

A Century of Jazz: Postcard Visualizations of Race, Place, and Jazz Venues in Three American Cities

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Background

This project studies some of the most notable locations where jazz strongly influenced the area's culture and music through historic postcards. It will analyze the opulence of the sites, or lack thereof, to determine how racial discrimination restricted African American musicians' capabilities. Additionally, audience members and performers' appearances will be analyzed to determine the prestige of an area. Examining solely postcards can be challenging in answering a more elaborate question because the intention of postcards is to idolize or glamorize whatever is being presented. Therefore, besides concluding what the cards convey, I will supplement outside sources to fill in gaps in information.

The jazz genre was first initialized in the United States in the heart of Louisiana, New Orleans. Throughout my research, many postcards will be focused on that area. The city's culture and music history make it an intriguing case to study. Being a southern state, African Americans faced turmoil even after the Emancipation Proclamation. However, they engaged in reconstruction unique to any other state, culture surged, and Dixieland jazz was birthed (What Is Jazz). In addition to New Orleans, Chicago and New York City also will be analyzed.

Methods

This research will consist of observational data acquired through analysis of the postcards. Postcards used in the project were either obtained from the preexisting card archive or purchased to fill evidence gaps. The decided locations were contingent on what cards were already available. From there, it was decided that venues in New Orleans, New York City, and Chicago would be observed. Any lack of cards in venues was addressed by acknowledging the gap or acquiring more cards.

Once all the necessary cards were acquired, the following step was coding them based on their image contents or descriptions on the back. The codes were based on attributes of the performers and audience, such as ethnicity, quality of instruments, and clothing. They were also made for the venue, interpreting the state of the location, the geographics, and its public interpretation. The descriptions were also analyzed for buzzwords pushing a specific motive or trying to create a particular connotation.

This was one of the most significant movements of people in the United States, with approximately six million African Americans migrating from the South to Northern, Midwestern, and Western states. Prominent places they relocated to include New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh (The Great Migration). This movement was motivated by the racial violence and segregation they wished to escape.



Nick's In Greenwich Village
1950

This card on NYC is the first instance of purposely improved promotion of jazz in the Northern States. This is based on the opulence of this card with its marble floors and cushiony seats.



Pete's Fountain
1967

This card makes for a great comparison in that it demonstrates the stark contrast between how white artists and black artists are represented. Unlike the cards containing black musicians, this has the musicians posed instead of in action. Additionally, the way this card describes itself on the back is notable, with notable phrases describing the venue, such as "elegant brick" and "wrought iron facade." The club this card represents is on Bourbon Street, which describes the location as "fabled and fabulous."



New Orleans French Quarter
2000

This 21st-century card acts as a conclusion to this timeline. It shows a mixture of both white and black performers. This raw and low-culture notion is still present, and this is showcased in the description of this card, bolstering the fact that the instrumentalists are playing while drinking cans of beer.

