the sound into wax. These early recording sessions did not create a "master" recording, but rather etched sound directly onto each cylinder, meaning a single performance could only make about three to four cylinders. For Johnson, who was estimated to have sold 38,000 cylinders by 1894, the recording process meant a long and taxing afternoon of repeat performances.

In this context, Johnson's performances would have been seen as a novelty use of the new technology rather than a musical experience. This is in part because cylinder technology limited what kinds of sounds could be recorded. Johnson's whistle was loud and sharp enough to move through the horn and cut through the wax, creating a clear sound. These limitations shaped the kinds of sounds that were recorded during this period, leading to instrumental lineups that were optimized to the technology and even

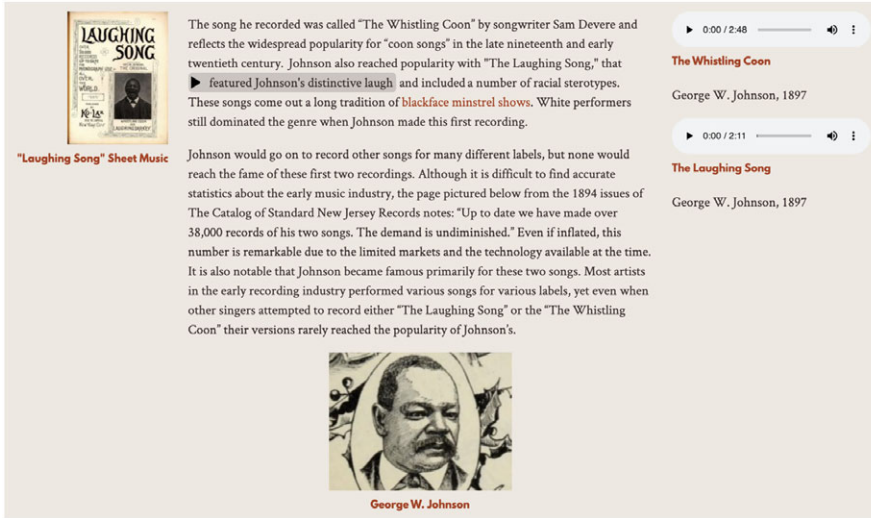


Figure 8. Spin page about George W. Johnson. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/q-first-star.

encouraging the development of new instruments like the Stroh Violin, which we explore elsewhere on the website. On Johnson's spin page we include an image of Johnson in the studio recording these songs, illustrating the kind of labor early recording entailed. We also use Soundcite to include several versions of the song from different cylinders, making audible the slight deviations between each recording.

Early artists were often paid per performance, making recording a lucrative, if physically taxing venture for a former street musician like Johnson. Later technology, however, made it easier to record bands and singers, and to make thousands of copies from a single master. These new technologies allowed companies to save money on recording sessions and Johnson found himself edged out of the market in favor of bigger, mostly white, performers. By the time of Johnson's death in 1914, however, new Black voices such as Bert Williams, James Reese Europe, and W. C. Handy could be heard navigating the demands and opportunities of the recording industry, now primarily focused on music. Johnson's astonishing commercial success in a burgeoning new media, however, demonstrates that Black performers were audible from the early days of the industry.

HtA amplifies Black recording artists not only within the larger cultural and technological shifts ushered in by recording, but also within older media networks like sheet music and live performance. On record, we can hear the voices of the most commercially successful Black theater circuit performers, such as Mamie Smith or Jelly Roll Morton. However, buried beneath these recorded performances are hundreds of other voices that never made it to record but impacted the development of American entertainment all the same. For example, Doug Seroff and Lynn Abott recover the career of Butler "String Beans" May as one of the most popular Black performers of the 1900s and 1910s. Despite his popularity on touring circuits and his wide coverage in the Black press, he is rarely acknowledged for his artistic contributions due to his absence from the archive of recorded sound. Although *HtA* highlights sound recordings as windows into the early

twentieth century, it is also important for the user to understand that focusing only on recordings distorts the much larger musical landscape in which they circulated.

To this end, *HtA* uses audio and mapping tools to show how Black theater circuits and itinerant tent shows in the first two decades of the twentieth century operated as a lucrative part of the entertainment landscape for the hundreds of Black performers who did not make it onto a record.[20] Signing with a theater circuit provided an artist or touring company access to a network of partner theaters, often regionally based, that could increase the potential profit to be made during a touring season. Although the recording industry became increasingly focused on music, it did not displace the consumer demand for live performance. In fact, the stage remained one of the most effective advertising and distribution tools for early recording companies and their stars.[21] Touring shows featured all the elements of Black commercial musical performance at the time, including "coon" songs and minstrel performances as well as early ragtime and blues. In fact, touring circuits helped to popularize urban blues, which first made it to record with W. C. Handy's "The Memphis Blues" in 1914. The Tri-State Circuit, for example, featured early performances by Bessie Smith, who would soon rise to fame as one of the "Blues Queens" of the recording industry.[22]

