California Soul

Music of African Americans in the West

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS, CHARTS, AND TABLES / vii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS / ix

INTRODUCTION
Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and Eddie S. Meadows / 1

I MUSIC IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

1. Way out West on Central: Jazz in the African-American Community of Los Angeles before 1930
   Michael B. Bakan / 23

   Ralph Eastman / 79

3. Oakland Blues
   Part 1. Essay
   Lee Hildebrand / 104
   Part 2. A Conversation with Bob Geddins
   James C. Moore Sr. / 112

   Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje / 124

II MUSIC AND THE MEDIA

5. Insider Perspectives on the American African Popular Music Industry and Black Radio
   Kecalu Person-Lynn / 179
Way out West on Central
Jazz in the African-American Community
of Los Angeles before 1930

Michael B. Bakan

In *West Coast Jazz*, Ted Gioia writes: “Conventional jazz history tells how jazz first traveled from New Orleans by riverboat up to Chicago. Yet just as early, jazz came by railroad from the Crescent City to California.” Jazz—understood in this article to be urban, brass-band inspired, blues-centered, ragtime-derived, improvisation-oriented, syncopated dance band music created by African-American musicians prior to 1930; music that began crystallizing into a distinct genre in New Orleans and other cities around the turn of the century, spreading throughout the United States over the next couple of decades and becoming most conspicuously developed during the 1920s in Chicago, Kansas City, and New York—did indeed travel west from New Orleans to California as early as it traveled north to Chicago and other major midwestern and northeastern cities. That music—“Louisiana-style or ragtime or jazz or whatever you want to call it,” as it has been described by one of the most prominent California jazz musicians of the early days, Benjamin M. “Reb” Spikes—was already alive and thriving on the West Coast by the second decade of this century.

Yet the story of jazz, as it has been told from so many perspectives in thousands of books, essays, and articles, has scarcely touched upon the rich history of the music’s early development in California. Perhaps the most conspicuous area of neglect within this largely ignored area has been the African-American jazz scene that flourished in the Central Avenue district of Los Angeles during the 1920s and the years immediately preceding. Jazz historians, with few exceptions, have treated the early Los Angeles jazz scene as little more than a footnote to the New Orleans–Chicago–New York mainstream of early jazz development. It merits mention only as a place where certain prominent musicians spent some time before, after, or in between more historically significant phases of their careers in major jazz centers.

Thus, in reading the literature, one might discover in passing that the Creole
Band (a.k.a. the Original Creole Band), which played a major role in disseminating New Orleans-style jazz throughout the nation during the World War I era, was actually formed in Los Angeles; that both Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton and Edward “Kid” Ory resided in Los Angeles for extended periods of time after leaving New Orleans and before moving on to Chicago (and that both ultimately died in California); that the first recordings ever made by an African-American jazz band, featuring a group led by Ory, were recorded in Los Angeles; that the first published compositions of Jelly Roll Morton were published in Los Angeles; that trombonists Britt Woodman and Lawrence Brown established themselves professionally in Los Angeles before moving east and achieving fame as members of Duke Ellington’s orchestra; or that the great jazz vibraphone pioneer and bandleader Lionel Hampton spent most of the early part of his musical career playing drums in Los Angeles dance bands of the 1920s.

Beyond such cursory references, there is little to be found about the Los Angeles activities of these musicians, whose best-documented career accomplishments occurred in other parts of the country rather than in Southern California. As for those musicians who came from or migrated to Los Angeles and chose to stay there rather than move on to Chicago or New York, most have been all but forgotten, their musical careers documented in a handful of scattered writings by jazz historians; a small number of rare and obscure recordings; notices in African-American newspapers of the day, especially The California Eagle (a.k.a. the Eagle), and other archive-preserved documents; and the autobiographical recollections of a few musicians whose careers date back to the early days of Los Angeles jazz.

Drawing together these varied sources, this chapter presents a sociomusicological history of jazz in Los Angeles’s African-American community before 1930, with particular focus on the years 1917–1929. This was a complex and fascinating period of transition and ambiguity during which jazz musicians and the music they performed helped to define the collective identity and social life of black Los Angeles, as well as the dynamics of that community’s interaction with the city’s dominant white population. In placing the musicians and their music within their sociocultural context, I hope not only to provide a much-needed account of a largely ignored chapter in the history of American jazz but also to make a contribution to the study of African-American cultural history in Los Angeles.

