

Congo Square and the Second Line: Their Relevance to Shifting Narratives about Jazz History

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INTRODUCTION: EXPANDING NARRATIVES OF JAZZ HISTORY AND HERITAGE

New Orleans, Louisiana, is celebrated as a pivotal center of American music, with its brass bands epitomizing the distinct sound of the Crescent City. To tell the story of New Orleans, jazz histories often adhere to a conventional narrative that traces the genre’s “birth” in New Orleans (NOLA) through iconic figures like Buddy Bolden, and charting its stylistic evolution and geographical spread to cities like Chicago and New York. These accounts have leaned heavily on tropes of individual genius, rigid musical categorization, stylistic shifts, and romanticized origin stories. Neglected is the rich tapestry of diverse cultural and musical influences, communal traditions, and continuous innovation by marginalized groups that have truly defined jazz heritage. Furthermore, the prevailing understanding of the city’s and the music’s history is built upon a foundation marred by racism and essentialization, leading to an idealized perception of New Orleans in the national psyche.

In recent decades, scholars from various disciplines—African American studies, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and cultural studies—have critiqued the narrow perspectives maintained within standard jazz narratives. Constructivist historiographical critiques have importantly challenged reductionist narratives in jazz history by arguing for representational plurality and diversity,¹ while others have highlighted the lasting influence of ritual, intersectional innovation and the vitality of generational traditions within Black American musical traditions.² It is this foundation that provides vital conceptual backing for my research. These critics have brought to light the significant role

¹ Scott DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography,” *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525–560; Sherrie Tucker, “Deconstructing the Jazz Tradition: The “Subjectless Subject” of New Jazz Studies,” *The Source* 2 (2005): 31–46; Charles Hersch, “Reconstructing the Jazz Tradition,” *Jazz Research Journal* 2, no. 1 (2008): 7–28.

² Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*, 25th anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

of marginalized groups, communal rituals, and enduring brass band traditions in shaping NOLA's creative heritage, aspects often ignored by conventional historiography.

Despite the important interventions of scholars like Scott DeVeaux and Sherrie Tucker, many of the most widely adopted jazz history textbooks have been slow to incorporate counter-narratives highlighting the continuity of marginalized resilience and invention. These influential texts rely heavily on a canonical lineup of celebrated artists and surveys of stylistic shifts, often failing to fully acknowledge the rich diversity of jazz's cultural roots and ongoing evolution. While much contemporary jazz scholarship has embraced more diverse, culturally situated perspectives, the rich, complex heritage uncovered through interdisciplinary and community-focused works remains on the fringe of mainstream jazz education, which continues to rely on textbooks that perpetuate traditional narratives and assumptions. As a result, a large part of the discourse surrounding jazz history has yet to be redefined towards more accurate and ethical representations that fully encompass the depth and complexity of the art form's cultural heritage.

Standard jazz textbooks have significant structural omissions. Broadly speaking, they lack inclusive language, fail to address intersectional influences, blur distinctions between styles, and neglect post-migration continuities. More specific to this project, these texts confine brass bands to jazz's gestational era and neglect dynamic dialogues that enable creative syntheses to permeate across decades. Furthermore, they lack substantive examination of profound second line heritages stemming from the ring shout.³ My goals extend beyond merely spotlighting such gaps; I aim to expand dominant narratives by emphasizing jazz and brass bands as dynamic cultures thriving through participation and continuous innovation versus outdated, unimodal portrayals. This analysis intends to push into overlooked territories that convey the tradition's intricate cultural complexity beyond simplified accounts stripped of nuance. Herein, I showcase jazz's amalgam of diverse creative currents persisting through time rather than reducing this elaboration of influences to static stepping-stones.

Through immersive fieldwork with brass band communities in NOLA and Los Angeles, CA, I have witnessed jazz firsthand as a living culture sustained not by mere preservation but through constant generational renewal. I have witnessed innovative revisions of traditional dance rituals, such as second-lining,

³ The ring shout, an early religious ritual involving rhythmic clapping, call-and-response singing, and counterclockwise dancing in a circular formation, served as a powerful religiopolitical expression, connecting practitioners to their ancestors and symbolizing African unity. See Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 11, 15.

and the integration of elements from Mardi Gras Indian rhythms and contemporary hip-hop, illustrating the ongoing evolution of this folk culture. In this article, I argue that we must expand rigid narratives fixated on individual early innovators and musical aesthetics toward a more holistic, accurate portrayal of jazz heritage. My analysis aims to push discourse towards embracing jazz as an enduring, multifaceted tradition grounded in marginalized resilience.

METHODOLOGY

Drawing upon nearly seven years of extensive fieldwork within NOLA and Los Angeles brass band circles, this article employs diverse methods to convey authentic portraits of living cultures. These include co-participation, personal interviews—both formal and casual—adapted note-taking, and sensory ethnography.⁴ *Co-participation*, a term I borrowed from Richard C. Jankowsky, was my primary methodological approach during fieldwork.⁵ As a skilled musician, I gained entrée into the brass band scenes and established relationships with musicians and non-musicians alike. Through immersive participation, actively engaging and performing alongside community members, I gained profound insights into realities often obscured by conventional narratives. Shared musical experiences facilitated introductions to future collaborators and sanctioned my acceptance within these close-knit communities.⁶ Any insights

⁴ To streamline my notetaking process, I embraced technological advancements by using a Samsung Galaxy Note 10. This device allowed me to write notes by hand, document events through photographs and videos, and integrate various forms of data into a single platform. The use of cloud storage ensured the security of my fieldnotes and provided easy access to my data.

⁵ For more on *co-participation*, see Richard C. Jankowsky, *Stambeli: Music, Trance, And Alterity in Tunisia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 7.

⁶ As a white, straight, cisgender male ethnomusicologist, I am conscious of the limitations posed by my outsider status. Nonetheless, I strive to mitigate biases and engage with living cultures through extensive participatory fieldwork, collaborative scholarship, and prioritizing community-based knowledge. Employing techniques such as musical co-participation, soliciting feedback on written work, and collaborative filmmaking, I elevate community members as equal partners in research. To ensure accuracy and obtain appropriate consent, collaborators review both written and filmic materials. Through spirited discussions, practitioners frequently challenge my assumptions, highlighting enduring biases that demand continual self-interrogation. I aim to navigate the liminal space between outsider and insider perspectives with humility, recognizing the inherent impossibility of fully bridging differences while still striving to resonate with the profound creativity of the communities on their own terms. I remain mindful that my interpretation is filtered through an academic lens and necessitates ongoing critique.

derived from my work are a testament to the generosity and wisdom of my collaborators.

