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## THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN JAZZ ON FASHION

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*Editors' Introduction: The efforts to provide more sensible dress for women finally came to fruition in the 1920s, as seen in [Chapter 3](#). Many factors help explain the change in women's dress from highly structured complex garments to the short, shapeless dresses that emerged in the 1920s. The change occurred, in part, with a shift from Victorian and Edwardian sensibilities to modernist concepts of functionality. Also, in America more young people were entering college and creating new lifestyles for their generation. With the emergence of better communication, airplanes and affordable automobiles, life began to move at a faster pace. Clothes reflected a changing society. Women wore simple, boyish styles that eliminated the need for boned corsets, and they bobbed their hair. The styles allowed for freedom of movement that the dress reformers of the past only dreamed of. But still, American women's fashion was mainly Paris fashion; the French label held sway in American retail establishments.*

*In keeping with this new age, Americans embraced a newly discovered musical form – jazz. Originating in New Orleans, jazz spread to major cities all across the United States. In New York, Chicago and other cities young men and women danced to the music of jazz. It soon had an effect on clothing styles. Our collective memories place the flapper at the center of 1920s fashion. We know the music; we know the clothes. But not every American woman was a flapper; the flapper was a young, adventurous woman who experimented with her new-found freedoms and lifestyle, and of course, swayed to the music. When the music spread to Europe, Paris in particular embraced jazz. As discussed by Susan Hannel, the American and French love of jazz dance expressed itself in dress via motifs in printed textiles, 'slave' jewelry, African hairstyles, and fringed dresses that imitated grass skirts.*

When we imagine the 1920s, the picture that often comes to mind is the rail-thin 'flapper' wearing a short dress embellished with beaded fringe kicking up her heels while dancing the Charleston. The flapper wore her dress shockingly short and bared more skin than women of previous generations in Western history. The look of the flapper has become a symbol of modern America and is emblematic of women's changing roles in society. In 1920 women gained the right to vote, and many young women attended college and were making a living for themselves. Changes appeared on every front, and the emergence of a new youth culture was central. Seeking new ways to define themselves, young people quickly embraced the new music of the era, jazz, and jazz dancing. It was the latter, jazz dancing, that would set the stage for the emergence of the youthful American flapper.

Like the flapper's dress, jazz was a radical departure from the past and became a symbol of the 1920s. The music was unique and, with its African origins, its rhythms and its syncopation, many considered it exotic. Jazz musicians, invariably African Americans, were considered the 'savage' creators of this music and were themselves perceived as exotic.<sup>[1]</sup>

As jazz became increasingly popular, it permeated many elements of popular culture, including fashion. Music and fashion have always had a close relationship, so when jazz became popular in the post-war years, it is not surprising that it had an effect on fashion. Women needed new clothing to wear while dancing the new dances. The energetic nature of jazz dances like the Charleston and the Black Bottom no doubt contributed to the need for shorter evening dresses without sleeves, dresses that would allow the legs and arms to move with complete freedom, dresses with skirts, fringe and beading that would fly away from the body like the arm and leg movements required by the dances. Mounds of hair pinned to the top of the head would never stay in place during such vigorous bouncing. Shorter hair clearly was more appropriate for these dances. The popular and fashionable dancer Irene Castle had already set an example when she bobbed her hair in the teens.

The swinging, sparkling, and sometimes cacophonous fringe and jewelry of the quintessential 'flapper' were but one manifestation of the fashion for jazz music. Costumes for costume balls and the decoration of accessories also capitalized on dance themes and the vogue for jazz. Images of jazz musicians were printed onto fabrics. Geometric print patterns applied to textile surfaces also reflected the active and improvisational nature of jazz. Jazz changed the musical landscape, and then contributed to the transformation of fashion in France and the United States.

This essay illustrates the specific ways in which jazz dance influenced garment silhouettes and embellishment, as well as how the idiom of jazz music influenced the content and geometry of modern textile prints. More importantly, the essay shows how African American musicians and performers, and stereotypes about their tribal African heritage, influenced perceptions about jazz and thereby influenced jazz fashion.

## History of Jazz and Jazz Dance

While jazz music and dancing seemed forward and completely novel in the early 1920s, the musical elements of jazz had developed at the turn of the century. African American amateur brass bands in New Orleans were playing early forms of the music around 1900. The diverse nature of New Orleans with its inhabitants of many races and cultures allowed musicians to borrow from multiple genres of music. By 1910 professional musicians were able to make a living playing jazz in New Orleans and all over the South. The Original Dixieland 'Jass' Band, a five-member band consisting of a trumpet, a trombone, a clarinet, a piano, and drums, is credited with bringing this style of music to New York in 1917. New Orleans jazz simultaneously gained popularity in Chicago. Jazz music grew out of syncopated ragtime piano music and blues played during the early part of the twentieth century. Both ragtime and the blues were considered African American music before Tin Pan Alley, the sheet and recorded music industry, altered them for mass audiences. Paul Whiteman popularized jazz dance, toning down its African American blues elements to make it more appealing to a wide audience (Erenberg 1981; Leonard 1962). Whiteman's type of jazz has been called 'refined' or 'commercial' jazz, and was the kind of dancing music many people in white communities enjoyed.

Jazz was not limited to American soil, for its influence was felt in Europe, particularly in France, where a critique of Western civilization by the Parisian avant-garde followed the First World War. Jazz music and Africa were at the center of that critique. The French had been aware of African art since at least 1906 when Picasso and his circle began to incorporate images based on African sculpture in their art. It took 'the dreadful, mechanical slaughter of the war [to] sharply ... increase this fascination, for African culture seemed to embody the lush, naïve sensuality and spirituality that cold, rational Europeans had lost' (Stovall 1996: 31). As a way of finding new traditions in which to believe, the French looked to the myth of the 'noble savage,' seeing African people not as equal, but rather as innocent and uncorrupted, with a proximity to nature that rendered them superior to white Europeans (Rousseau 1984 [1755]).