PRE-1930 JAZZ IN LOS ANGELES: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Jazz historians have devoted a good deal of attention to the study of “West Coast jazz,” but this term, despite the broad and diverse frame of reference it implies, has come to be associated almost exclusively with one small slice of a very large pie: the “cool jazz” phenomenon of the 1950s, spearheaded by Miles Davis with the release of his album Birth of the Cool and developed mainly by California-based white artists such as Chet Baker, Dave Brubeck, and Shelly Manne. Even during this period, when Los Angeles achieved at least brief recognition as a major cen-
ter of jazz innovation, the city's African-American jazz musicians received little notice beyond the local level. Ted Gioia's *West Coast Jazz* and Robert L. Gordon's *Jazz West Coast* have particularly filled the void by providing balanced and complete accounts of modern (i.e., post-World War II) jazz in Los Angeles. Among the autobiographies and oral histories that provide important information about African-American culture and the Central Avenue jazz scene of the forties and fifties are Red Callender's *Unfinished Dream* and Roy Porter's *There and Back.*

Though both Gioia and Gordon delve into the pre-World War II era of African-American jazz in Los Angeles in order to establish a historical context for their discussions of later developments, only Gioia goes as far back as the 1920s and preceding years, and his coverage of this early period, though informative, is minimal.

Tom Reed's *The Black Music History of Los Angeles—Its Roots* makes a concerted effort to explore the emergence and early history of African-American jazz and the Central Avenue-based cultural scene in which it flourished. This book is a veritable treasure-trove of rare photographs and other archival documents (newspaper and magazine notices, advertisements, promotional flyers, record jackets and labels, etc.) covering a period of fifty years, from 1920 to 1970. This impressive, attractive volume is a wonderful tribute to Central Avenue and to the musical and cultural history of Los Angeles's African-American community. Through its assemblage of photographs and other documentary materials, it paints an evocative portrait of that community's musical legacy. However, as a scholarly resource, it has severe limitations. The organization of materials is somewhat haphazard, and the text, mainly limited to captions and short introductory and transitional essay passages, provides valuable chunks of information but leaves a great deal unaccounted for, jumping about without much regard for chronological coherence.

Bette Yarbrough Cox's *Central Avenue—Its Rise and Fall,* despite its somewhat anecdotal presentation, is one of the few works that provides a more extensive discussion of jazz in Los Angeles prior to 1930. Cox includes excellent photographs of jazz musicians and venues as well as oral histories of Los Angeles musicians who personally experienced the Central Avenue jazz scene during the early 1900s.

Albert McCarthy's *Big Band Jazz* is the only comprehensive jazz history text that provides reasonable documentation of Los Angeles's 1920s jazz scene, devoting a full seven pages to discussion of the careers, bands, and music of four performers who dominated that scene: Reb Spikes (as well as his brother and business partner John Spikes), Sonny Clay, Paul Howard, and Curtis Mosby. Noteworthy here are McCarthy's assessments of recordings by these artists.

Articles by jazz historians Floyd Levin and Lawrence Gushee represent some of the most important contributions to the literature on early jazz in Los Angeles. Levin has written about both “local” musicians of the period, such as Reb Spikes and Andrew Blakney, and expatriate New Orleans jazz masters who resided in the city during the 1920s, particularly Kid Ory and Jelly Roll Morton. Gushee's important research on the New Orleans–Los Angeles jazz connection includes an
annotated list of New Orleans musicians who worked in California for extended periods between 1908 and 1925; a fascinating study of the legendary Creole Band; and a report on the early career of Jelly Roll Morton which chronicles Morton's activities in Los Angeles between 1917 and 1922 and suggests Jelly Roll may have spent time in the city as early as 1917. Morton's Los Angeles years—along with those of Ory and cornetist Mutt Carey, another transplanted New Orleans jazz master—are also documented in Martin Williams's *Jazz Masters of New Orleans*. Morton's own account of his tenure in Los Angeles prior to and during the early 1920s appears in a chapter entitled "I Took California" from the book *Mister Jelly Roll*, a condensed and edited version of the jazz master's autobiographical oral history, transcribed by Alan Lomax from a lengthy series of recordings for the Library of Congress. *Mister Jelly Roll* represents Lomax's reduction of Morton's voluminous personal history into a concise, informative, and highly entertaining book.