In addition to pairing sonic and visual sources with interpretive text, we also include interactive maps that allow the user to engage with the spatial dimensions of this history. For instance, in the example above, we include a map focusing on the Tri-State Circuit's touring locations in Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. Although the recording industry centralized in urban, Northeastern cities, theater circuits provided a crucial opportunity for Black performers across the nation to entertain as well as to express political ideas (Figure 9). Black theater and tent show circuits developed in smaller, mostly regional configurations over the first two decades of the twentieth century. Often, touring schedules followed the rhythms of Southern agricultural labor. Railcars brought popular acts to audiences in laboring camps across various industries, although the most successful time of year was during the fall cotton harvest in the Mississippi Delta.[23] Although Black performers had found a way to escape agricultural labor through the entertainment industry, their tours kept them connected to the seasonal rhythms nature imposed and to the 90 percent of African Americans who still lived and worked in the South.

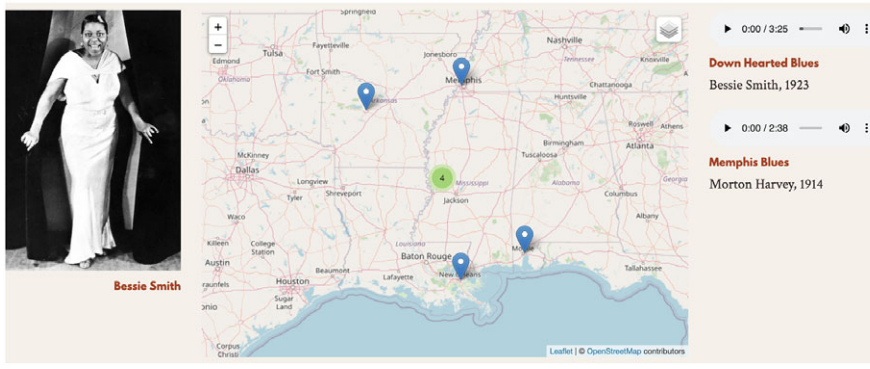


Figure 9. Images, recordings, and interactive maps showing the Tri-State Circuit. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/theater-circuits.

Pairing maps with identifiable artists allows us to explore the experiential dimensions of these performance circuits and what they meant for Black mobility and politics. For example, the website includes a map with location data for the S. H. Dudley circuit from 1910–1911, the only Black owned and operated theater circuit of the time.[24] We paired this map with images of Dudley and a clipping from the Black press, which would often report on his work in the entertainment industry. We also included an image and recording of Mamie Smith, a regular performer on Dudley's circuit before she became a recording star in the 1920s, to consider the multidimensionality of these theater circuits for someone like Smith (Figure 10).

These circuits provided economic opportunity for Black performers at a time when most Black Americans could only find work in the service sector or agriculture. On these stages, even when forced to enact minstrel stereotypes, performers like Smith were professionals playing a role in an industry that brought them into the fold of a growing Black middle class. At the same time, the labor of touring could be grueling; performers traveled from city to city on railcars while rehearsing and refining their act before the next performance.[25] Traveling could be a harrowing experience for Black performers who faced the constant threat of racist violence and discrimination on the road, particularly when traveling on circuits like the Tri-State that brought them to the South (Figure 11).

A map of the Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA) circuit a decade later in comparison with earlier, more regional circuits, demonstrates the national expansion of

Figure 10. Images, recordings, and interactive maps showing the S.H. Dudley Circuit. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/theater-circuits.

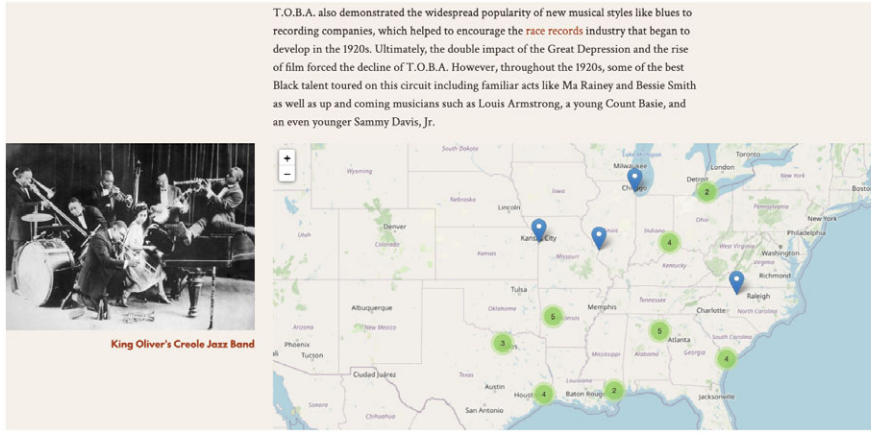


Figure 11. Images, recordings, and interactive maps showing the S.H. Dudley Circuit. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/theater-circuits.