The power of the connection between jazz music, black culture, and the critique of Western culture is well illustrated in the following example. For the surrealist artist Paul Lebeer, jazz was the catalyst to study African art. The primary reason for his interest in blacks was not black art or the opening of the Sudan in Africa, but jazz. He attended his first black jazz concert in Paris when he was a very young man at the end of the First World War. In that period he also began to write about modern art. In his account of how jazz brought him to African art, Lebeer explains that one of the main elements of surrealism was an extremely violent critique of Western civilization that in turn elevated other civilizations. Though African art was not as closely related to surrealism as Oceanic art, it was more desirable for its creativity and remained part of the surrealist critique (Leiris 1967).

Though jazz became popular during the First World War, the raucous, unorthodox jazz music of the 1920s, like the interest in African Art, eventually came to represent a critique of French life and a rejection of traditional values (Blake 1999; Stovall 1996: 37). Jazz reflected this change for two reasons. First, it sounded like nothing ever before created and thus nourished the desire for a break with the war-torn past. Second, most people playing jazz in Paris were African Americans. The French saw all blacks as primitive and exotic; it was unimportant to them that black people came from many parts of Africa and the New World. The result of this ignorance and stereotyping was that jazz music became the music of the 'noble savage' and fit into the vogue for blacks and black arts as symbols of an uncorrupted past in the history of the human race. In fact, the Parisian demand for black jazz musicians was so intense during the 1920s that white jazz musicians had trouble competing for jobs (Stovall 1996: 38; Archer-Straw 2000).

As the 1920s commenced, France began to look with interest to America's jazz and skyscrapers, not only as a way of reacting against the past, but also as a way of becoming modern. In fact, Americans travelling to France in 1922 were astounded 'to discover that the very things they have come abroad to get away from – the machines, the advertisements, the elevators and the jazz – have begun to fascinate the French' (Wilson 1922: 49). The couturier Paul Poiret observed in 1927, 'At the present moment we in France are slaves to the American influence' (Poiret 1927: 32). Poiret also believed the French popularity of cigarettes and pajama pants came from America.

Until this time European popular music and concert music existed in separate spheres as low and high musical art. Phillipe Soupault, in his 1930 essay, 'The American Influence in France,' stated that along with American cinema and poetry, jazz music had had a strong effect on the French: 'What remains profoundly true is that this music worked its way in and struck violently those whom the cinema had already awakened to the American influence' (19–20). He believed that jazz had exposed the French to the 'close relationship between art and life' in American culture (20), and encouraged a new mingling of forms in highly stratified France.

The popularity of jazz music in France led many French fashion magazines to include articles about jazz musical events occurring in Paris. There were also obtuse references to jazz music, as seen in a 1922 illustration titled 'Le Jazzoflute,' where a woman wearing a De Beer evening dress plays a slide flute in front of a wind-up phonograph (*Gazette du Bon Ton* 1922). The demand for jazz music in Paris during the 1920s brought many African American musicians and performers to the city, and consequently articles about African American performers began to appear in the pages of French fashion magazines (Stovall 1996). Photographs of performers in costume and descriptions of their doings outside the music halls gave the French public information about the jazz and music hall scene. These descriptions reflected contemporary stereotypes of blacks. In 1923 *Vogue Paris* included a photo of the African American performer Florence Mills, in costume, noting that she evoked 'warm earth and long nights' (Florence Mills' 1923: 35). Suggesting Africa with references to warm earth, tomtoms, and jungle rains was frequently a part of these descriptions. It seems that to be of African descent, whether truly African or African American, was to be forever attached to the geography and climate of Africa. Linking jazz music to the jungle and its inhabitants was fairly typical for the period. The artist Charles Lepape demonstrated this tendency when he designed a picture rug in knotted wool, c. 1928, called *La Jungle*, depicting three black musicians: one on a guitar, one on a saxophone and one on a wash-board (*Art of Textiles* 1989: Plate 223).

African American performers were also part of the French social pages and mentioned in the accounts of social events around Paris. In the summer of 1926 the French magazines *Femina* and *Le Figaro* sponsored a fundraiser showcasing French fashion called 'Le grande nuit de Paris.' The magazines later featured portraits and photos of several African Americans who attended the fundraiser. 'Midnight in New York' was one of many entertainment skits that were staged that night: 'This very modern tableau was composed for the pleasure of our eyes ... and our ears ... To the rhythm of a jazz band disrupting everything, this [evocation] created an amusing exhibition of the dances currently in vogue, among others a Charleston performed by two superb blacks' ('Grand Nuit' 1926).

Of course the Paris-based American dancer and singer Josephine Baker made it into the fashion pages. She modeled couture, and advertised Bakerfix hair pomade. Despite the economic control and racial bias of whites, Baker was the master of her image. By manipulating her onstage image to coincide with European and American expectations of the exotic, she made millions. She used her scanty costumes, make-up and jungle

stage settings, as well as 'conventions of the burlesque to create a *danse sauvage* that played with the paradigm of the black exotic in the context of white colonialism' (Martin 1995: 311). By playing the less evolved, less civilized black woman, Baker allowed her audiences to feel superior and in control while at the same time providing a vicarious sexual experience forbidden in everyday life.