*Mister Jelly Roll* and other autobiographies and oral histories of jazz musicians who resided in Los Angeles prior to 1930 inform a profound understanding of the period and its music. The autobiography of Pops Foster, a bassist who began his career in New Orleans and is most remembered for his work with Louis Armstrong, contains valuable information on the author's experiences in Los Angeles during two periods when he was based there, the first in 1922–23 and the second around 1927–28. His colorful remembrances vividly recapture the lifestyle and musical activities of the period, especially with reference to expatriate New Orleans musicians such as Kid Ory, Ed "Montudie" Garland, and Papa Mutt Carey. Lionel Hampton's autobiography, *Hymn*, is both evocative and provocative. The third chapter, "Hollywood," traces the development of the vibraphonist's career from the time of his arrival in Los Angeles from Chicago as an ambitious teenager drummer around 1923 or 1924 to his membership in Les Hite's Los Angeles–based big band beginning around 1930. Tom Stoddard's *Jazz on the Barbary Coast*, the only book devoted exclusively to a study of early jazz history in California, delves even further into Los Angeles's musical past by including a autobiographical sketch of Reb Spikes. Spikes settled in the city in 1919, which, according to Stoddard, was right about the time when "the West Coast jazz scene shifted [from San Francisco] to Los Angeles."

In addition to the sources already discussed, there are a few others worthy of mention. Bette Cox's "A Selective Survey of Black Musicians in Los Angeles, 1890–ca. 1945," William Claxton's photographic essay on West Coast jazz, a brief survey of early West Coast jazz by Leonard Kunstadt, and William Kenney's *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904–1930* all contain references to pre-1930 African-American jazz musicians with Los Angeles ties. Works by Lonnie Bunch and Lawrence B. DeGraaf explore the economic, political, and cultural conditions surrounding the musical life of the era.

The principal primary source for research in this area is *The California Eagle*, the African-American community's main newspaper during the period under investi-
gation. Notices and advertisements published in the *Eagle* between 1917 and 1929 announcing performances by area jazz bands, as well as occasional reviews and articles, provided the blueprint of early Los Angeles jazz history from which this study was built. Personal interviews that I conducted in 1988 with two jazz musicians whose careers began in 1920s Los Angeles, trumpeter Teddy Buckner and saxophonist/clarinetist Jack McVea, were also of fundamental importance.

What follows is a historical study of a jazz lifeworld. It features a few famous musicians who are remembered mainly for what they did before they moved to Los Angeles or after they left, a host of others who are barely remembered at all, and a city that has hardly been recognized as having had a jazz scene at all, let alone one worthy of serious interest, prior to 1930. Regardless of their overall impact on the historical development of jazz, however, the musicians and bands of Los Angeles in the early days of jazz were a major force in the life of the city's African-American community, and the stories of their musical lives add new depth and perspective to our understanding of the United States's musical and cultural legacy. Furthermore, on the basis of the few recordings that still survive, it is evident that the leading 1920s Los Angeles bands were highly accomplished musical outfits—with some fine “hot” soloists and talented composers and arrangers among their ranks—who lent considerable verve and style to the instrumental blues, rags, stomps, novelty numbers, and popular songs that constituted the jazz repertoire of the day.

**JAZZ BEGINNINGS IN CALIFORNIA**

In the early years of this century, San Francisco was the main center for “hot” music on the West Coast. Most African-American musical activity was centered in a district known as the Barbary Coast, the city's answer to New Orleans's Storyville district. An abundance of nightclubs, brothels, and other spots that featured music in a variety of contexts provided ample work opportunities for local players and drew African-American musicians and other entertainers from throughout the country.

A touring band of New Orleans musicians led by bassist Bill Johnson first brought the new jazz style of New Orleans to the Barbary Coast in 1908, and their impact on more conventional dance music styles of locally based bands such as Sid LePott's So Different Orchestra (see Figure 1.1) was soon felt. The “ragged,” syncopated, driving four-beat rhythmic style of the New Orleans jazz musicians transformed the more squared-off, heavy two-beat feel of local rhythm sections. Quasi-polyphonic, improvised embellishments of the main melody by a “front line” of cornet, clarinet, and trombone gained currency. Instrumental blues, rags, and stomps were added to the usual repertoire of quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, and popular songs, stimulating the development of new dance styles. By the outbreak of World War I, San Francisco had already given birth to several jazz dances that became popular nationwide, including the Texas Tommy, Turkey
Trot, Grizzly Bear, and Bunny Hug. Even the word “jazz” came to have an important connection with San Francisco, that being the city where, in 1913, the term first appeared in print with reference to music. Jazz music and jazz bands became increasingly important parts of the very active Barbary Coast entertainment scene up until the government closed the district down in 1921 as part of a Prohibition-era effort to curtail vice.