Black theater circuits in just a decade. Arising in part from the success of S. H. Dudley's circuit, TOBA consolidated several circuits into a nationwide network in 1921 that provided increased opportunity for Black artists to perform for audiences across the nation. This national circuit legitimized the professionalism of Black performers and helped to create "business relationships with the emerging race record industry" while also protecting performers from abusive practices of "rogue" theater owners.[26] At the same time, not unlike the recording industry, the creation of TOBA left Black theater circuits primarily in the control of white theater owners and bookers.

Within the tent or theater, however, Black performers used the stage to create a dialogue with Black audience members who "witnessed their own people reflect on and critique American life under Jim Crow, all the while achieving fame via a very modern and newly respectable profession."[27] Despite risks to safety, touring in the South also kept Black performers connected to the African Americans who still lived and worked in the South and allowed for the continued development of new genres like the blues. We can hear some of the most successful circuit performers on record, but there are many more whose voices we cannot. From the recording studio to the tents and theaters of touring circuits, however, Black performers seized the limited opportunities available to them within the entertainment industry to shape the cultural, political, and musical life of America.

Hearing the Play of Parody in the Blues

Recent work on the history of the blues locates the genre's origins less in folk music or pre-commercial practice than in the touring companies described above and in minstrel shows.[28] In these sources and others, blues appears less as the soul cry of an oppressed people and more as a product of the endless desire of the music business to market novel musical forms in racialized ways. We can see this in many examples: in one famous instance, Alan Lomax drove to the Stovall plantation in northern Mississippi to record McKinley Morganfield, "Muddy Waters," whom he described as an "unwashed folk singer" and a bearer of the genuine folk blues. But it's clear from Morganfield's own

account that he played a wide variety of songs including versions of the commercial blues that had been circulating widely for almost thirty years before Lomax arrived at the Stovall farm. He would have heard, for example, Bessie Smith, who when asked by Langston Hughes about the art of the blues, replied that blues was what "put her in de money."[29] Generations of African American musicians approached questions about the blues warily, seeing it as both a form of aesthetic confinement and as a continuation of the spectacle of African American suffering foregrounded in minstrel shows. Miles Davis, in a 1989 national television interview, recalled a teacher at Julliard relating the blues to slavery. Davis dismissed the entire construction of blues as "black hurt" out of hand, saying, "Listen, my father's rich, my mama's good-looking, all right? And I can play the blues. I've never suffered and don't intend to suffer."[30]

The origin of the blues in minstrel shows appears clearly in W. C. Handy, who began his professional career as a minstrel and often spoke proudly of how the minstrel show honed his professional skills and his ability to "put one over" on the audience. In his famous account of hearing the blues for the first time at a rail station in Tutwiler, Mississippi, Handy described "a lean, loose-jointed Negro" whom he overheard playing guitar. His clothes were rags, Handy wrote, and his feet popped out of his shoes. Handy dressed him in memory like the minstrel character Jim Crow. The man played the guitar, Handy added, with a knife blade "in the manner popularized by Hawaiian guitarists who use steel bars," further undermining the claim of folk authenticity by pointing out how Hawaiian music circulated as a commercial fad.[31] Handy located the blues in a character out of a minstrel show, then connected the possibly fictional folk musician's playing to commercial recordings and performances of Hawaiian music.

HtA follows the recent historiography cited above by arguing that the blues derived from a complicated relationship between commercial parodies and ideas of authenticity. Many of these came from the new discipline of folklore, which always sought communities of noncommercial, uncontaminated musical practice. Despite their importance to the idea of the folk, such uncontaminated musical communities rarely existed independent of the market webs in which people lived. And minstrel shows also drew on an idea of "folk," simultaneously presenting themselves as authentic expressions of African American culture and, as frequently, vicious mockery or parody. One of the ways *HtA* reveals the constant cycling between claims of authenticity and parody involves a close reading of the fluidity of pitch.

Advertising for minstrel shows featured caricatures with loose limbs and rubbery bodies. Minstrels wore absurd clothing and spoke and sang with slippery, woozy diction. Because minstrelsy appeared as both mocking and authentic, minstrel singing styles often featured elaborate and exaggerated pitch bending. The pitch bending later became the very hallmark of the blues as a commercial genre, one of the things the blues was said to consist of. Many folk traditions use nonstandard pitches, and African American musical practice may indeed have involved a less strict relationship to fixed pitch. But "swooping" up or down to the note is also a characteristic of untrained singers, who will often move sharp and flat on either side of a note until they settle at the correct pitch. Pitch slurring and swooping in minstrel shows signified the same thing as cartoonish, rubbery limbs or garbled grammar and diction: they signified both comic ineptitude and "authentic" difference.

The earliest recordings in America show us this clearly, and *HtA* relies on digital tools to make this process audible for users. We use the example of Arthur Collins singing "Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home" from roughly 1899–1902, a classic of the minstrel and vaudeville stages that later became a staple of twentieth-century pop songs. The

melody makes comic pitch bends central: for example, in the introduction, at 0:25, "Bill Bailey's woman" is hanging clothes "in her back *ya-ard*, and weepin' *ha-ard*." The sharp pitch bends on those two words are juxtaposed with mundane household tasks and weeping. Then the more familiar chorus begins with a swoop up on "won't you come home Bill Bailey" and then a swoop down on "whole day lo-ong." The song mocks working-class African Americans and describes Bailey's paramour moaning and "bellerin"" like a "prune fed calf." Similarly, Dan Quinn's 1903 version has similar elements in the chorus. In these recordings, pitch bending signifies animalistic comic ineptitude and lack of self-control, pain you are supposed to laugh at. At the same time, the comedy of pain is framed as racial authenticity.