While Josephine Baker had much more of an impact on the French than she did on Americans, news about her accomplishments in Europe was enthusiastically reported in the United States. Information about Josephine Baker in popular magazines like *Vanity Fair* was so upbeat and flattering as to be almost fawning ('[Dark Star in Paris](#)' 1934: 34, 74). By 1934, she was seen as one of the two most famous Americans in Europe. (Woodrow Wilson was the other.) Despite the positive review of Baker's successes, language describing her was often couched in racial stereotypes associating blacks with the jungle and childlike qualities. In her private life she dressed casually 'like a comfortable child' (74). She was the 'Pennsylvania Negress' with the 'superb slim jungle torso' and 'erotic rhythm' (34). The reader was never permitted to forget that Baker was a black American, though it was mentioned that she was more the product of the Champs Élysées in Paris than of New York's Broadway.

American fashion magazines also featured jazz themes, especially in advertisements. An advertisement appealing to 'The Sophisticated Smoker' depicted exuberant dancers etched into a French-made cigarette case illustrating 'youth, joy and jazz' ('[For the Sophisticated Smoker](#)' 1929: 118). Another ad for shoes took advantage of the jazz craze by trumpeting: 'Shoes that Jazz to the Jubilant Sax' ('[Shoes that Jazz](#)' 1927: 56). The extreme reach of jazz themes is well illustrated with the design for a sampler, a traditional textile art form used to teach young women needle skills, that included a dancing couple and black musicians, presumably playing jazz ('[Dear Me!](#)' 1928: 64).

As Harlem became one of the centers of jazz music, American fashion magazines pointed to its importance to New York nightlife, covering the popular nightclubs and the celebrities who performed there, all the while perpetuating the same stereotypes and rhetoric found in French magazines. By 1931 *Vogue* reported that 'Every one [sic] can go to Harlem – and everyone does. You might almost say it was part of an American education to see the dusky high lights of Harlem' ('[Came the Dawn](#)' 1931: 120). It was a 'hot-spot' (Shaw 1931: 73), and the 'Mecca of foreign visitors and jaded New Yorkers' ('[Came the Dawn](#)' 1931: 43).

Harlem was perceived as a place where one could throw off the constraints of American morality. A guide to the nightlife of New York City in 1931 stated that Harlem, like Paris, 'changes people. Especially the "proper" kind, once they get into its swing' [sic] (Shaw 1931: 73). Travelling to Harlem to hear and dance to jazz music was one way that Americans could alleviate sexual repression. 'Jazz culture and Harlem in the 1920s represented liminal space – a continual carnival where whites [went] slumming to "let off steam"' (Martin 1995: 318; Edwards 2001: 155).

Jazz symbolized cultural change, and the interest in Harlem and jazz rhythms, that 'peculiarly modern commodity,' was also seen as a symptom of degeneration by those who felt threatened by the changes; 'Perhaps it is a sign of the lack of virility of our modern "smart set" that the contemplation of the sensuous, tropical, and erotic savageries of the Negroes gives an exhilaration and a sense of the quickened life that even the wildest antics of Broadway fail to give' ('[Came the Dawn](#)' 1931: 120). When attending the clubs of Harlem, where the performing blacks 'know only too well the charms of their darkness,' the white audience, 'huddled in the surrounding dusk, inert from drink and lack of air ... feel the anaemia of their own race; and the white girls glance with a sort of dull resentment at the vital contortions of their tea-colored sisters' (Mannes 1934: 94).

Jazz dances like the Charleston and the Black Bottom were popularized on Broadway and Harlem stages. The Charleston, a dance well known to African Americans in the South, had been seen in the South at least since the turn of the century (Stearns and Stearns 1994: 111–4). The Charleston is danced with the knees bent, then straightened, while the feet pivot in and out. Weight is shifted from one leg to another and the free leg is kicked out from the body at an oblique angle. The arms swing forward and back in opposition to the legs. The dance was performed in several African American shows in the early 1920s, and became a dance craze only after the 1921 musical review *Shuffle Along*, where it was danced to a melody called *Baltimore Blitz*, and James P. Johnson and Cecil Mack's 1923 version in *Runnin' Wild*, a musical with African American performers that opened at the New York Colonial Theatre on 62nd street (Stearns and Stearns 1994: 111–2). The careers of both Ginger Rogers and Joan Crawford were launched by the Charleston. Rogers was even billed as 'Queen of the Charleston' (Stearns and Stearns 1994: 112). Unlike the Black Bottom, the Charleston remained popular and was revived many times. In telling the history of the Charleston for *Vanity Fair* in 1926, Eric Walrond stated that:

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people like the Charleston because it satisfies an instinctive urge in them. In a measure it is for this very reason that there is interest in the primitive songs and music of the black slaves and their descendants. It certainly is the spirit preeminently responsible for the vogue of the black and brown reviews, Florence Mills, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, African art, the creative writings of the 'new' Negro, Countée Cullen, Harlem and the Negro cabarets. ('[Charleston, Hey! Hey!](#)' 1926: 116)

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The Black Bottom, like the Charleston, was danced by African Americans in the South long before the African American pianist/composer Perry Bradford introduced it in 1919 as a dance-song available in sheet music (Stearns and Stearns 1994: 110–2). George White saw the Black Bottom in Harlem in 1924 in the stage play *Dinah* and had it adapted for his Broadway review *Scandals of 1926* after which it became an official dance craze. The Black Bottom incorporated slapping the backside with forward and backward hopping, foot stomping and pelvic gyrations, movements that were considered overly erotic for the period. The Charleston and the Black Bottom were refined by making the movements less exaggerated for the ballroom in order to suit white Americans' tastes.