Even before the closing of the Barbary Coast, the pendulum of jazz activity on the West Coast had begun to swing southward to Los Angeles. Though jazz took longer to germinate in the conservative African-American community of Los Angeles than it had in San Francisco, the community experienced rapid growth and change, and the Central Avenue district of the city was “a musical hotbed by the start of the ‘Jazz Age’ in the 1920s.” The closing of the Barbary Coast was the decisive event that established Los Angeles as the premiere center for jazz on the West Coast. As Stoddard explains, “The Barbary Coast had closed and the centre of Bay Area jazz disappeared. . . It was far easier to make it in Los Angeles and many musicians went south, some staying for the rest of their lives.”

With the largest and fastest-growing African-American urban community in the West, as well as the growing Hollywood movie industry and an emerging
recording industry, Los Angeles also became a magnet for jazz musicians from other parts of the country, especially New Orleans, where jazz players suffered a devastating blow with the closing of Storyville in 1917. Without question, Chicago and then New York served as the main new centers for the growth and development of jazz in the 1920s and years immediately preceding, with Kansas City, St. Louis, and Memphis also figuring prominently in the music's ascent. But jazz also thrived in Los Angeles, where an interesting mix of local players, New Orleans expatriates, and itinerant and resident musicians from all over the country contributed to an active and exciting musical culture. Jazz became a major component of the social life of Los Angeles's African-American community; it played an important role in that community's efforts to establish a sense of identity during a rather turbulent historical period marked by growth, pride, and prosperity, on the one hand, and by external pressures and internal strife and confusion, on the other.

Black Los Angeles, 1915–1930: An Era of Growth, Change, and Paradox

It was in 1988 that I first became aware of the early history of African-American jazz in Los Angeles. I was reading a catalog for an exhibit at the California Afro-American Museum in Los Angeles: Black Angelenos: The Afro-American in Los Angeles, 1850–1950. The catalog was written by the then curator of the museum, historian Lonnie Bunch. It was the following passage about jazz on Central Avenue during the final years of what Bunch defined as the “Golden Era of Black Angelenos,” an era spanning the three decades from 1900–1939, that piqued my curiosity:

For many Black Angelenos, the plethora of musical establishments, jazz dens and nightclubs located in this area made Central Avenue the entertainment center of the city. . . . It was the jazz clubs that brought the evening crowds to Central Avenue, where new migrants[,] established residents and “White Nordies” rubbed elbows on the dance floor. Nightclubs such as the Kentucky Club at 25th Street and Central with its Kentucky racing decor, the Club Alabam, the Savoy at 35th Street and Central . . ., the Apex Night Club at 4015 Central Avenue, . . . and many other establishments, all provided opportunity for Black musicians to develop a following, and a chance for the patrons to have “cool, clean, scads of fun.”

Bunch’s discussion of this evidently active and exciting jazz scene did not extend beyond this one paragraph, and it ultimately proved to be a bit misleading: my subsequent research would reveal that the specific clubs mentioned opened no earlier than 1928, just a year before the end of the so-called Golden Era. But even given the sparseness of Bunch’s account and the questionable accuracy of his chronology of the development of Central Avenue’s jazz venues, the subject matter was fascinating.

My interest was strengthened all the more by Bunch’s discussion of the complex social, cultural, and political environment of Los Angeles’s African-American community in the 1920s. “Central Avenue was in its heyday as the center of both
the Black business and residential communities" and also host to a flourishing musical and literary movement similar to the Harlem Renaissance but smaller in scale. Black businesses, doctors’ and dentists’ offices, beautiful homes, publications (including The California Eagle), nightclubs, theaters, and hotels were sources of pride and symbols of prosperity and opportunity. The pinnacle of entrepreneurial accomplishment was the opening of the glamorous, black-owned Hotel Somerville in 1928, “the Jewel of Central Avenue,” renamed the Hotel Dunbar in 1929 when economic hardships brought on by the Depression forced its owner, Dr. John Somerville, to sell the establishment. In the political arena, the election of African American Frederick Madison Roberts to the office of state assemblyman in 1919, an office he held until 1934, represented “the crowning achievement of the Golden Era of Black Los Angeles.”