On the website, we use the Soundcite tool to demonstrate this phenomenon. Soundcite enables us to include an audio example of "comic pitch bends" that the user can hear without opening a new window or separate audio player or leaving the site (Figure 12). We use Soundcite as part of the larger goal of making music more legible and easier for nonmusicians to feel comfortable critiquing. Musical analysis typically consists either of celebrity biography or accounts of musical structure informed by music theory and not accessible to untrained listeners. We want to make musical analysis as seamless as possible for both scholars and lay audiences. Further, just as historians would encourage "close reading" of historical sources, we want to encourage "close listening" to musical examples. So, in a discussion of the Bert Williams song "Nobody" (1903), we point out that Williams was engaged in a parody of stereotypes, imitating and mocking the kind of pitch-bending men like Arthur Collins or Dan Quinn engaged in. And we can show this with a clip of some of the many times Williams imitates the comical slurs of the trombone with his voice (Figure 13).

Modern listeners often find "Nobody" deeply painful or embarrassing to listen to, the sound of a person compelled to enact their own degradation. But audiences at the time, Black and white, found it uproariously funny and understood it as a parody of minstrel clichés. We interpret the song as a knowing parody of stereotypes then in wide circulation, much in the manner of contemporary African American comedians who mock common stereotypes. The Soundcite clips encourage listeners to find meaning in small details and specific musical moves and make it easier to hear through the veil of time.[32]

We continue to trace the evolution of pitch bending and the blues by using one of the earliest existing recordings of W. C. Handy's "Memphis Blues." Handy claimed to have learned the melody from the singer at the Tutwiler rail station, and the melody includes

Figure 12. Clicking on the black triangle plays a short clip of pitch bending. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/minstrelsy.

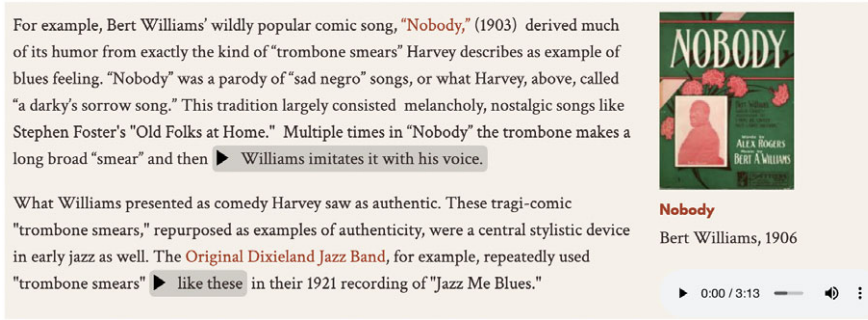


Figure 13. Soundcite clip of vocal imitation. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/memphis-blues.

"blue notes," presented with some plasticity of pitch. Soundcite allows us to name the specific notes in Morton Harvey's 1914 version of the song, and have readers click and hear them (Figure 14). Harvey himself, decades later, felt the recording failed to capture "authentic blues feeling" because the musicians on the track were unfamiliar with the blues, a genre then just emerging from vaudeville and minstrel shows. But as the screenshot below from *HtA* explains, Harvey felt that he had captured something authentic with exactly the sort of "trombone smears" that Williams had made famous in parody a decade earlier (Figure 15).

Thus, parody turns into authenticity, or as Karl Miller put it, commercial musical culture "tendered authentic minstrel deceits as authentic folkloric truths."[33] By 1921, the Original Dixieland Jass Band had sold more than a million copies of what were often described as the first recordings of "jazz." We use Soundcite to show how the same tragi-comic "trombone smears" were foundational to their self-presentation as authentic jazz.

The relationship of parody and authenticity established in these early recordings continued well into the twentieth century: many scholars have pointed out that Elvis Presley's first recordings, often described as the primal examples of authentic rock and roll, read very clearly as gleeful parodies of the blues and country genres he grew up hearing on records and on the radio. By showing the interplay of parody and authenticity we can undermine the claims to nature or race that underpin genre conventions.

Soundcite offers a simple way to do the very complicated work of unpacking roughly one hundred years of mythology around the folk origins of the blues, what might be called the "Martin Scorsese presents the blues" version, and which Miller calls the "folkloric

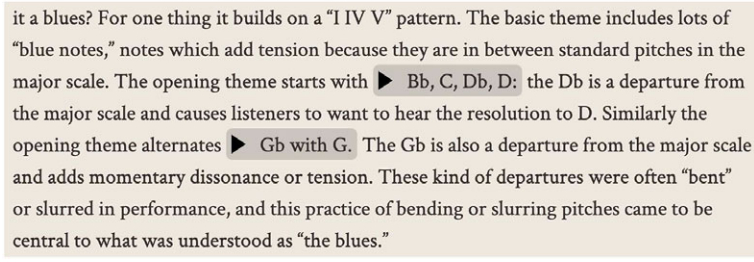


Figure 14. Soundcite clips that make pitches audible for the user. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/memphis-blues.