## Jazz Fashion

The Black Bottom and the Charleston were popular enough to influence dancing dresses, fancy dress costumes and images on textile prints. Ever Poiret pointed to their influence on French fashion, predicting that 'the implacable and hypertrophic rhythms of the new dances, the blues and the Charleston, the din of unearthly instruments, and the musical idioms of exotic lands' as well as other American influences would eventually lead to increasing masculinity and severity in women's fashion (1927: 32). His design prediction for pants influenced by 'Some Future Charleston,' he described as 'a costume which is largely a matter of bracelets' (1927: 36). Stacked heavy bracelets could serve two purposes: to be an additional source of sound and to reflect an interest in things African, as in the stacks of African bracelets worn by women in the avant-garde like Nancy Cunard (Chisholm 1979). The bracelets were thus a reference to the African origins of the Charleston. Interest in pants made sense in a period where the androgyny and youthfulness of short hair, flattened chests and tubular silhouettes were in evidence. Pants would also be more modest than a skirt for a dance like the Charleston.

Jazz dance was parodied in the design costumes for fancy dress balls. In 1925 *Art-Gout-Beauté* suggested 'Miss Jazz' as an appropriate costume. 'Miss Jazz' was a long thin dress of black and silver geometric shapes worn with a tall hat similar to a wizard's hat. The sharp triangles of contrasting black and silver in the costume were as much a reflection of modern geometric design as they were of the energy and syncopation associated with jazz. Costumes based on the popular dances, the Black Bottom and the Charleston, were illustrated in January 1927, also in *Art-Gout-Beauté*. Both costumes have pants decorated with large jazz motifs. The Charleston costume has a large music note close to the hem and the Black Bottom costume has a banjo in the same place. The model wearing the Black Bottom costume also carries a 'golliwog' doll. The Oxford English Dictionary defines golliwog as 'A name invented for a black-faced grotesquely dressed (male) doll with a shock of fuzzy hair' (1989). The original golliwog character was a doll in B. Upton children's book *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls – and a Golliwog, 1895*. In the Black Bottom costume, the golliwog doll connects the dance to its African American origins.

Fancy dress costumes incorporating jazz themes allowed those who wore them to participate in the fashion for jazz in an environment where fantasy was allowed. The enduring nature of jazz costumes is illustrated by the two Black Bottom costumes worn to a party with the theme 'Come as a Song' on Long Island in the United States in 1939, when the dance had long since been eclipsed by other dances (*Party Given on Long Island 1939: 86–7*).

Jazz music was dance music and the popularity of dancing to jazz influenced the design of evening wear, including uneven handkerchief hems, fringe that swayed and made percussive sounds when the body moved, shiny fabrics that reflected light to the beat of that movement, and shorter hems which allowed the legs to move freely (*Robes Du Soir 1990: 125–6*). (Historic costume collections throughout the United States have significant numbers of short, beaded evening dresses from the 1920s, despite their fragility.) French couturiere J. Suzanne Talbot designed a 1927 evening dress fringed and strung with wooden beads. These elements simultaneously satisfied the desire for sound and movement while dancing the Charleston and reflected interest in primitive materials, a trend very much associated with the interest in African art and jazz music. The importance of fringe as an African influence can be seen in *Figure 4.1*, which depicts one of four dresses suggested for dancing by *La Gazette du Bon Ton* ('*Robes a Danser 1922: 161–4+*'). 'Femme Amaguilla (Afrique)' has a straight skirt covered by a voluminous, fringed overskirt. Fringe made up of small strips of fabric and exposed legs were often associated with African dress. In *Figure 4.2*, the cover of a 1925 composition by Richard Stevens called 'Dance of the Cannibals,' two of the dancers wear such skirts. The skirts are remarkably similar to the 'banana' skirt worn by Josephine Baker for her 'Danse Sauvage' in *La Revue Nègre* in Paris in 1925.

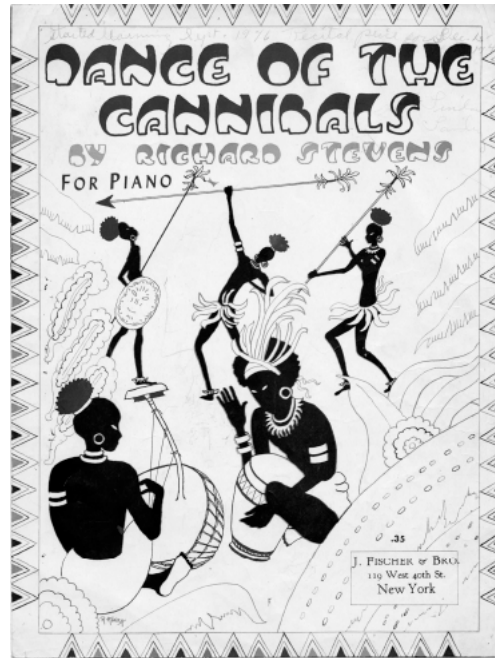
**Figure 4.1**



Fringe associated with African dress. 'Femme Amaguilla (Afrique)' from 'Robes a Danser,' *La Gazette du Bon Ton*, May 1922: 166, plate 38.