Though Los Angeles had historically been one of the best American cities for black residents in terms of freedoms, opportunities, and standards of living, conditions decisively worsened during the twenties. Lionel Hampton, the most celebrated musician to emerge from the 1920s Los Angeles jazz scene, moved west from Chicago as a teenager around 1924. His arrival in California rudely awakened him to the ugliness of racism:

Hollywood was a pretty town, but I didn’t think much of the attitude toward blacks there. It was my first real experience with discrimination. Back in Chicago, the black population was so big that you could live and go to school and work and never even have to talk to a white person. And even if you went downtown, you didn’t have to sit in the back of the bus or anything. But out in Hollywood, it was like the South in some ways. You had to sit in the back of the bus, go into the white nightclub by the back door. Taxis wouldn’t stop for you. Also, black musicians didn’t get paid as much as white musicians—in fact, blacks got about 20 percent of what whites made.

The 1920s and the years immediately preceding them, constituted a dynamic and turbulent period in the history of black Los Angeles. The internal pride, achievement, and determination of the African-American community were challenged by escalating racism, oppressive political conditions, overwhelming population growth, and socioeconomic diversification. The establishment of distinctly African-American cultural icons became important in the promotion of some sense of cultural identity and integrity for the community. Jazz helped to facilitate social integration, and jazz musicians became symbols of the energy, spirit, pride, and struggle of a new kind of African-American culture. There was a sense of liberation and fresh vitality in the new sound of jazz, valued qualities for a community trying to move forward at the same time that it was being forced to close in upon itself.

*The Pre-1930 African-American Jazz Scene in Los Angeles: A History*

The year 1917 stands as an important landmark in U.S. history and in the history of jazz. The United States entered World War I; the first jazz recording was
made—"Livery Stable Blues," by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (a white group); and Storyville, the famed red-light district of New Orleans, where the pioneers of jazz honed their craft and earned their livelihood, was closed down.

With the closing of Storyville, many of New Orleans's musicians found it necessary to go elsewhere to make a living. Following the general migrational trends of African Americans of the period, most headed north to major urban industrial centers, especially Chicago and New York. Chicago became the new center of "hot" jazz music, with musicians including Joe "King" Oliver arriving in 1918 and Louis Armstrong joining him there a few years later. Some of the musicians, however, went west, and their principal destination was usually Los Angeles, the fastest-growing African-American community in that part of the country.

Even before 1917, New Orleans jazz musicians began migrating to Los Angeles on a temporary or permanent basis. A group of New Orleans jazzers led by bassist Bill Johnson, who would later become the leader of the Creole Band, reportedly played a one-month engagement at the Red Feather Tavern in Los Angeles in 1908, after which time they returned to New Orleans. The band's cornet player, Ernest Coycault, stayed in Los Angeles for good, becoming a leading figure in the city's jazz scene from the outset.

By 1912, Bill Johnson had returned to Los Angeles and set up residence there. Joining forces with several other New Orleans expatriates who had moved to California either independently or at his invitation, he formed the Creole Band in 1914. Along with Johnson on bass, the band featured the legendary cornetist Freddie Keppard, clarinetist George Baquet, violinist James Palao, trombonist Edward Vincent, and drummer Ollie "Dink" Johnson. Performances by the band, billed alternately as the Creole Orchestra, the Imperial Band of New Orleans, and Johnson's Imperial Band of Los Angeles and New Orleans, are documented by announcements in The California Eagle between April and July 1914 for events such as a truck drivers' outing, an Emancipation Day carnival, and a Fourth of July all-night ball at the Dreamland Hall.\textsuperscript{31}

The Creole Band got its big break at a heavyweight prize fight between Leach Cross and Joe Rivers in Los Angeles on August 11, 1914. In attendance was Carl Walker, manager of the Pantages theatrical company. He was so taken by the group's performance between the undercard and the main event that he arranged for an audition with his boss, Alec Pantages, the famous theatrical impresario. Clarinetist George Baquet recalled the incident years later in a 1965 address to the New Orleans Jazz Club: "[W]hen we played the then popular 'Mandalay,' Freddie Keppard, our cornetist, stood up with his egg mute and an old Derby Hat on the bell of the instrument. The crowd stood up as one man and shouted for us to get up into the ring, and screamed and screamed. When we got down, Mr. Carl Walker, Mr. Alec Pantages' manager, stepped up asking for our card."\textsuperscript{32}

The audition for Pantages was an unqualified success, resulting in an offer to perform on the Pantages vaudeville tour circuit. Baquet remembers that at the audition Pantages was so impressed that "he jumped up on the stage and asked us to
form an act, he did not care what, so long as he had that music. So, going into a
huddle we formed a plantation act with a comedian, the character of Old Man
Mose.”