In my analysis, I will examine several of the most widely used jazz history textbooks, including *Jazz* by Scott DeVeaux and Gary Giddins (2009), *The History of Jazz* by Ted Gioia (2021), *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis* by Mark C. Gridley (2014), and *Jazz* by Paul Tanner and David Megill (2013). These influential survey texts significantly shape the dominant narratives and perspectives presented in many jazz education settings. By reading these materials closely, I aim to identify and discuss the problematic representations and omissions that persist in how jazz history is often taught. This critical approach will focus on the treatment of second line traditions, the influence of Native American and Mardi Gras Indian cultures, and the continuity of brass band traditions beyond the birth of jazz. By highlighting these issues within the context of widely adopted educational resources, I seek to underscore the urgent need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to jazz historiography. Furthermore, I will introduce critical interventions from scholars in various fields, including jazz studies, ethnomusicology, and history, whose works have yet to be fully incorporated into the canonical jazz textbooks. These interventions offer valuable insights and alternative perspectives that challenge the limitations of conventional narratives, and provide a foundation for reimagining how we understand and teach jazz history.

SHIFTING NARRATIVES IN JAZZ DISCOURSE

It is commonly accepted that NOLA brass bands profoundly shaped early jazz. But this brass band tradition is anything but fixed in history. Through constant modification and adaptation, brass band musicians participate in a long, ever-evolving tradition of negotiation, hybridity, and resilience, creating music that is enjoyable on its own terms and is functional, serving to unite the community. However, widely used jazz history textbooks invariably provide incomplete portraits bereft of deeper brass band history. Standard accounts situate these dynamic creative conduits solely as static precursors, thus extirpating an enduring tradition that remains profoundly seminal to jazz's spirit. Consequently, through consistent utilization of the past tense, prevailing narratives relegate NOLA's brass bands and second line culture to historiography's margins rather than acknowledging their persistence as thriving, evolving outlets perpetuating communal creativity on their own vibrant terms.

Influential works by Scott DeVeaux (1991), Sherrie Tucker (2005), and Charles Hersch (2008) have argued for more ethical, holistic representation of

overlooked creative facets and countercultural currents that have profoundly shaped jazz heritage. These scholars set the stage for a critical interrogation of restrictive historiography that fails to fully convey the cultural complexity at jazz's core, revealing instead additional counternarratives and creative influences often minimized or excluded from standard jazz accounts.

DeVeaux's groundbreaking article "Constructing the Jazz Tradition" (1991) interrogates the idea of a singular, coherent lineage in jazz history. He argues against an organic, unified narrative progressing through evolutions in style, instead asserting the tradition has been socio-politically constructed through contested processes of canon formation. DeVeaux suggests that the boundaries delineating jazz require contextualized analysis regarding how critics, musicians, and markets have influenced boundary drawing. He prompts a reassessment of historiographical categories as potentially artificial designations rather than innate aesthetic qualities.

Building on DeVeaux's critical perspective, a movement known as the "new jazz studies" emerged throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, aimed at challenging and expanding the dominant narratives surrounding jazz history. This movement sought to achieve a more nuanced rendering of jazz historiography by exploring themes such as race, gender, and identity politics. Primarily an anti-canonical project, the new jazz studies utilized a critical lens to study jazz history. It focused on its social, cultural, and political contexts rather than solely on the music itself, examining how jazz has been used to resist oppression and create social change. In the ensuing years, many scholars took up this approach, opening up new research avenues and allowing for the exploration of jazz history in greater detail and with greater nuance.

Two additional texts have been foundational in reframing the methodologies and goals of jazz studies. Sherrie Tucker's "Deconstructing the Jazz Tradition" (2005) analyzed the politics and biases that have shaped mainstream jazz narratives.⁷ Tucker spotlights the need to challenge the notion of clearly defined linear continuity, given systemic patterns of excluding underrepresented voices that grapple with struggles at the tradition's margins. She advocates for embracing a wide range of viewpoints in jazz discourse, seeking varied perspectives and raising thought-provoking questions about how received knowledge perpetuates dominant cultural ideologies. This approach aims to better reflect and resonate with the profound complexity inherent in jazz rather than oversimplifying or limiting the discussion.

Likewise, in "Reconstructing the Jazz Tradition" (2008), Charles Hersch examines debates regarding maintaining fixed narratives versus fostering more

⁷ Tucker, "Deconstructing the Jazz Tradition," 31-46.

flexibility in conceptualizing jazz history.⁸ He explores arguments suggesting established canons uphold quality standards instead of dialogic approaches, allowing more diversity within the tradition. Hersch ultimately argues for analyzing the diverse range of stakeholders, purposes, and meanings rather than adhering to a rigid, singular orthodoxy, echoing calls for nuance. He prompts reassessment about whether current discourse fully captures jazz's diverse realities across time and place.

Despite the body of well-researched and well-meaning literature highlighting the blurriness of jazz categories and questioning canon formation, lessons from the new jazz studies movement seem to have found little traction in jazz history courses and textbooks the world over. Jazz education frequently mirrors the problematic jazz historiography these scholars critiqued, perpetuating canon formation centered around individual "geniuses" pioneering aesthetic innovations. Much like Western knowledge systems erasing Indigenous worldviews, jazz discourse expunges the communal creativity, ritual resilience, and potent hybridities driving ongoing reinvention. It reduces dynamic traditions to artifacts detached from contemporary vitality.

In contrast, my co-participatory research collaborators relate profound revelations through generations of intimate creative dialogues that complicate the prevailing narratives perpetuated in textbooks. Rather than celebrating individual genius figures spurring sudden stylistic ruptures, their stories emphasize collective growth, ritual resonance, and ongoing evolution. As one collaborator stated about rhythms channeled from elder spirits, eternal drumbeats continue to reinvigorate jazz's future through timeless yet adaptive conduits like percussion and brass. Our discussions revealed dynamic currents that are profoundly enriching yet still neglected in how jazz is typically taught. Far from narrow aesthetics enshrined in a fixed canon, collaborator accounts unveil jazz's ceaseless flow through overlapping creative deltas that dominant materials confine to isolated tributaries bereft of intermingling confluence.

An examination of widely used jazz history textbooks reveals a significant lag in incorporating the critical perspectives and diverse narratives brought forth by new jazz studies scholarship. While many contemporary jazz educators may be engaging with these vital conversations in their classrooms, the persistent reliance on traditional textbooks can perpetuate a limited understanding of jazz history. These texts often sidestep the "tough conversations" that interrogate issues of racism, sexism, and the exclusion of marginalized groups from historical representations. By failing to address these embedded biases and omissions, such textbooks can hinder the creation of truly inclusive and equitable academic

⁸ Hersch, "Reconstructing the Jazz Tradition," 7-28.

communities that reflect contemporary ethical standards. Embracing the revelations made possible through collective self-critique and the insights of the new jazz studies is crucial for fostering environments where everyone feels respected and heard within jazz discourse spaces.