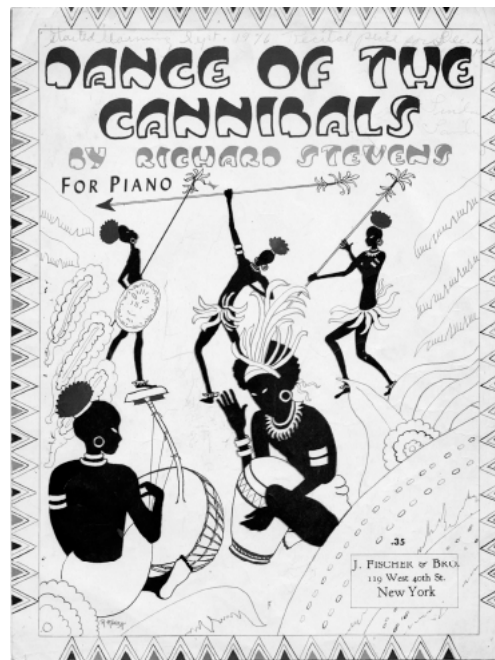
By the mid 1920s dance dresses were short and often the arms were bare, allowing both the legs and the arms to move freely away from the body. Exposed skin and the shortened skirt also reflected the more casual, less formal atmosphere of the nightclub cabaret where much of the dancing was taking place (*Erenberg 1981: 233–59*). The shortness of evening dresses for dancing most likely influenced similar trends in day dresses. A July 1926 cover of *Life* by L.J. Holton (*Figure 4.3*), illustrates a woman dancing the Charleston in a short day dress. Lest the viewer forget the African origins of the Charleston, the background of the illustration includes a veritable tribe of Africans, carrying their spears to heighten the effect and wearing short, fringed skirts, in the same Charleston dance position as the female figure in front of them.

**Figure 4.2**



Fringed skirts on caricatures of Africans. 'Dance of the Cannibals,' 1925. Illustration by R. Ashley for sheet music cover. Composer: Richard Stevens. Published by J. Fisher & Bro., New York.

Figure 4.3



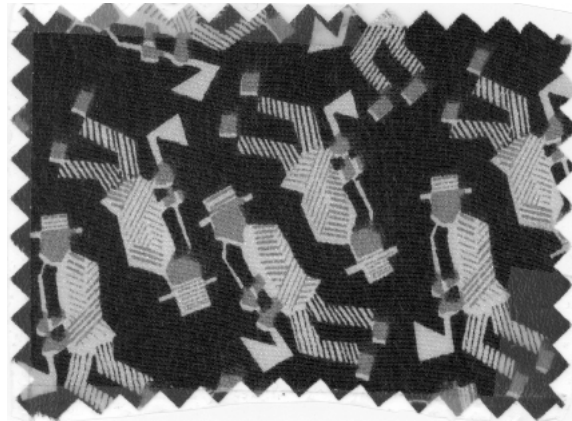
'Everything is Hot-tentotsy Now,' *Life*, July 15, 1926: cover. Illustration by L.J. Holton.

## Jazz Textiles

Jazz and dance themes also made their way onto fabric prints. The 'Charleston' crepe was a textile designed by Edgar K. Frank & Co:

the spirit of jazz has been cleverly caught and portrayed upon Canton silk and cotton crepe in its gayest and most daring of mood. The Englishman with the monacle dangerously perched upon the edge of the tabouret is attempting to keep the drummer in time who seems to be 'running wild,' while the figures grouped around them are apparently trying to out-step one another. ("Charleston" Crepe' 1925: 16)

**Figure 4.4**



African American playing saxophone. Silk crepe textile, c. 1925–30. The Museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology, ACOFA #125.

A 'Jazz' print was included with the spring 1926 line of textiles called 'Americana Prints' from Stehli Silks ('Americana Prints' 1925: 1, 47). In 1928 Stehli again included a jazz-inspired print in its 'Americana' collection. 'Rhapsody,' a print inspired by George Gershwin's *Rhapsody* in *Blue* and designed by John Held Jr, was covered with figures of white men playing assorted instruments in a jazz band ('Characteristic New Spring Weaves and Prints' 1928: 87; McKnight, 1999). While jazz musicians were typically white in these textile prints, one extant silk textile of unknown provenance in the Textile Collection of The Museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology illustrates a black man in a tall hat playing what appears to be a saxophone (Figure 4.4).

John Held Jr, credited with creating the exquisite image of the flapper and her 'sheik,' did many covers for *Life* and illustrations for *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker*. Held was so influential that the society he caricatured began to imitate his satires; 'Of him it can be truly said: he set the style for the era: clothing, coiffure, manners, figures of speech and, most important of all, a youthful exuberance and all encompassing impudence' (Merkin 1968 n.p.).

Textiles were also influenced by the sounds of jazz, not just the images of jazz. Patterns in textiles reflected the wildly rhythmic and spontaneous qualities of jazz while also paying homage to the geometric, mechanized world of the 1920s. The Charleston inspired two such textile patterns. The painter and textile designer, Sonia Delaunay, sketched a garment and textile pattern called 'Charleston' in 1925 (Damase 1991: 105). The textile pattern has rows of small black triangles which emphasize visual rhythm through strong contrast of color and sharp edges. Their geometric shape is reiterated in the silhouette of the dress, two triangles turned so that their points join at the waistline, forming an hourglass shape. The angularity of the dress silhouette, like the textile motifs, reflects the jerky, angular movements of the Charleston.

An afternoon dress from 1927 by the couture house Philippe et Gaston, also titled 'Charleston,' has long strips of fabric applied down the length of the back of the dress, creating a visual beat from strip to strip ('Charleston Dress' 1927: 23). The strips fall away from the body of the skirt at the hem and then loop upward again and reattach to the skirt as they wrap toward the front. The loosely hanging strips of fabric provide extra swing and movement to the dress, reiterating the idea of movement found in its namesake, the Charleston dance.

## Orienting Jazz Fashion

The introduction of jazz fashion into mainstream fashion may have been assisted by the tendency to link jazz themes with Orientalist themes already present in fashionable dress. Orientalist print motifs and garment silhouettes had been a strong influence for many years before the influence of jazz.