Over the next four years, the Creole Band was a fixture on the American
vaudeville circuit, introducing the sounds of New Orleans jazz to many parts of
the nation even before the advent of jazz recordings or the diaspora of New Or-
leans jazz musicians to Chicago and elsewhere in the wake of Storyville’s demise.
According to Eileen Southern, “It was this band, the Original Creole Band, that
carried the jazz of New Orleans to the rest of the nation.”

It was around the time of the Creole Band’s 1914 performance at the Cross-
Rivers boxing match that New Orleans–style jazz began to make inroads into the
small and conservative African-American music scene of Los Angeles. Up to that
time, Los Angeles had remained a rather sleepy town in terms of nightlife and
music making. Pioneer Los Angeles musician Reb Spikes reported to Stoddard
that “Los Angeles had mostly just piano players in the early days before 1913. I
know when I used to go to dances here they just had a piano player. He had all the
dance jobs and his name was Sam McVea. He finally got up to three pieces: piano,
mandolin, and drums. That’s the only Negro I remember around here, and you
couldn’t have a dance unless you had McVea. We didn’t have any dance halls in
Los Angeles so there weren’t any places for musicians to play. San Francisco had
the dance halls for the bands.”

The Sam McVea referred to by Spikes was likely related to (or perhaps was
himself) the father of Jack McVea. Jack got his start as a musician playing banjo
for his father’s group, McVea’s Howdy Band, in the 1920s, joining the band when
he was only eleven years old. According to Jack, the Howdy Band always played
from written arrangements in a straight style “without ragging.” Most of Los An-
geles’s black dance-band musicians were formally trained in European art music,
to a greater degree than their counterparts elsewhere in the country, and music-
reading ability was a prerequisite for professional success in the society dance-
band scene. Black Angelenos were, on the whole, more affluent and more formally
educated during the first part of the century than any comparable African-
American community in the country, and this was reflected in musical training
and tastes.

Prior to a large-scale expansion of railroad service to California around 1915,
only the wealthiest of southern blacks could get to the West Coast. Los Angeles re-
mained a rather exclusive enclave for African Americans of high economic and
social standing, with an inordinately low percentage of unskilled urban workers,
farmers, and others representing lower economic brackets. Such a community
had no desire to be identified with a larger “black American culture” and espe-
cially abhorred the notion of association with poor blacks of the rural South. The
valued symbols and cultural practices of black Los Angeles reflected the commu-
nity’s adaptations of white middle-class culture. Measures of sophistication and
prestige were largely held in common by both groups. In terms of musical taste,
European art music and popular mainstream dance music—played by musicians who "were expected to read music and to play the music as written" with "very little improvisation or embellishing of melodies"—were seen as far more appropriate to the values and aspirations of the established community than were musical forms coming out of the South, such as blues and jazz. Paul Howard, who moved to Los Angeles from Ohio in 1910 when he was about fifteen years old and became one of the city's major musicians and bandleaders in the 1920s, recalled in an interview with Berta Wood that before 1915 the main entertainment in the city's clubs involved German beer garden music, which, along with church music, the symphony, and an occasional brass band, "was all the music there was in those days." Before and during the 1920s, musicians such as John Gray and William T. Wilkins ran music schools that provided conservatory-type musical training for young African-American musicians. Art music recitals by local musicians and internationally renowned black concert artists, including Roland Hayes and Florence Cole-Talbert, were presented quite regularly.

Against the background of this conservative musical environment, it is perhaps no coincidence that the particular New Orleans jazz musicians who enjoyed the greatest success in Los Angeles in the early days of the city's jazz scene—for example, Jelly Roll Morton, Kid Ory, William Johnson, and Ernest Coyault—were light-skinned Creoles with excellent formal musical training. The specific significance of such formal skills within the context of the particular demands of the city's jazz scene will be explored later in this chapter.

As southern blacks began migrating to Los Angeles in ever-increasing numbers in the middle part of the 1910s, the Los Angeles African-American community not only grew dramatically, it also changed dramatically, and the musical climate of the time followed suit. Reb Spikes states that in 1913, "The only Negro-owned place [for music] in Los Angeles was the Dreamland at Fourth and Standard [but] durin' the war, from 1914 on, there was four or five Negro-owned places." Spikes mentions the Cadillac Cafe and Murray's Cafe (at 56th on Central) as two such places, both of which were owned by "a Negro fella named Murray." The Dreamland Hall at Eighth and Spring Street, first of the black-owned Los Angeles dance clubs, was, incidentally, the venue for one of the Creole Band's early Los Angeles performances prior to the group's discovery by Pantages.