Of course, expanding beyond standard narratives requires judicious framing, given reasonable constraints on instructional time during condensed academic terms. Assuredly, most courses cannot expansively address every overlooked influence, perspective, or lineage with extensive depth. I would argue, however, that incorporating even a brief sampling of neglected community-driven practices or hybrid creative influences still holds profound value for seeding resonant inquiries.

During fieldwork in NOLA between 2018 and 2019, I was consistently humbled by the depth and breadth of my collaborators' knowledge about the second line tradition, its history, and its significance. It was clear to me, through my discussions and activities with my brass band collaborators, that the tradition stays connected to its roots yet dynamically adapts and transforms over time to resonate with evolving contemporary experiences. Through my collaborators, I gained a deeper understanding of second line lineage, underscoring the tradition's complexity beyond well-known figures. Moreover, I learned that the second line builds upon the memory of Congo Square, serving as a symbol of community-making and spiritual uplift. It provides a framework for practitioners to achieve cultural oneness, retaining vitality not through preservation but constant adaptation—each generation making the tradition resonate with their experience. For example, New Orleans drummer Jaz Butler highlights NOLA jazz's diverse, embodied, living nature, countering restrictive narratives. These insights led me to critique "creation myth" narratives and reconsider jazz historiography. Their sentiment bears an uncanny resemblance to the healthy, postmodern skepticism of metanarratives: as Gayatri Spivak stated in 1999, "When a narrative is constructed, something is left out."⁹

So, what has been *left out* of the "official" story? Among the things excluded from the jazz narrative are the failure to fully acknowledge Congo Square's profound symbolic significance as a space of resilience, cultural retention, and creative synthesis for oppressed communities, the historical and ongoing influences of Native American and Black Mardi Gras Indian cultures on NOLA's musical culture, the second line as a form of jazz practice, and the continuation of the brass band tradition beyond the birth of jazz.

⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 19.

PROBLEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS AND CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS

Congo Square

Congo Square is perhaps jazz's most exoticized, essentialized, mythicized, and racialized history. Yet, for a location holding such mythic reverence as jazz's fabled birthplace, Congo Square receives remarkably limited substantive analysis regarding its immense spiritual symbolism and ongoing influences. Texts reinforce primitivist "origin" tropes around music's sudden emergence from Congo Square's soil, but fail to critically engage with the Square as a powerful locus of creative resistance. Gioia, for instance, provides meaningful contextualization tied to the origin of second line parades, yet overlooks women's involvement in these communal creative conduits spanning generations.¹⁰ Neither Gridley nor Tanner and Megill's introductory works meaningfully address the profound ring shout origins linking today's brass band-accompanied second line parades back to the circular dances that retained African diasporic resonance under savage subjugation.¹¹

Thus, while all surveyed works provide extensive early jazz details, insights regarding the centuries of marginalized creative action that laid the rhythmic foundations for the entire enterprise occupy minimal space. The profound truth that contemporary jazz reality depends on currents catalyzed in places like Congo Square escapes dominant historiography's purview, leaving stories of oppressed peoples turned toward transcendence through rhythmic release unheard, their echoes entering only faintly through pedagogical margins stuck in past tense.

Since the 1960s, scholars have scrutinized the "myth" of Congo Square, arguing that it reflects racial prejudice and socio-musical Darwinism.¹² Congo Square is more than a precise location where religiocorporeal musicking took place and vendors sold their wares: it was a basis for collective creativity within an oppressive social structure—a system of resistance that persists today. The

¹⁰ Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 1.

¹¹ Mark C. Gridley, *Jazz Styles*; Paul Tanner and David W. Megill, *Jazz*, 12th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013).

¹² Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans, the Formative Years 1791–1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); Henry A. Kmen, "The Roots of Jazz and the Dance in Place Congo: A Re-Appraisal," *Anuario Interamericano De Investigacion Musical* 8 (1972): 6; R. Collins, *New Orleans Jazz: A Revised History: The Development of American Music from the Origin to the Big Bands* (New York: Vantage Press, 1996); Jerah Johnson and Louisiana Landmarks Society, *Congo Square in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Samuel Wilson, Jr. Publications Fund of the Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1995); Randy Sandke, *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics, and Business of Jazz* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

communal dancing, call-and-response singing, and percussive music practices that defined the gatherings at Congo Square have deep roots in African religious and expressive forms, particularly the ring shout.

As Jason Berry eloquently states:

The human architecture of the ring dances at Congo Square [now Louis Armstrong Park] was rearranged—dancers in long sinuous lines opened the ring, stretching it out, coursing ahead, moving African polyrhythmic sensibility on a more linear path of melody. The joy-shouts of parade people and the ground beat of feet on the street surged with call-and-response patterns of the horns and woodwinds, playing off the rhythm and roll of drum syncopations.¹³

This passage directly connects the circular, counterclockwise dancing, and rhythmic music-making practices seen in Congo Square to the ring shout tradition, which in turn gave rise to the jazz funeral and the second line.¹⁴ Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture* (1987) and Samuel L. Floyd's *The Power of Black Music* (1995) are two significant works that expound upon and elucidate the ring shout—a “multifaceted African religious observance” that served as “a symbol of a new community in the making”—and assert that African religious and expressive forms have historically served as a coping mechanism, a form of resistance, and a vehicle of transcendence for African Americans.¹⁵ Stuckey describes the ring shout as the fundamental organizing principle of “slave culture,” an early religious ritual consisting of rhythmic clapping, call-and-response singing, leaping, jumping, fanning movements, the waving of handkerchiefs, and most notably, counterclockwise shuffling and dancing in a circular formation. The ring shout functioned as a powerful religiopolitical expression, connecting the multi-cultural practitioners to the spirits of their ancestors and gods and symbolizing African unity.¹⁶

¹³ Jason Berry, *The Spirit of Black Hawk: A Mystery of Africans and Indians* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 102. See also Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 267-268; See also Samuel A. Floyd Jr., “Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry,” *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1991): 265-287.

¹⁴ The ring shout is still performed as a religious ritual by some African American communities in the southeastern United States, particularly in the Gullah region of South Carolina and Georgia. It is also practiced by some African American churches, such as the Church of God in Christ.

¹⁵ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 15; Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 174.

¹⁶ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 15.

The communal dancing, call-and-response singing, and percussive music practices that defined the Ring Shout represent the ancestral roots of the brass band-accompanied second line parades that remain integral to NOLA's culture today. This connection highlights how cultural retention occurs not through preservation but through generational modification, with each era adapting traditions like the ring shout to resonate with evolving contemporary experiences, as exemplified by the evolution of second line parades.