Harvey himself felt the recording failed to capture a "blues quality." He wrote: "The 'Blues' style of singing and playing, which became so familiar later, was just about to be born. Even the dance records of 'The Memphis Blues' made during that period were played as straight one-steps. However, there were a few good old-fashioned ▶ "trombone smears" in the orchestral effects of my 'Memphis Blues' record." Harvey's comment pointed out that blues and ragtime (the one step) were not then distinct styles. But he also praised the "old fashioned trombone smears," which locate the blues in comic exaggerations.

Figure 15. Soundcite clip of trombone smears. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/memphis-blues.

paradigm." We want to situate "the blues" in the play of parody and authenticity and, as the next section shows, in transnational commercial flows. Soundcite allows us to use recordings as historical evidence; it makes possible a close reading of musical sound and encourages visitors to the website to invest themselves in exploring the meaning of even very brief musical passages. It bypasses the formalism of musicology, which typically depends on the ability to read standard notation and allows a seamless integration of music and text. In these ways, we hope that *HtA* can serve as a model of how to integrate analysis of music into historical practice.

Hearing Musical Globalization

In addition to the way it mobilizes sound as evidence, another central feature of *HtA* is its transnational framing. Historians have charted the global reach of the early recording industry, but they have typically explored the musical effects of this globalization within specific national contexts. We have many excellent studies of the impact of Victor, Columbia, Edison, Pathé, and Odeon on the popular music of individual countries, but very few works that explore transnational musical patterns. Michael Denning's *Noise Uprising* is a powerful exception to this rule, but Denning approaches the "phonograph music" that emerged in port cities across the world as multiple instances of a single political dynamic he identifies as decolonization.[34] There is certainly a great deal more to say about musical globalization in the early recording era.

By explicitly defining its object as transnational and by incorporating recordings directly into its text, *HtA* allows users to hear a fundamental, sonic shift in the patterns of musical globalization. To put it briefly, we argue that the early years of the recording industry, up until around 1920, were characterized by exceptional genre fluidity and multidirectional borrowing. In these years, the advent of recording allowed music to flow more freely across generic and geographic borders. But this period did not last. During the 1920s, genres became both more fixed and more firmly associated with specific nations. Music continued to flow across borders, but these flows increasingly took the form of a one-way dissemination from the core to the periphery. This interpretation is built on elements drawn from the existing scholarly literature, yet the transnational frame of *HtA* and its use of music as evidence make this fundamental shift audible and understandable in a new way.

In the early decades of recording, records marketed in the United States featured a wide range of genres: Sousa marches, ragtime, minstrelsy and ethnic humor, blues, as well

as plenty of musical styles from outside the United States. Among the first records made by the pioneering African American bandleader James Reese Europe was one that featured genres and compositions from Argentina and Brazil: a tango on one side and a *maxixe* on the other. The presence of these South American genres in Europe's repertoire is, of course, widely known. It partly reflects his status as the bandleader for Irene and Vernon Castle, the Anglo American dance couple who popularized new forms of social dancing in the 1910s. In most accounts of Europe's music, the tango and maxixe are minor footnotes. Europe is mostly known as a ragtime musician and a precursor of jazz.[35]

Yet the borders around genres were extremely porous in this period. As both dances and musical genres, the tango and maxixe were all the rage in European and North American cities in 1913 and 1914, just as the recording industry took off. And American musicians were listening closely. James Reese Europe, like many scholars today, was convinced of the tango's deep roots in the rhythms of the African diaspora. As he put it, "Both the tango and the fox-trot are really negro dances."[36] Europe was not alone; the composer Bob Cole told interviewers that ragtime syncopation was of a piece with rhythms imported from Latin America and the Caribbean. In the words of historian David Gilbert, "as Americans Black and white just began to understand syncopation as the essential sound of blackness, they associated exciting rhythms with an entire world of exotic music."[37]

Genres had been conveyed across borders by sheet music for decades and by traveling performers for centuries, and at first, recording accelerated the process. Victor and other companies sent recording teams to Buenos Aires and brought some Argentine groups to New York to make tango records they could sell in the South American market, but they also recorded tangos played for American audiences by American brass bands, including Europe's Society Orchestra, the Victor Military Band, Sousa's Band, Arthur Pryor's Band, Conway's Band, and many others.[38] Records gave listeners access to cosmopolitan, musical modernity in the form of ragtime numbers, Enrico Caruso arias, as well as tangos and other international genres. Using multiple recordings as examples and Soundcite clips to isolate key elements, *HtA* allows users to hear what tango meant as the term circulated the globe in the 1910s.