As the community grew on and around Central Avenue and the demand for music for social occasions grew in response, bands began to form. They were made up of local musicians, New Orleans musicians, and players from other parts of the country, especially Texas and, somewhat later, Chicago. By February 1916, Central Avenue was host to a number of black-owned businesses: two hotels, a dry goods store, the Angels motion picture theater (advertised in the March 10, 1916, California Eagle as the "Only Show House Owned by Colored Men in the Entire West"), the Booker T. Washington Building, a drugstore, and numerous smaller businesses. Central Avenue was growing quickly, and, as Gioia points out, "From the first, black music was part of this economic expansion."
The demand for jazz and “syncopated music” grew as a result of both the influx of African Americans from Louisiana and other parts of the South and the excitement felt by more adventurous Angelinos who had been intoxicated by the hot sounds of the Creole Band and touring groups who came through town. Even local bands that had not traditionally played in a true jazz style got in on the jazz vogue. The Wood Wilson Band, for example, which was already active as a local dance band by 1913 (at which time Reb Spikes played with the group), did not include any bona fide jazz players; yet by 1916, when a young Paul Howard joined the group, doubling on saxophone and clarinet, bandleader Wilson had renamed the group Wood Wilson’s Syncopators, and the band was being billed as a “Famous Jass Band” at such events as Los Angeles’s first-ever automobile show, which took place at the Watts Country Club.

It was about a year prior to his joining Wilson’s band (his first music job) that Howard first caught the jazz bug, hearing the Creole Band for the first time at the Pantages Theater in Los Angeles. Howard recalls, “I had never heard anything like it in my life. I was working at Bullock’s department store and going to school and I cut both of them to hear the band. During their two-week engagement I didn’t miss a performance.” After a brief stint with Wilson’s Syncopators, Howard moved on to McVea’s Howdy Band at the Dreamland Hall and in 1918 joined the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra. The Black and Tan was originally from Texas, a ten-piece “cake-walking ragtime brass band that came to Los Angeles with a carnival” in 1916 or earlier. A notice in the January 8, 1916, edition of The California Eagle announces a dance at 19th and Central featuring the Black and Tan Orchestra.

In 1918 local trombonist Harry Southard, who had been active in Los Angeles dance bands since at least 1913, when he and Reb Spikes were both members of the Wood Wilson Band, took over leadership of the Black and Tan. As Howard puts it, Southard “reshuffled” the group into a jazz band, changing its name from the Black and Tan Orchestra (or Band) to the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra (the billing used in the Eagle for an October 12, 1919, appearance at the Dreamland Cafe). Unlike Wilson’s band, the Black and Tan did have at least one “genuine” jazz musician, Ernest Coycault, the cornet and trumpet player who had come to Los Angeles in 1908 with Bill Johnson’s first New Orleans touring band and stayed. In addition to Coycault, Southard hired Howard to play clarinet and tenor saxophone. The Black and Tan became one of the busiest groups in Los Angeles through the first half of the twenties, posing the most serious competition to bands led by newly arriving New Orleans musicians, especially those of Jelly Roll Morton and Kid Ory.

Jelly Roll Morton and Kid Ory: Resident New Orleans Jazz Masters

Jelly Roll Morton, the highly influential pianist, composer, bandleader, and self-proclaimed “inventor of jazz,” was the first of these two jazz luminaries to move
west. Though he had been to California as early as 1912 and possibly even earlier,\textsuperscript{66} it was not until 1917\textsuperscript{67} that Morton actually stationed himself in the state. Based primarily in Los Angeles, he also performed in San Diego and San Francisco touring as far south as Tampico, Mexico, and as far north as Vancouver, Canada, over the course of the next five years. Often his touring activities centered around cabaret and dance-hall performances of his vaudeville show, which featured the famous entertainer Bert Williams.\textsuperscript{58}