While Henry A. Kmen (1966, 1972), Jerah Johnson (1995), R. Collins (1996), and Randall Sandke (2010) made vital contributions to documenting nineteenth-century musical activities in NOLA, their narrow focus perpetuated certain myths and oversights regarding Congo Square. These contributions reinforced a hegemonic, colonialist analysis by emphasizing white observers' perspectives over embodied practices and community voices. In contrast, historian Ned Sublette's *The World That Made NOLA: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* highlights the experiences of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, delving into connections to the Caribbean, the slave trade, and the crucial role of music and religion in the lives of the enslaved.¹⁷ Sublette's work illuminates previously overlooked connections and offers a more comprehensive historical narrative that incorporates the perspectives and experiences of marginalized communities. For instance, historians emphasized the 1817-1835 timeline based on available recorded references, yet evidence indicates these communal traditions spanned far longer, persisting before and after documented accounts.¹⁸ Tracing precise dates discounts the resilience of these living practices through oral transmission.¹⁹ Similarly, focusing solely on the physical location of Congo Square erases the reality that gatherings occurred throughout NOLA, wherever African diasporic communities could claim space.²⁰ Sublette emphasizes that none of the scrutiny placed on the variety of locations or the timeframes in which gatherings *actually* took place "takes away from the importance of that spot across Rampart Street today remembered by the English name Congo Square."²¹ He underscores Congo Square's importance beyond specific dates and locales, inspiring further research into how circular dances and

¹⁷ Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008), 12.

¹⁸ Jerah Johnson, *Congo Square in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1995), 18-25.

¹⁹ Berry, *City of a Million Dreams*, 89-92.

²⁰ Evans, "Congo Square," 9-21; Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 121; Gaspard Bolin, "The Second Line Parade: A Cultural Geography," PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles (2021), 176 and 252.

²¹ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 121.

rhythmic practices, wherever communities gathered, connect ring shouts to second lines.

For NOLA's Black community, Congo Square provided the space for a myriad of cultural expressions to come together in a syncretic hybridization of cultural ideals and expressions, both sacred and secular, of abducted Africans from nearly one-third of the African continent, maroons, and Native Americans who gathered there. The communal dancing, percussive music, and call-and-response vocals that defined these gatherings represent the origins of kinetic and musical expressions that came to distinguish NOLA's culture. As these living practices were modified and passed down through generations, the ring shouts of Congo Square evolved into the brass band-accompanied second line parades that remain integral practices today. The contemporary second line parade retains an unbroken connection to its Congo Square roots, with observables like dancing, singing, and percussive music directly continuing centuries-old African diasporic traditions.

In addition, the term "Congo Square" has taken on a flexible, expansive significance as a metonym, conjuring up more than just the physical public Square itself. As a metonym, Congo Square encompasses diverse concepts, spaces, practices, and periods associated with the evolution and retention of African-rooted culture in NOLA. It represents Sunday gatherings of enslaved Africans, free people of color, and Native Americans, dancing, drumming, and singing—a space where they could retain and reinterpret their heritage and points toward the emergence of vital creative forms like second lining and brass bands that remain integral to NOLA's culture today. Invoked this way, Congo Square connects the city's contemporary music scene to historic roots and aesthetic sensibilities.

Indigenous Cultures and Mardi Gras Indians

This marginalizing trend extends to the treatment of Native American and Mardi Gras Indian traditions, which have played a vital role in shaping jazz but are often relegated to cursory references or problematic portrayals in jazz textbooks. While cursory references to Native American and Mardi Gras Indian traditions occasionally appear in jazz education materials, these resources overwhelmingly neglect substantive discussion of these profound traditions' vital role in shaping jazz. When discussing these topics, education texts often contain problematic exoticization of customary Mardi Gras Indian practices, portraying them as mere costumed celebrations rather than multifaceted spiritual traditions that merit deeper contextualization of their hybrid cosmologies and maroon linkages. For instance, Gioia writes, "At Mardi Gras time, [B]lack celebrants

still dress up as Native Americans, sometimes adopting costumes that cost thousands of dollars.”²²

Gioia’s statement is problematic, as it demonstrates a lack of understanding and respect for the deep cultural, historical, and spiritual significance of the Mardi Gras Indian tradition. By reducing this rich cultural practice to a mere act of “dressing up” in “costumes,” the statement oversimplifies and diminishes the profound meaning behind the tradition.²³ It fails to acknowledge the shared struggles and solidarity between African Americans and Native Americans in Louisiana, which form the foundation of the Mardi Gras Indian tradition.

Similarly, Gridley’s overview of Mardi Gras Indian traditions exemplifies the tendency to essentialize profound cultural fusions into derivative formats of undiluted African lineage.²⁴ By describing Mardi Gras Indians as “African Americans” whose “music is essentially African,” Gridley fails to appropriately acknowledge the equally integral First Nations percussion traditions that have shaped this unique cultural expression.²⁵ This oversimplification disregards the complex historical and cultural context in which Mardi Gras Indian traditions emerged, where African Americans and Native Americans found solidarity in their shared experiences of oppression and discrimination. Gridley’s assertion that these traditions have “managed to keep African music and dance traditions alive since at least as early as the 1880s” neglects the significant influence of Native American rhythmic patterns, instrumentation, and ceremonial practices incorporated into Mardi Gras Indian performances.²⁶

It is important to recognize that while jazz textbooks may have limited space for in-depth exploration of Mardi Gras Indian culture, authors have a responsibility to avoid perpetuating myths, misinformation, or incomplete truths inherited from traditional narratives and historiography. Although these problematic representations likely do not stem from malice or ill intent, they nonetheless require critique and correction to foster a more accurate and respectful understanding of the rich cultural tapestry that has shaped jazz.

Mardi Gras Indian traditions emerged from a complex historical and cultural context in which African Americans and Native Americans found solidarity in their shared experiences of oppression and discrimination. The fusion of African and Native American musical practices, rhythmic patterns, instrumentation, and ceremonial elements has created a unique and vibrant cultural expression that

²² Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 6.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gridley, *Jazz Styles*, 20.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

continues to evolve and thrive in New Orleans. By acknowledging the profound spiritual and cultural significance of Mardi Gras Indian traditions and their integral role in the development of jazz, we can work towards a more comprehensive and respectful examination of these influential practices in jazz education and scholarship.

Centuries of solidarity forged amidst oppression through collaborative music-making between marginalized communities often remain confined to cursory mentions rather than receiving central focus as a seminal generative force. Despite playing a profound role in birthing jazz's rhythmic foundation through resonant creative synthesis, ceremonial Mardi Gras Indian culture and cross-cultural fertilization receive scarce appropriate examination across materials. Thus, narratives consistently overlook the profound complexity of traditions shaped by the interchange between oppressed peoples, erasing such collaborative currents from standard accounts of jazz's origins. However, insights from practicing Mardi Gras Indians underscore the importance of appropriately unveiling these overlooked yet vital conceptual linkages that course through jazz history.