Sonically, "tango" in this period referred to the *habanera* rhythm, a variant of the European contradance developed in Cuba, brought back to Spain, and from there, exported to the rest of Latin America. Tango had developed in the port cities of Montevideo and Buenos Aires as a new way to dance habanera, and in its initial wave of global popularity, the habanera pulse remained tango music's defining characteristic.[39]

Given the extreme genre fluidity of these years, musical mashups and cross-fertilizations were common, and *HtA* examines multiple examples. Most famously, W. C. Handy included a tango section in his hit song "St. Louis Blues." But many other mixtures were possible: Hawaiian guitarist Frank Ferara recorded "Hawaiian Portuguese Tango" with his wife Helen for Victor in 1916. Playful fusions like this one are easily dismissed as anomalous novelty numbers by contemporary listeners who know tango, blues, and *hapa haole* music as distinct genres. Yet easy access to musical genres, styles, and techniques from around the world could have significant effects. The adoption of the Hawaiian slide guitar by both blues and country musicians is a major example.[40]

Likewise, the early history of jazz reveals the generative power of musical transnationalism in this era. The habanera rhythm and its close relatives, the *tresillo* and *cinquillo*, figured prominently in early jazz, lending the music what New Orleans pianist Jelly Roll Morton famously called a "Spanish tinge" and helping to lay the rhythmic foundations of

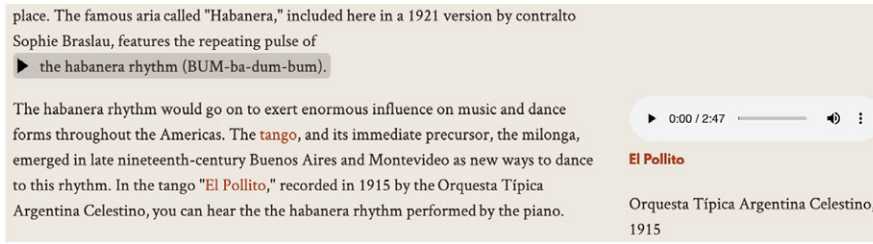


Figure 16. Soundcite clip of habanera rhythm. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/habanera.

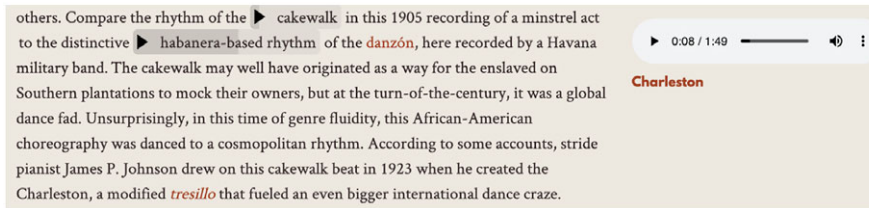


Figure 17. Soundcite clips used to compare different rhythms. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/q-soundalike.

the genre.[41] Again, *HtA* uses sound as evidence to make this case (Figure 16). For example, we draw users' attention to the cinquillo rhythms that the African American cakewalk seemed to share with the Cuban *danzón.* We then allow users to hear how the pioneering boogie-woogie pianist James P. Johnson based "The Charleston" (1923) on a modified cakewalk, launching a jazz dance craze on a transnational beat. Here and elsewhere, *HtA* mobilizes sonic evidence to make the case that the advent of the recording industry reinforced multidirectional musical flows that yielded significant innovation (Figure 17). Groundbreaking musical innovators like Johnson fashioned their music from a wide range of transnational sources.

Nevertheless, by around 1920, the business models established by the recording industry began to channel the global flows of popular music in new ways. The agents of the multinational record companies who scoured the world for music to commercialize prioritized "local music," popular genres that sounded completely different from the music they knew.[42] And they imagined that local music would only interest local consumers. Entering foreign markets, the companies hoped to sell their prestigious catalogs of European and American music, on the one hand, and this local music, on the other. When they marketed foreign music in the United States, it was generally part of an attempt to capture new markets among immigrants nostalgic for the sounds of home. Over time, this strategy drew sharper lines around musical styles and tended to strengthen the associations between musical genres and nations. The tango was essentially Argentine, the samba was Brazilian, and jazz was American, and bands tended to specialize in the popular music of their country. This way of thinking about genre is clearly visible in the record catalogs and advertisements of the day. *HtA* displays a typical 1925 advertisement for Victor Records in a Buenos Aires magazine that listed "local repertoire"—tango

and Argentine folk genres—on one side, and European classical music and American jazz on the other.[43]

Transnational influence did not stop, but thanks in large part to the enormous economic and political power of the United States, it increasingly moved in only one direction. In Latin America, genres such as the tango, samba, and *son* underwent enormous stylistic development in the 1920s and 1930s, and in significant ways, these innovations reflected the influence of jazz. In the case of tango, a "New Guard" of composers and bandleaders, such as Julio de Caro and Juan Carlos Cobián, infused the music with harmonic and orchestral sophistication to appeal to Argentine listeners accustomed to the sonic modernity of Paul Whiteman's jazz records.[44] But while Argentine listeners continued to listen to jazz, American audiences were completely ignorant of developments in Argentine tango after about 1917.[45] Record companies had decided that whereas jazz and classical music were prestigious genres of ostensibly universal appeal, tango was local music for the Argentine market.