The term Orientalism arose in the late eighteenth century when it was associated with British policy in India, including the study of Indian culture in order to facilitate the administration of Britain's colonies. Orientalism also described a specific kind of exoticism in types of painting begun by the French and developed in other European countries early in the nineteenth century which used Middle Eastern and North African subjects (MacKenzie 1995: xiii, 2–3). It has since been used to describe the influence of the East on patterns, textiles, ceramics, furniture, and building styles. In the past twenty-five years Edward Said's interpretation of Orientalism has had much influence (Said 1978). Said argued that Oriental studies reflected 'intellectual and technical dominance and a means to the extension of political, military, and economic supremacy' by the West over the East, particularly the Middle East (MacKenzie 1995: xii). This more negative interpretation of Orientalism has come to dominate scholarly work on Orientalism, particularly in literary criticism.

Richard Martin and Harold Koda, in analyzing Orientalism in dress, noted: 'the Orientalist objective in Western dress was to cull from the various Easts that spellbinding foreignness for the purposes of rendering Western dress richer and more exotic' (1994: 12). Orientalism in dress was appealing because it was an alternative to Western dress. Jazz fashion was also an alternative to the dress that came before it and had the

potential to enrich Western dress and textile design. The difference lay in the racial anxiety caused by associations with African American dance and music. To link the art of African Americans, people from the West African diaspora, to an Orient that included North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East, was to render them more exotic and less radical.

An example of associating jazz with an exotic East is found in a 1927 advertisement for William H. Davidow Sons Co.'s scarves and belts ('Wm. H. Davidow' 1927: 164). The accessories were decorated with Held's flap-pers playing jazz instruments. The advertisement also showed a woman in a desert oasis environment, as if in the Sahara in North Africa, wearing a coat or sweater with one of these Held jazz illustrations on the back. During the 1920s people were more familiar with North Africa than sub-Saharan Africa. Placing the coat and its jazz image in North Africa situated the coat in a recognizable African landscape. The desert oasis context also instructed the reader on the appropriate context for the garment: a sunny, resort-like locale with palm trees. An advertisement for Club Alabam in New York City features an illustration of a black man in tails wearing a turban and dancing in a landscape with a palm tree, again presumably North Africa ('Club Alabam' 1925: 30). The advertisement combines the American South (Alabama), African Americans (the dark face with the exaggerated white lips was a standard 'blackface' depiction of American blacks), and another North African landscape.

Jazz was linked to the Middle East when the term 'sheik' was used to describe the white man dancing to jazz with his flappers depicted by John Held. 'John Held Jr drew the jazz-flapper and her sheik best ... The lad was apple-headed, his hair buttered tight down, he wore bell-bottomed trousers, a raccoon coat, drove a Stutz Bearcat and played or danced to jazz a lot' (Longstreet 1956: 95). The term meant a 'type of a strong, romantic lover; a lady-killer,' and came into use after Hollywood adapted E.M. Hull's novel *The Sheik* (1919) for the 1921 film *The Sheik* starring Rudolph Valentino. Many young girls during the era eventually came to call their boyfriends 'my sheik' (Longstreet 1956: 95).

The title 'Jazz Cleopatra,' given to Josephine Baker is yet another way jazz was associated with the Middle East (Rose 1989). The title linked jazz and Baker, an African American of West African descent, to Egypt – considered at the time to be the Orient and not a part of Africa – while also identifying her as the queen of jazz. The connection between jazz and Orientalism was also seen in the popularity of 'slave' jewelry. Slave collars were a fairly innocuous way for fashionable women to incorporate exotic African themes into their modern look. Interest in slave collars as jewelry may have originated with the metal collars seen on eighteenth-century Venetian ceramic figurines of black slaves called 'Blackamoors.' An eighteenth-century Venetian Blackamoor torch-bearer sculpted in wood was described as having a slave collar 'in bright gilt' ('Blackamoor' 1926: 57). The twentieth-century slave collar jewelry could be made up of from one to many bands of solid metal that hung stiffly around the neck or tightly against the neck. The earliest French examples appear around 1925. The artist Jean Dunand, considered at the time to be an expert in colonial art (Howard 1931), painted several portraits of women in this kind of collar, including the hat designer Madame Agnès (Marcilhac 1991). Dunand eventually created his own version of the collar in lacquer and silver (Marcilhac 1991: plate 76). A 1927 illustration of one of Madame Agnès's Congo-inspired hats showed a model wearing a slave collar (de Meyer 1927: 71). The combination of African headdress and slave collar was a double reference to Africa.

In February of 1926 the slave collar in the United States was called a 'Charlot Necklet' because one was seen in *Charlot's Revue*, a yearly musical review that began in London and then moved to Broadway in New York. The collar was 'a ring of fourteen-karat gold, as plain as an old-fashioned wedding-ring, worn about the throat like a slave collar of long ago' ('Charlot Necklet' 1926: 53). The slave/Charlot necklet was popular enough to be on a *Vogue* cover by July of the same year.

The term 'slave' was also applied to bracelets. 'Slaves of fashion' in 1926 wore these bracelets and necklets ('Slaves of Fashion' 1926: 38). The slave bracelet was usually a series of rectangular links, sometimes connected with enamel links in red, green and black ('New Gold Jewellery' 1926: 85). The model wearing the 'Charlot necklet' above wore this style of slave bracelet. Slave bracelets were so widespread by December of 1926 that *Vogue* reported 'they had an exaggerated and much cheapened popularity' that could be alleviated by the Van Cleef and Arpels versions covered with diamonds, emeralds or rubies ('French Chic' 1926: 61). Such bracelets were often worn in multiples, a practice which had its detractors. A 1938 tongue-in-cheek 'psychiatric' analysis about the meaning of stacking numerous bracelets concluded that: 'one or two bracelets, you'll be relieved to know, are considered normal enough, but piling them on in quantities is likely to show an eagerness to be chained and enslaved, a regression to savagery, possibly even a bit of heinous masochism' ('Psychiatry Analyzes the Fashions' 1938: 68–9). Although meant to be humorous, the passage clearly links stacked bracelets to primitive cultures, but specifically Africa because of the references to slavery and savagery.