Native Americans played a significant yet often overlooked role in shaping New Orleans' unique social and musical heritage. Indigenous peoples like the Quinipissa, Acolapissa, Ouma (Houma), Chitimachas, Tunicas, and Bayououlas had deep ties to the Louisiana territory before European colonization.²⁷ Forcibly enslaved Native Americans and Africans fought against colonial oppression through marronage and active resistance in the bayous.²⁸ In southern Louisiana, self-emancipated maroons formed collaborative communities with Native Americans and other maroons. They established independent and sustainable regional societies by banding together based on common interests and needs. Over the course of a century, the African and Native American cultures mixed, creating a new hybrid culture known today as Mardi Gras Indians.

Best known, perhaps, for their ritual street gatherings during Carnival time, where they wear elaborate ceremonial clothing called "suits" on Saint Joseph's

²⁷ David Elliott Draper, "The Mardi Gras Indians: The Ethnomusicology of Black Associations in New Orleans," (PhD diss., New Orleans: Tulane University, 1973); Evans, *Congo Square*; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Michael P. Smith, *Mardi Gras Indians* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1994); Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*; Matt Sakakeeny, and Willie Birch, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Frederick Starr, *New Orleans Unmasked* (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection, 2022).

²⁸ Marronage is the act of freeing oneself from slavery. A maroon is someone who successfully escaped slavery and achieved freedom.

Day, Super Sunday, and Mardi Gras Day, Mardi Gras Indians emerged in the late 19th-century context of post-Reconstruction racial dynamics,²⁹ with some scholars and historians referencing Buffalo Bill's shows visiting NOLA and potentially influencing early masking by Black residents.³⁰ In photographer and community scholar Michael Proctor Smith's article, "Behind the Lines: The Black Mardi Gras Indians and the NOLA Second Line" (1994), Smith argues that the Mardi Gras Indians are the vestiges of maroon cultures from the Lower Mississippi Delta region and NOLA, tracing their origins as far back as the 1780s.³¹ Smith skillfully connects the vibrant Mardi Gras Indian culture and its rich musical heritage to Africa, specifically emphasizing the significant role of Congo Square and the second line and situating it within the context of the Black Atlantic framework.³² This connection underscores the invaluable contributions made by the Mardi Gras Indians to NOLA's musical milieu and jazz. In so doing, Smith offers an alternative perspective, which jazz experts frequently disregard.³³

²⁹ Draper, "The Mardi Gras Indians"; Evans, *Congo Square*; Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*; Michael P. Smith, "Behind the Lines: The Black Mardi Gras Indians and the New Orleans Second Line," *Black Music Research Journal* 14, no. 1 (1994): 43–73; Smith, *Mardi Gras Indians*; Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 2008; Sakakeeny and Birch, *Roll With It*; Frederick Starr, *New Orleans Unmasked*.

³⁰ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 63–67; Joyce Marie Jackson, "Framing Vernacular Culture: The Local Contours of Early Jazz History," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2015): 67–92.

³¹ Indian oral tradition is insistent that it reaches farther back, stressing the continuity to Congo Square, which in turn connects to the legacies of Saint-Domingue and Africa. For more information regarding Black Mardi Gras Indians, see *The Black Mardi Gras Indians of New Orleans*, directed by Maurice Martinez and James E. Hinton (DoorKnobFilms, 2002/1976) DVD.; Smith, "Behind the Lines" (1994); Richard B. Turner, "Mardi Gras Indians and Second Lines/Sequin Artists and Rara Bands: Street Festivals and Performances in New Orleans and Haiti," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2003): 124–156; and *Jazz Religion, the Second Line and Black New Orleans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

³² Smith, "Behind the Lines," 43–73. Paul Gilroy's book, *The Black Atlantic*, proposes that the African Diaspora in countries around the Atlantic Ocean should be seen as a single cultural and political space: the Black Atlantic. This space is a hybrid of African, American, Caribbean, and British cultures, and is continually evolving through travel and exchange across the Atlantic. See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 1993. Cheryl L. Keyes builds on Gilroy's ideas by suggesting that African-centered concepts and African American music are consciously and unconsciously emphasized through a process called *cultural reversioning*. See Cheryl Lynette Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 21–38.

³³ Smith, "Behind the Lines," 43–73.

To explore the intersection of Mardi Gras Indians and jazz, and the reasons behind jazz scholars' omission of their tradition, we will delve into the musical aesthetics and influence of Mardi Gras Indians on jazz. Additionally, we will address the historical silence surrounding the Indigenous cultures that form the foundation of Mardi Gras Indian culture. This discussion aims to provide insights into the significant contributions of Mardi Gras Indians to jazz while shedding light on the neglect of their cultural heritage in scholarly discourse.

Mardi Gras Indians' musical aesthetics can be linked to the historical significance of Congo Square, where communal dance rituals played a central role in expressing spirituality and cultural identity.³⁴ The dances and music-making of the Mardi Gras Indians are important sites for intersectionality and shared cultural expression between the cultures gathered there. Integral to this religiocorporeal musicking tradition was the ring shout.³⁵ Mardi Gras Indians' aesthetics encapsulate what Samuel L. Floyd terms "all of the defining elements of black music," which include call-and-response devices, additive rhythms and polyrhythms, timbral distortions of various kinds, musical individuality within a collectivity, and the metronomic foundational pulse that underlies all African American music."³⁶ Moreover, the ring shout's rhythmic patterns, call-and-response singing, and circular dance formations share striking similarities with the Busk ritual dances of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex, which likely draw directly from local tribes like the Choctaw.³⁷ For example, typical Mardi Gras Indian tambourine rhythms replicate Choctaw stomp dances.³⁸

As Mardi Gras Indians became vital members of NOLA's music scene, the drumming traditions of their forebearers—both African and Native American—combined with the Black marching band traditions in NOLA to help shape jazz. Their musical aesthetics were later recast and incorporated into popular music idioms, such as rhythm and blues and Indian Funk, a form of jazz/rock fusion of the 1970s. Their music was picked up and played by local NOLA DJs and later sampled by hip-hop and bounce artists.

³⁴ Draper, "The Mardi Gras Indians"; Evans, *Congo Square*, 38, 47, 86, 107, and 117; Smith, "Behind the Lines," 46.

³⁵ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*; Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*.

³⁶ Samuel A. Floyd, *Index to Negro Spirituals*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Center for Black Music Research Columbia College, 1991), 267–268.