As visitors to *HtA* can hear, recordings of tango, samba, son, and ragtime could often sound quite similar in the 1910s. This was partly because of the ubiquity of brass instruments and the limitations of recording technology, but it also reflected the omnipresence of the habanera and related rhythmic patterns. By the late 1920s, this was no longer the case: as Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, and others transformed jazz, New Guard musicians reinvented tango, and Brazilian and Cuban innovators like Ismael Silva and Arsenio Rodríguez produced similarly groundbreaking transformations in samba and son. And while those Latin American musicians were familiar with American jazz, the new structure of musical globalization meant that their music went largely ignored by Anglo and African American audiences and musicians. *HtA* allows users to hear the new shape of musical globalization by revealing the difference between what tango sounded like in the United States in the 1920s and what it had come to sound like in Argentina.

When Latin American music did flow into the United States, it did so on very different terms. The so-called rhumba craze ignited in 1930 by Don Azpiazú's recording of "The Peanut Vendor" yielded an influx of Cuban music into mainstream American pop music that would last through the mambo era of the 1950s. But American audiences encountered this music through a lens of exoticism that made it seem essentially different. Hundreds of pop tunes with English lyrics and Cuban-inspired rhythms depicted Latin America as tropical, languid, sexy, and unserious.[46] The tango had also been experienced as exotic, and yet James Reese Europe and Bob Cole had heard its underlying, rhythmic similarities to African American music; W. C. Handy mixed it with the blues, and jazz innovators infused their music with related rhythms. This type of blending would not occur again until the Cubop experiments of Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo in the 1940s, and then the exercise was experienced as a coming together of two different traditions whose commonalities lay in a distant, African past, rather than a reigniting of circuits of musical exchange that had been active just a few decades before (Figure 18).

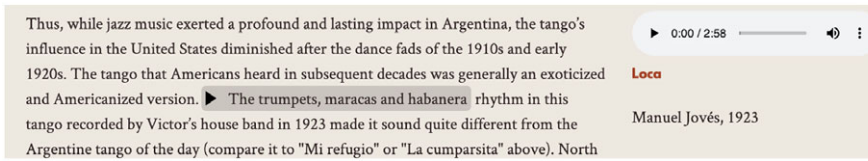


Figure 18. Soundcite clip highlights differences in tango music recordings. https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/q-whatcity.

The drawing of rigid, national boundaries around popular music genres in the 1920s has cast a long shadow, profoundly constraining interpretations of music history. Specifically, scholars of American popular music have tended to construct national genealogies for national genres. They point to distant African and European roots but not to the musical blending and mixing of the early twentieth century. By making the shift in patterns of musical globalization audible, *HtA* begins to suggest a new, more transnational history. The project encourages users to question the essentialism that treats each musical genre as the product of a particular ethnic or racial group. Instead, the sonic evidence reveals that transnational fluidity and borrowing characterized the early decades of recording. The exclusive association between genres like tango or jazz and specific nations or groups was itself produced by the commercial recording industry.

Concluding Thoughts

Hearing the Americas leverages the enormous potential of digital tools to synthesize a new interpretation of the early recording era. The site explores a wide range of musical styles, generating specific arguments on multiple topics. We have described three of these here: a spatial analysis of Black agency within the music industry, a demonstration of the ways early records linked particular sounds and performance styles to ideas about racial authenticity derived from minstrelsy, and an examination of the shifting patterns of musical globalization in the 1920s. For these and all the other arguments developed on the website, recorded music, placed in its social, economic, and political context, provides key evidence. We rely on the digital architecture of Omeka S combined with Soundcite's capacity to integrate sound and text to develop these claims and to enable listeners to make sense of recordings that typically sound impenetrable even to those with a deep knowledge of music history.

In the end, our analyses underscore the enormous cultural impact of the commercial marketplace for music. Genres that seem quintessentially American or deeply rooted in ancient traditions were, in fact, catalyzed by commerce. Artists innovated within the constraints and opportunities provided by a market shaped by profound inequalities and powerful ideologies. They turned musical expressions of white supremacy into vehicles for knowing parody, then watched those parodies re-emerge as new versions of authenticity. Early records are not an archive of a pre-existing set of musical expressions captured and preserved on shellac. Rather, they are the traces of a dynamic process of cultural creation. The soundscape they produced differed from what came before and would not last long. In subsequent years, African American performers would exert agency in new ways, as genres became increasingly rigid and cut off from foreign influence. And yet, the multiple musical transactions of the 1910s and 1920s would certainly affect the music of future years. Understanding those negotiations helps us to better navigate the intellectual structures that still bind music in the present.