In 1926 *Vogue* illustrated a turbaned African whipping two bareheaded African slaves. In reference to the source of slave bracelets *Vogue* stated matter-of-factly, 'whatever their origin, slave bracelets like those shown just below are too intrinsically chic to be omitted' ('French Chic' 1926: 61). The African slaver in this illustration wears a turban on his head and is therefore associated with Orientalist or Middle Eastern depictions of slavery. The Orientalist connection to slave collars and bracelets is also seen in an advertisement for non-alcoholic Vermouth ('The Sultan's Secret' 1927: 159), where the sultan's woman wears a series of metal coils around her neck and wrist. Even her torso and ankles seem to be bound by the same accessory. The neck coils are related to the multiple coils seen as a slave collar on the July 1926 cover of *Vogue*. The images in the advertisement illustrate how easily the style for slave collars was transferred between Oriental and African-inspired fashion.

The process of associating jazz motifs and performers to North Africa and the Middle East makes sense in a culture comfortable with Oriental motifs but not so comfortable with African-derived and inspired motifs. Jazz and its performers were linked to Orientalist themes like slavery, the desert, and sheiks because Orientalism was already a very important part of fashionable dress and linking jazz and Orientalism was a way to make jazz more accessible, more exotic, and perhaps a little less radical.

## Conclusion

Jazz-influenced fashion during the 1920s was an exciting amalgam of garments, accessories, and textiles. It included clothing designed for dancing to jazz music, as well as textiles that either illustrated jazz musicians or incorporated motifs with the visual rhythms of jazz syncopation and improvisation. Jazz influence extended also to fancy dress costumes that parodied the popular jazz dances like the Charleston and the Black Bottom.

Jazz fashion had two significant components, the recognition of the African American origins of jazz, and the competing desire to cloak and ameliorate those origins in comfortable Orientalist contexts and language. Underlying all of jazz fashion are the origins of African American music itself. References to the origins of jazz appear again and again in depictions and descriptions of jazz fashion. When clothing and textile designers

connected African American art forms like jazz music and dance to fashion, a major shift occurred in the canon of Western dress. The new dance dresses created by these designers were shorter and more revealing than ever before. They made it easier to move to the music of jazz and they encouraged the shortening of day dresses. A flapper who wore such garments and danced the Charleston was seen as wild and untamed. The addition of fringe that swayed imitated African dress and, along with the sound it generated, contributed to perceptions about the primitive aspects of the performance and of the dance.

Jazz and jazz fashion were exciting and novel, but also produced anxiety. When slave jewelry was combined with African-inspired garments, the designer of the ensemble was recognizing the African origins of slavery and unconsciously referencing African American performers, descendants of African slaves. Anxiety produced by the radical changes associated with jazz and jazz fashion had to be tempered. Placing jazz images in recognizable African environments, or using terms like 'Jazz Cleopatra' for an African American performer, and 'sheik' for men who danced to jazz, made the changes easier to understand in a culture where Orientalist imagery and terms were already prevalent.

## Notes

<sup>[1]</sup>.'Savage' is a word best used carefully. Writers used the word to describe jazz, African American performers, and even the 1920s decade. The term originates with the eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who invented the idea of the 'Noble Savage,' as being guided by his feelings and not his thoughts, and therefore perceived as untouched, unspoiled and innocent in his idyllic environment ([Rousseau 1984 \[1755\]](#)).

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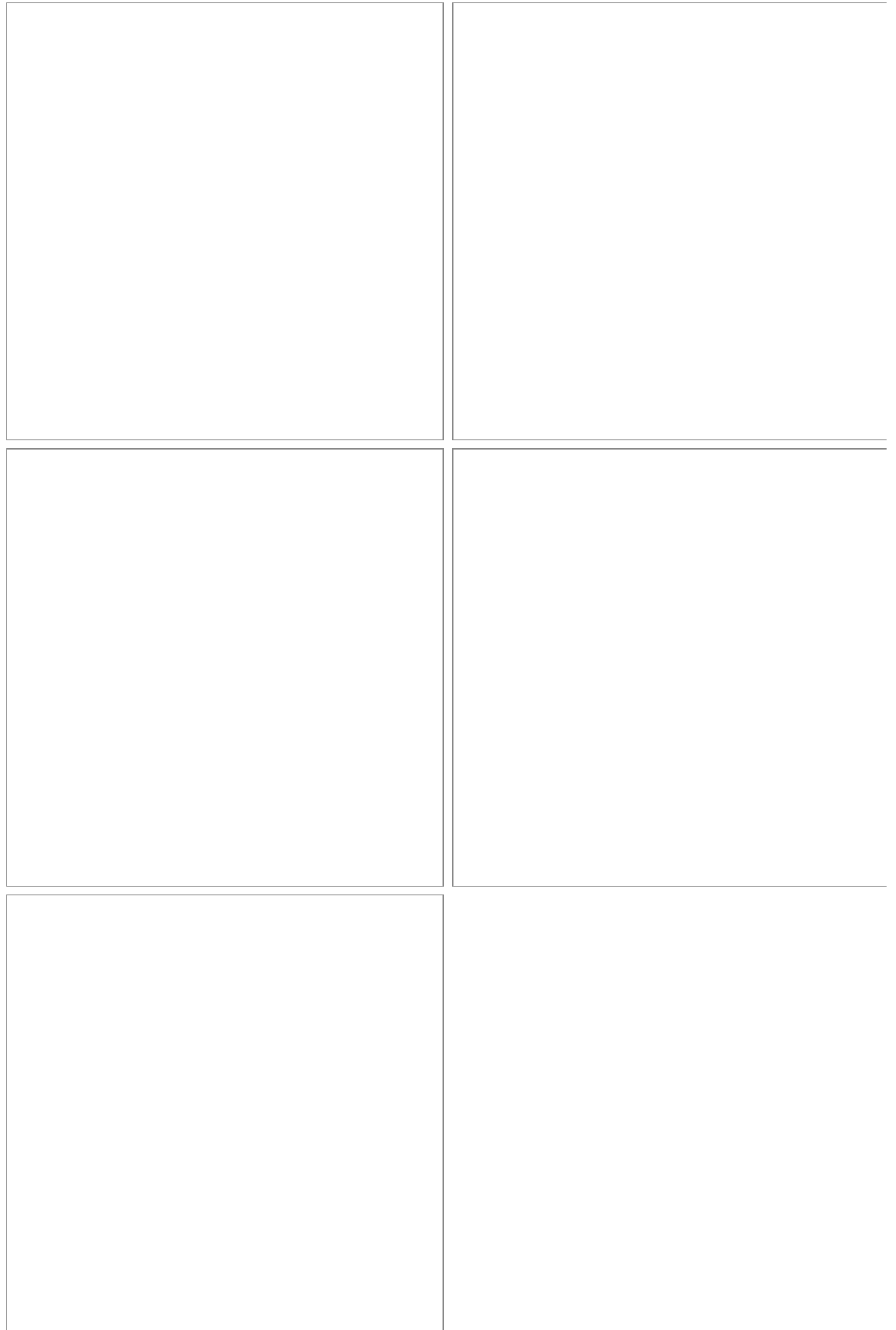