³⁷ Freddi Williams Evans, *Congo Square*, 9.

³⁸ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*; Koons (2016, 103) describes the Feather Dance and Stomp Dance as part of the busk practiced by the Tvlwv Pvlvcekoly, a Muskogee Creek Native American community, noting that these descriptions apply to only one tribal town and that other tribal traditions of busk may vary significantly.

Today, nearly fifty Mardi Gras Indian tribes are documented throughout the city, and many of their members are associated with brass bands in some form or fashion. It's hard to imagine a second line parade in NOLA without a group of percussionists following immediately behind the band, playing cowbells, tambourines, beer bottles, and shakers—many of whom are Mardi Gras Indian. Together with brass bands, they contribute to the music by creating a rich, polyrhythmic texture that propels the parade participants along, encouraging them to sing and dance as the sinuous column of the second line presses on, winding its way through the Backatown neighborhoods for hours.

Not only do the singing style and performative rhythms “fit” neatly into the aesthetics of jazz and brass band music, but Mardi Gras Indian aesthetics were integral to the concept of the “Big Four” beat in NOLA jazz.³⁹ The Big Four beat is a standard brass band rhythm, cadence, or form representing “the first departure from the standard march beat, freeing up the rhythm and providing a springboard for jazz improvisation to emerge.”⁴⁰ With the help of practitioners and their oral accounts, we can draw a throughline from the recorded histories of early American popular music to today.

So, why the scholarly neglect? Why aren't Mardi Gras Indians and their musical influence incorporated into jazz textbooks? The reasons again lie with jazz historiography. Louisiana's early Indigenous cultures relied heavily on oral tradition and performative ways to pass on their history. In contrast, Euro-American scholars prioritize written narratives and chronological frameworks to validate and verify accounts. Non-Native scholars have researched and interpreted their culture through archaeological evidence but have largely ignored their oral histories. The colonists put their own interests first by using written records to remove Indigenous People's power and sovereignty. The absence of Native presence in these records leads to the misunderstanding that they have no history. This belief was supported by scholars in the twentieth century, including Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, most widely known for his structural functionalism theory, who wrote, “In the primitive societies studied by social anthropology, there are no historical records.”⁴¹

³⁹ Gaspard Bolin, “The Second Line,” 108–109. The “Big Four” beat also encapsulates the Afro-Cuban 2–3 clave. See Benjamin G. Doleac, “Strictly Second Line: Funk, Jazz, and the New Orleans Beat,” *Ethnomusicology Review* 18, (2013); Doleac, “We Made it Through That Water,” 7.

⁴⁰ Gaspard Bolin, “The Second Line,” 109.

⁴¹ Renato I. Rosaldo, “Doing Oral History,” *Social Analysis* 4 (Spring 1980): 25.

The omission of Indigenous cultures' histories is pervasive in Western scholarship, which numerous scholars have extensively documented.⁴² However, at least three scholars within jazz studies have written on the subject. Bruce Boyd Raeburn and I have critiqued the lack of Indigenous contexts in NOLA jazz narratives, obscuring crucial cultural intersections and influences.⁴³ Karl Hagstrom Miller, in *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, argues that common narratives creating a strict separation between white and Black Southern musical origins serve to erase meaningful cross-cultural borrowings and collaborations with Native American, Mexican American and other diverse musical traditions that shaped early forms like jazz.⁴⁴

The Continuation of the Brass Band Tradition Beyond the "Birth of Jazz"

Widely used textbooks such as Gioia's *The History of Jazz*, Gridley's *Jazz Styles*, and DeVaux and Giddins' *Jazz*, highlight the inadequate representation of brass band traditions in contemporary jazz education. These texts confine brass bands primarily to pre-1900 developments and their influence upon formative NOLA jazz, neglecting generations fusing modern genres and absent stylistic continuity.⁴⁵ These materials relegate brass bands to jazz's gestational era, thereby obscuring the vibrant ritual retentions and reinventions powering jazz's contemporary heartbeat as well as the ongoing evolution and creative dialogues that have continued to shape the brass band tradition over time.

To fully appreciate the enduring impact and evolving nature of the brass band tradition in NOLA, it is crucial to look beyond the limited scope of most jazz

⁴² There is a plethora of writing from within Indigenous Studies and other social sciences discussing the omission of Indigenous cultures' histories in Western scholarship. Several notable examples follow: Tara Browner, *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999); Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Devon A. Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson, *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014); and Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

⁴³ Bruce Boyd Raeburn, *New Orleans Style and the Writing of American Jazz History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009). Gaspard Bolin, "The Second Line," 82-100.

⁴⁴ Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, 37-38 and 56-58; Gridley, *Jazz Styles*, 24; Giddens and DeVaux, *Jazz*, 69-72.

texts, which often confine the discussion to the early years of jazz's development. By examining the rich history and ongoing adaptations of brass bands from the late-nineteenth century to the present day, we can better understand how this vital musical tradition has continued to shape the city's cultural landscape and inspire new generations of musicians.

By the 1870s, Black brass bands had become an essential feature of the social and cultural life of NOLA. Groups such as the St. Brenard Brass Band, Kelly's Brass Band, the Oriental Brass Band, and the Pickwick Brass Band were among the city's favorites. By the 1880s, until sometime around the First World War, brass bands were in full flower, leading some to refer to the period as the Golden Age of Bands.⁴⁶ During this time, the Excelsior, Eureka, Deer Range, Pelican, Pickwick, Olympia, Onward, Reliance, St. Joseph, and Tuxedo Brass Bands were established, each with exceptionally long life and reach. Indeed, these brass bands provided a space for musicians to hone their musical skills and was the breeding ground for the rise of jazz. And that's where the NOLA brass band tradition stops—at least in all the jazz textbooks I've encountered.⁴⁷

From the time Buddy Bolden signified on military marching band tunes or members of the African American community stretched out the ring dances creating a second line parade, or the Young Tuxedo Brass Band incorporated swing, bebop, and R&B, or the Dozen infused funk, bebop, and free jazz into their music, or "contemporary" brass bands who infuse elements of rap and hip-hop into their music, brass bands have utilized *adaptive* strategies to provide people with a sense of community through music, negotiate identities, and reconfigure "tradition" to resonate with their own unique experiences. Open-minded and unrestricted, contemporary brass band musicians search for inspiration from virtually every musical encounter, building from a tradition of hybridity and a growing diversity of styles. Using old processes in new ways, brass band musicians reinvented the tradition and expanded the repertoire; many of their tunes have become standard repertoire.