Acknowledgments. The authors would like to thank Laura Brannan, Megan Brett, Jason Heppler, Jayme Kurland, Kim Nguyen, and Susie Nguyen, whose work was crucial to creating *Hearing the Americas*; Sheila Brennan and Stephen Robertson, who played vital roles at the project's inception; as well as the project advisors, Robin D. Moore, Lauren Sklaroff, Susan Smulyan, David Suisman, and John Troutman.

Notes

1 Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 25.

2 Sterne, *Audible Past,* 25.
3 R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Sterne, *Audible Past*; Mark M. Smith, *Sensory History: An Introduction* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2007).
4 Sterne, *Audible Past;* Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
5 William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Gilbert, *The Product of Our Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
6 This contributes to the growing field of digital sound studies whose major debates are collected in Mary Caton Lingold, Darren Mueller, and Whitney Trettien, eds., *Digital Sound Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
7 Thomas Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).
8 Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Marc Hertzman, *Making Samba: A New History of Race and Music in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
9 One notable example is Emily Thompson's project "The Roaring Twenties," a companion site to her book *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004). Thompson's digital project creates a sonic exploration of New York City that draws from newsreel footage, noise complaints, and visual sources like letters and photographs that can be experienced through one of three pathways organized by type of sound, on a map of the city, or chronologically. http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/index.php?project=98 (accessed on Aug. 10, 2023).
10 This approach draws from recent scholarly discussions about argument and digital humanities. See: Stephen Robertson and Lincoln Mullen, eds., "Special Section: Arguing with Digital Histories." *Journal of Social History* 54 (Summer 2021); Stephen Robertson and Lincoln Mullen, "Digital History & Argument White Paper," https://rrchnm.org/argument-white-paper/ (accessed Dec. 5, 2021).
11 The full project team is highlighted on the website to credit all contributions: https://hearingtheamericas.org/s/the-americas/page/about (accessed on Aug. 10, 2023).
12 Sheila Brennan, "A Case for Digital Collections," *Collections* 12 (Fall 2016): 384–85.
13 These include: The Library of Congress, "National Jukebox," https://www.loc.gov/collections/national-jukebox/about-this-collection/ (accessed Dec. 5, 2021); University of California Santa Barbara, "Cylinder Audio Archive," https://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/ (accessed Dec. 5, 2021); The Internet Archive, "The Great 78 Project," https://great78.archive.org/ (accessed Dec. 5, 2021).
14 In particular, the work of Sterne, *Audible Past*, and William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life.*
15 Soundcite is developed and maintained by Knight Lab at Northwestern University and is a powerful tool for integrating sound media into digital publications. The website provides an easy-to-use interface that imports web-hosted audio via a link, a clipper to select a segment of the audio track, and a text box to tie your words to the audio. Soundcite uses this input to generate an embed code that can then be inserted into the HTML editor on any digital web publishing platform. To learn more about Soundcite, visit https://soundcite.knightlab.com/ (accessed Aug. 10, 2023).
16 Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 15.
17 John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life;* Suisman, *Selling Sounds.*
18 Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life,* 4.
19 Thompson, *Soundscape of Modernity,* 50.
20 We draw heavily from the work of Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, particularly Abbott and Seroff, *The Original Blues: The Emergence of the Blues in African American Vaudeville* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 2017), 217; as well as William Barlow, *Looking Up At Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).
21 Suisman, *Selling Sounds,* 29.
22 On the blues queens, see Daphne Duval Harrison, *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988). For a consideration of the transition from Black musical

theater to blues, see Daphne Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), 378–87.

23 Abbott and Seroff, *Original Blues*, 221.

24 Dudley, a Black performer turned promoter, created a Black theater circuit that partnered only with theaters that were Black-owned and Black-operated, offering a new model of business and demonstrating a desire to invest in opportunities in the industry at all levels.

25 Barlow, *Looking Up At Down*, 119.

26 Seroff and Abbott, *Original Blues*, 248.

27 Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 6.

28 On the origins of blues as a genre see Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Gilbert, *Product of Our Soul;* Elijah Wald, *The Blues: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

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33 Miller, *Segregating Sound,* 6.

34 Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015). For a critique of Denning's decolonization thesis, see Matthew B. Karush, "The Politics of Tango**:** A Response to Michael Denning's *Noise Uprising*," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 31, no. 4 (2019)**:** 51–66.

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36 Cited in Reid Badger, *A Life in Ragtime: A Biography of James Reese Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 116.

37 Gilbert, *Product of Our Souls*, 70.

38 For these and other examples of tangos recorded by American bands, search the online *Discography of American Historical Recordings* compiled by researchers at the University of California, Santa Barbara Library: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu (accessed on Aug. 10, 2023).

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40 *Troutman Kīkā Kila*.

41 Christopher Washburne, *Latin Jazz: The Other Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 60.

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43 *Caras y Caretas*, May 16, 1925, 167.

44 On the New Guard tango musicians, see Kacey Link and Kristin Wendland, *Tracing Tangueros: Argentine Tango Instrumental Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 46–49.

45 In 1936, some 20 percent of musical programming on Buenos Aires radio stations was dedicated to jazz. Andrea Matallana, *Locos por la radio: Una historia social de la radiofonía en la Argentina, 1923–1947* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006), 95.

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