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Fashion and Jazz

| Encyclopedia entry

**Alphonso D. McClendon****Source:** *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion. Global Perspectives*, 2010, Berg Fashion Library

Fashion and jazz are expressive forms of art and have significantly influenced one another in the first half of the twentieth century. The merger of alluring fashion and impassioned jazz configured mutually beneficial relationships, where aesthetics imparting identity and showmanship were put forth. Creative output, an aspiration of each discipline, was achieved through the exploration of textiles and construction in fashion, and the improvisation of melody and harmony in jazz. With American origin

Fashion as Performance

| Book chapter

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Fashion is defined as the art of the perfect moment, of the sudden and surprising and yet obscurely expected harmonious apparition—the Now at the threshold of an immediate future. But its realization is, at the same time, its destruction. By appearing, and giving definitive form to the moment, fashion is almost already part of yesterday.

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Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500–2000

| Book chapter

**Michelle Maskiell****Source:** *Classic and Modern Writings on Fashion*, 2nd Edition, 2009, Berg Fashion Library

Kashmiri shawls and shawl cloth were well-known exports within Asia and moved through established trade networks linking international areas of demand long before the shawls became European commodities. From the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, Kashmiri artisans wove cloth from Central Asian goat fleece, silk, and other materials. Dealers brought unprocessed goat hair to Kashmir from the city of Leh in Ladakh (see Map 1), the long-established entrepôt between Kashmir and Central Asia.

1690–1815: Chinoiserie, Indienne, Turquerie and Egyptomania

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**Adam Geczy****Source:** *Fashion and Orientalism. Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st Century*, 2013, Berg Fashion Library

See, mademoiselle, how that goes well with your Chinese-style hairstyle, your mantle of peacock feathers, your petticoat of celadon and gold, your cinnamon bottoms and your shoes of jade...

The Management of Colour: The Kashmir Shawl in a Nineteenth-Century Debate

| Book chapter

**David Brett****Source:** *Classic and Modern Writings on Fashion*, 2nd Edition, 2009, Berg Fashion Library

Writing about colour has always been difficult because colour is notoriously resistant to language. The inter-translatability of colour names and terms between languages is remarkably diffuse, which is a sure sign of their odd logical status. Even where we might expect coherent theory, in the art of painting, discourse on colour was generally defined (negatively) as against disegno, drawing as form and composition. This was true until the mid-nineteenth century, and remains influential. There is

Cultural Authentication in Dress

| Encyclopedia entry

**John E. Vollmer****Source:** *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion. Global Perspectives*, 2010, Berg Fashion Library

Cultural authentication in dress is a process of assimilation through which a garment or an accessory external to a culture is adopted and changed. With this change, over time, the artifact becomes a vital, valued part of the adopting culture's dress. Nigerian scholar T. V. Erekosima originally introduced this theoretical construct in the late 1970s to investigate the assimilation of material culture by the Kalabari people of southeastern Nigeria. In 1981 Erekosima and anthropologist and dress sc

Fashion, Dress, and Interior Spaces

| Encyclopedia entry

**Peter McNeil****Source:** *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion. Global Perspectives*, 2010, Berg Fashion Library

Clothes are animated by bodies moving in space, and attitudes toward work and leisure that have changed dramatically across culture and time. In early modern Europe until the eighteenth century, sumptuary laws extended well beyond dress to even the type of finish and materials used in interior design. Other societies, including China and Thailand, continuously attempted to control these appearances. In England in the post-Restoration decades, very wealthy women exhibited new independence in the d

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Civilization! Read: 'the era that has lost almost all its creative power...in jewellery as in furniture'; and in one or the other we are compelled to exhume or import. Import what? Indian bracelets of glass filament and Chinese earrings of cut paper? No. But more often the naive taste that underlies their making.

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