For example, Mardi Gras Indian and tuba player Anthony "Tuba Fats" Lacen (1950-2004) of the Wild Magnolias tribe was a pivotal figure who bridged Indian culture, traditional jazz, and modern brass bands. Blending the aesthetics of Black college marching bands and early NOLA jazz with contemporary funk and Indian rhythms, Tuba Fats innovatively adapted traditional brass band

⁴⁶ Richard H. Knowles, *Fallen Heroes: A History of New Orleans Brass Bands* (New Orleans: Jazzology Press, 1996), 2.

⁴⁷ John Edward Hasse, *Jazz: The First Century* (New York: William Morrow, 2000); John Edward Hasse and Tad Lathrop, *Discover Jazz*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2012); Gridley, *Jazz Styles*; Giddins and DeVeaux, *Jazz*; Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, among others.

music to resonate with modern experiences through his original bass lines and riffs. By the late 1980s, his signature syncopated sound was ubiquitous, widely emulated by tuba players across the Crescent City, and even incorporated into local rap classics like Gregory “D” and DJ Mannie Fresh’s 1989 “Buck Jump Time.”⁴⁸ Through his pioneering style, Tuba Fats left an indelible and cross-generational influence on New Orleans’ brass bands, jazz artists, and Mardi Gras Indians.

A contemporary example comes by way of the To Be Continued Brass Band (TBC), with whom I spent countless hours performing, talking, and occasionally rabble-rousing. The TBC Brass Band was formed in 2001, uniting high schoolers from George Washington Carver and John F. Kennedy High Schools of NOLA’s 7th and 9th Wards. Breaking neighborhood rivalries, they pioneered a fusion of Mardi Gras Indian traditions, R&B, hip hop, reggae, and other genres, reflecting an innovative spirit that reshaped brass band music. While borrowing instruments from Carver High, TBC swiftly found its place in the city’s second line community and through weekly shows at Celebration Hall, Mother-in-Law Lounge, and later, the Tremé Hideaway.

TBC has deep Mardi Gras Indian ties, including trombonist Joseph Maize Jr., who performs with The Rumble and formerly the Grammy-nominated band Cha Wa, fronted by Golden Eagles Spy Boy J’Wan Boudreaux, who frequently sings and plays cowbell with TBC. TBC covers Mardi Gras Indian songs like their 2009 cover of “Hey Pocky Way,” impromptu jams with Mardi Gras Indian tribes, and recorded original innovations like “M.B.K.” and “Fiya Water” featuring Boudreaux and “Wylde Magnolia” with Glen David Andrews on their 2019 album *TBC II*.⁴⁹

During his chant on “M.B.K.,” Boudreaux draws from the call-and-response and rhyming couplet traditions of Mardi Gras Indian songs. Boudreaux’s exuberant lyrics like “dressed to kill,” “We be rockin’ and rollin’,” “Sick rockin’ streets,” “Say hoopin’ and hollerin’ goin’ carry on,” and “I was havin’ fun” reflect his spirited mood during the session, while also demonstrating the dedication he and TBC bring to their music-making as well as the joy they find in it. Yet, his “Say jockomo feena tell ‘em what I say,” which includes the phrase “jockomo feena”—that, according to one of my collaborators, Jerel Brown (Uptown

⁴⁸ Gregory “D” And DJ Mannie Fresh, “Buck Jump Time,” track 6 on *“D” Rules The Nation, Yo!* Records, X-101, 1989, compact disc.

⁴⁹ To Be Continued Brass Band, *TBC II*, TBC Records, 2019, compact disc; To Be Continued Brass Band, “Hey Pocky Way,” track 7 on *Modern Times*, Blue Train, 2009, compact disc. The originals that TBC recorded featuring Indian musical aesthetics on *TBC II* are “Wylde Magnolia,” featuring Glen David Andrews, “M.B.K.,” and “Fiya Water,” which both feature J’Wan Boudreaux (TBC, independent release, 2019, New Orleans, LA).

Warriors; bass drum and bandleader, Free Spirit Brass Band), translates from the Mardi Gras Indian patois roughly to “don’t mess with us”—is symbolic of the braggadocio of brass band and second line culture en masse.⁵⁰

Ethnomusicologist David Elliot Draper links the formulaic rhyming couplets and call-and-response pattern of Mardi Gras Indian chants to the dozens, a form of verbal combat among young African American men.⁵¹ This combative rhetoric can be seen as a response to historical oppression, a means of empowerment, an artistic expression, and a challenge to negative stereotypes.⁵² Boudreaux’s chants exemplify how he merges his Mardi Gras Indian heritage with brass band collaborations.

TBC’s resonance transcends its music: it embodies the essence of NOLA’s hybrid culture. Their Mardi Gras Indian roots run deep, intertwined with a rich legacy of call-and-response chants. The chant “MBK” is emblematic of their ethos, crafted spontaneously during a second line parade and captured in their recording sessions. This captivating piece captures the vibrancy of TBC’s sound while demonstrating their homage to Mardi Gras Indian traditions.

The vitality of TBC represents the ongoing adaptation of NOLA’s second line tradition. Their innovative sound, developed through collaborations and diverse influences, demonstrates how the tradition has creatively transformed over time. TBC connects to influential brass bands like Excelsior, Eureka, Olympia, Onward, Reliance, Tuxedo, Dirty Dozen, and Rebirth—who also pioneered new directions—even taking over Rebirth’s Tuesday night spot at the Maple Leaf Bar (8316 Oak St.), where Rebirth had performed for 31 years. In embracing their journey, we witness the dynamic interplay between musical heritage and contemporary innovation within the ever-evolving tapestry of NOLA jazz culture. Though their journey continues, TBC embodies the spirit of heritage and ingenuity that fuels the living culture of NOLA jazz. Picking up where Tuba Fats left off, TBC’s fresh approach vividly illustrates second-line music’s dynamic, intergenerational progression through alternate strategies.

One of my collaborators, Glen David Andrews, a native New Orleanian trombonist with an encyclopedic grasp of the city’s jazz and brass band history, helped me hear subtle stylistic differences between artistic styles and learn about

⁵⁰ Jerel Brown, musician, personal communication with author, May 2019, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵¹ David Elliot Draper, “The Mardi Gras Indians,” 118.

⁵² Sakakeeny and Birch, *Roll with It*, 158; Doleac, “We Made it Through That Water,” 225; Michael P. Jeffries, *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 125–130; Cheryl Lynette Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness, Music in American Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 29–32.

less famous but impactful local musicians obscured from standard narratives. As a member of the Glen David Andrews Band, I often chatted with my fellow musicians while on breaks from performing at the Royal Frenchmen Hotel and Bar on Frenchmen Street. Our discussions frequently ranged from benign to profound and sometimes even revelatory. One particular evening in March 2019, during one of these conversations, our discussion turned toward the meaning of jazz and the tradition itself. Jaz Butler, the band's talented drummer, asserted, "I can feel 'em [her ancestors] with me when I play. They speak *through* me, through my hands. They dictatin' what I play." She continued, "[that's] what makes our music so unique; it's embedded in the rhythms, its beats, and how we perform."⁵³ Her belief, shared by many of my other collaborators, emphasizes jazz as more than just a collection of notes but a living, breathing tradition passed down through generations. Butler stands as a testament to the profound connection between musicians and their ancestral roots.