The Great Migration
1910

1914
King Oliver's Creole Band



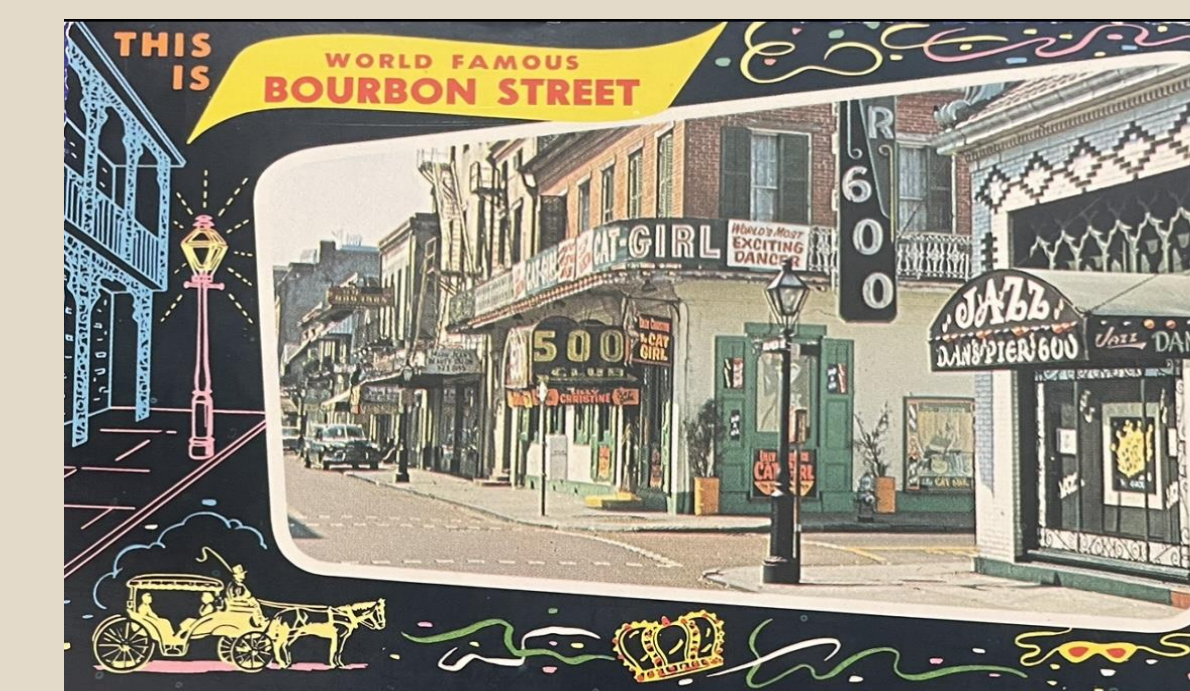
The context of this card can be traced from two different bands that originated in Louisiana. The most direct ancestor was Lawrence Duhe's New Orleans Jazz band. The band started its first tours in 1914, with its destination being South Bend, Indiana. The band remained in Chicago for the following years and performed in various venues there (Anderson).

This card is the most extravagant appearing card with African American musicians making it an outlier. This is evident because of the performer's formal attire and the cobbled brick and iron embellishments. Though it is an outlier, its description of the back contains no words that push the narrative that jazz is a high-culture event, unlike other cards.



1966
Count of Two Sisters

1973
World Famous Bourbon Street



This card is a significant contrast to Pete's Fountain, demonstrating that two diverging perceptions of jazz formed in New Orleans. Just six years after, this card describes Bourbon Street as "crazy mixed-up," and even the individual who wrote on it described it as a "strange place to see." This notion of Bourbon Street as a party city is heavily contradictory to the previous "fabled and fabulous" description.

Results

The timeline starts with Dixieland jazz and its creation in early 20th-century New Orleans. However, the first cards in the timeline to back this up are 'King Oliver's Creole Band' from Chicago and 'Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds' from New York City. Both cards occur first due to the Great Migration (The Great Migration). They brought the initial New Orleans influences on these cities. As the timeline progressed, in the 1960s, there was a split perception in New Orleans. As the genre shifted from being primarily an African American genre, so did how the cards demonstrate jazz's opulence. This is most notable with 'Pete Fountain's' and 'Al Hint,' which further characterize jazz as luxurious in the images by the wealthy outfits worn, the musicians posing, and the embellished phrases to describe the venues. Around this same period, that notable shift occurs in Chicago and New York City with the Lobby and Foyer and Nick's in Greenwich Village. Though no musicians are present, based on the images, the cards intend to portray a more grandeur venue with folded cloth, marble floors, and elaborate art. What was particularly interesting about the New Orleans postcards is that they split into two varying perceptions of jazz, unlike Chicago and New York City. At the same time, this more pontifical version remained within the postcards even after the 1960s. New Orleans continued to maintain that original Dixieland Jazz. This is demonstrated through a contrasting card, 1973 'World Famous Bourbon Street,' which shows the traditional jazz prevailing regardless of the shift. The perspective remains prevalent throughout the present day, as demonstrated with the 2000 'New Orleans French Quarter.'

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Sources

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