In the view of my collaborators, there exists an almost "mystical dimension" where the spirit of jazz remains immortal, an eternal flame to be passed on indefinitely.⁵⁴ John Casimir, the former clarinetist for the Young Tuxedo Brass Band, eloquently captured this sentiment, remarking that in NOLA, "Nobody here ever really dies... they're all still here like you and me... we just don't see them anymore."⁵⁵ This profound connection to the past, the acknowledgment of jazz's ever-evolving nature, and the belief in an enduring spirit contribute to the rich cultural heritage of NOLA and the remarkable legacy of jazz as an art form. Together, Butler's and Casimir's views critique rigid "creation myths" and align with postmodern skepticism that dominant narratives inherently omit perspectives, emphasizing jazz as a living tradition realized through generational modification resonating with evolving experiences. This conception links present practice to the cultural memory of creative spaces like Congo Square through the vitality of constant change.

Naturally, some castigate those that fuse contemporary music—jazz, funk, pop, or rap—with brass band tradition.⁵⁶ However, for young musicians, music

⁵³ Jaz Butler, musician, personal communication with author, March 2019, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵⁴ White, "The New Orleans Brass Band," 95.

⁵⁵ John Casimir as quoted in White, "The New Orleans Brass Band," 95.

⁵⁶ Dr. Michael White is especially critical of the "contemporary" brass bands—those that followed the Dirty Dozen Brass Band (founded in 1977), who reinvented brass band tradition, incorporating elements of be-bop, R&B, rock and roll, funk, and eventually hip hop and New Orleans bounce—stating "The once reverent and respectful jazz funeral has become a pale shadow of its original character." "The traditional style of jazz no longer dominates the contemporary brass band sound of the still-popular community parades and funerals. A fake,

is a mediating voice, with brass bands providing a vehicle in the struggle against interpersonal, economic, and structural violence.⁵⁷ NOLA's Black community nurtured a culture undergirded by common values yet allowing for numerous reinterpretations. Today's artists participate in longstanding traditions of negotiation, hybridity, and resilience through constant adaptation. They create enjoyable, functional music that unites and serves the community as a living, evolving tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this article, I have explored the rich tapestry of NOLA's musical heritage, focusing on the significance of Congo Square, the influence of Native American and Mardi Gras Indian cultures, the second line as a vital form of jazz practice, and the continuity of the brass band tradition beyond the birth of jazz. By examining problematic representations and omissions in widely adopted jazz textbooks, I have highlighted the urgent need for a more comprehensive, inclusive, and accurate portrayal of jazz history. Critical interventions made by scholars from various disciplines have shed light on the complex cultural intersections and creative resilience that have shaped jazz and its related traditions, challenging dominant narratives and providing a foundation for reimagining jazz historiography.⁵⁸

My immersive fieldwork and collaborative scholarship with NOLA and Los Angeles brass band communities have revealed the depth and vitality of these living traditions, underscoring the importance of integrating community epistemologies and oral histories into our understanding of jazz history. The insights gained from my collaborators emphasize the need to embrace jazz as a dynamic, multifaceted tradition that thrives through constant adaptation and

distorted image and sound of jazz and 'New Orleans music' have become increasingly common in the fog of cultural ignorance, commercialism, and indifference" (White 2007, 826). See also White (2001, 69–96).

⁵⁷ Sakakeeny and Birch, *Roll with It*.

⁵⁸ In addition to the interventions cited earlier in the paper, it is important to highlight practitioner scholarship. Members of the second line community are producing vital studies, such as Brice A. Miller's "Feet Don't Fail Me Now: Brass Bands in Post-Katrina New Orleans" (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 2015) and Michael G. White's "Reflections of an Authentic Jazz Life in Pre-Katrina New Orleans" (*The Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (2007): 920–927). Projects like "Can't Be Faded" (2020), a collaboration between ethnomusicologist Kyle DeCoste and members of the Stooges Brass Band, offer promising avenues for future research, showcasing the importance of incorporating firsthand experiences and perspectives from within the second line community (Stooges Brass Band and Kyle DeCoste, *Can't Be Faded: Twenty Years in the New Orleans Brass Band Game* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020).

generational renewal. As a cultural outsider, I make no claims to have presented a definitive overview but hope to have provided an introduction to a tradition that continues as a thriving, living practice, honoring those who came before, including Native Americans who provided refuge to previously enslaved, self-emancipated individuals.

Educators can foster learning environments that resonate with jazz's profound complexity and contemporary relevance by incorporating diverse voices, interdisciplinary perspectives, and creative engagement with marginalized narratives. As we move forward, it is essential for jazz scholars, educators, and enthusiasts to actively challenge restrictive frameworks and engage in the critical self-reflection necessary to create a more accurate and ethically grounded representation of jazz history. By embracing the dynamic dialogues that sustain the art form's creative vitality and amplifying the voices of those historically marginalized, we can ensure that the rich legacy of jazz continues to inspire and transform generations to come.

The term "shifting narratives" has gained popularity in recent times. This term refers to the notion that historical accounts evolve as fresh evidence and viewpoints emerge. This concept is especially vital when examining the experiences of marginalized communities whose stories have been overlooked. By modifying how the past is narrated, historians can transform how history is recorded and create a more comprehensive, refined, and accurate understanding of the past.

Today, many realize that crafting an inclusive narrative requires looking at events through various lenses rather than just a single filter. It is understood that history and culture are complex and ever-evolving fields and that how a story is told can significantly impact our understanding of the past. Furthermore, as a nation, we in the United States are just beginning to recognize how our own biases and perspectives can shape the way we interpret and understand our history. So, what now?

We must integrate the works of scholars who have incorporated practitioners' beliefs and experiences into our teaching materials. This can be accomplished through various means of disseminating knowledge, such as articles, chapters, films, oral histories, and other relevant sources. Our objective should be to comprehensively understand jazz as a complex and multifaceted art form. In jazz education, educators need to embrace a more inclusive and equitable curriculum that highlights the rich tapestry of jazz history and the overlooked voices—like Indigenous, Latin American, Asian American, and female musicians—that have shaped its evolution. By moving beyond the confines of rigid timelines, individual achievements, and abrupt stylistic shifts, we can provide students with

a comprehensive understanding of the complex cultural intersections and enduring influences that have nurtured the jazz tradition.

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