Beginning in 1917, Morton worked the cabarets along Central Avenue, such as the Cadillac Cafe (553 Central—see Figure 1.2), the Newport Bar, and the Penny Dance Hall (Ninth Street at Central). Reed notes performances by Jelly Roll at George Brown's Little Harlem and Baron Long's (both in Watts), at the U.S. Grand Hotel, and at the Jump Steady Club, where he appeared with the great blues singer Jimmy Rushing. Reed also notes Morton's employment as pianist for a house of prostitution in an area of downtown Los Angeles called "Nigger Alley."\textsuperscript{68}

Of these establishments, the only one that advertised in the Eagle was the Cadillac Cafe, which beginning in November 1917 promoted itself in newspaper ads as having "The Highest Class Entertainers, Music and Service."\textsuperscript{70} Though Morton's name does not appear in the ads, his autobiography\textsuperscript{71} indicates that the Cadillac was his first main gig after he arrived in Los Angeles in 1917 and that the band he played with there initially was composed of local (at least, non-New Orleans) players:

The Cadillac was again in bloom. Of course, the musicians couldn't play the tunes we could in New Orleans; they didn't have the ability. So we had to play what we could—The Russian Rag, Black and White, Maple Leaf Rag, Liza Jane (a little comedy song, the whole Coast went for that), Daddy Dear, I'm Crying For You, Melancholy Baby—these were quite prominent in 1917, if I don't get the years mixed up. Then I wrote a tune and called it Cadillac Rag that we used to do with a singer.\textsuperscript{72}

The first reference to Morton in the Eagle appears on the second page of the April 5, 1919, issue. Here, the first of a series of daily ads indicates that "the Great Jelly Roll and his Jazz Band" performed nightly at the Dixie Hotel Bar and Cafe on Jackson Street near Kerney for at least three months (see Figure 1.3).\textsuperscript{73} Following the ads for the extended stay at the Dixie, Morton's name disappears from the paper, not reappearing until May 1922. It is likely that for at least part of the intervening three years his musical activities centered around a small dance hall he took on as a business venture after deciding to settle in Los Angeles (at least temporarily). Morton's life as a businessman also involved pimping, gambling, and hustling.\textsuperscript{74} Given his prosperity during his years in Los Angeles, which was only nominally attributable to his musical activities,\textsuperscript{75} there was clearly a market for the "sportin' life" on Central Avenue. This was a cause of distress for the upstanding, conservative, black Angeleno establishment, which feared the community's moral standards would decline as the migration of southern blacks increased. The conservatives found support for their positions in the pages of the Eagle, as shown in the following passage from a 1917 article:
Figure 1.2. Jelly Roll Morton at the Cadillac Cafe, Los Angeles, 1917 or 1918. Left to right: “Common Sense” Ross, Albertine Pickens, Jelly Roll Morton, Ada “Brick-top” Smith, Eddie Rucker, Mabel Watts. From Floyd Levin’s Jazz Archives. Used by permission.

The Hotel Gordon, of 750 Pacific Street, Has Moved
TO ITS NEW AND SPACIOUS BUILDING AT
606-608 JACKSON ST.
WHERE IT WILL BE KNOWN AS THE
DIXIE HOTEL Bar and Cafe
Entertainment Every Evening by the Great Jelly Roll and his Jazz Band. — Now Open For Business — Ladies Entrance
DON'T FORGET THE ADDRESS: 606 and 608 JACKSON STREET
Right Above Kerney Street
Will announce Grand Opening later. ALEX COCHRANE, Prop.

Figure 1.3. Hotel Gordon/Dixie Hotel. Advertisement for Jelly Roll Morton at the Dixie Hotel Bar and Cafe, The California Eagle (5 April 1919): 2.
The question has been asked of us what are we going to do about conditions on Central Avenue. It is claimed that gambling is flourishing on this thoroughfare like the proverbial Green Bay tree, but we surmise that the anti dice shaking ordinance will now at least put a quietus on the crap games and reduce the pernicious practice to a minimum. At any event the Eagle at all times stands for law and order and we must insist that Central Avenue shall have the fullest protection from those who choose to violate the law.79

Further efforts to crack down on corruption and vice resulted in a city ordinance requiring that all dance halls close at midnight. As the proprietor of a dance hall, Morton was frustrated by the ordinance, and to get around the restriction he "went partners with Pops Woodward, the trombone player and we opened up the Wayside Park at Leek's Lake out in Watts County. There we could stay open all night."77 Just what Morton's business arrangement was with Reb and John Spikes, who ran the cafe at Wayside Park and were in charge of its entertainment programs, is not entirely clear. It appears that Morton was hired by the Spikes as a kind of musical director for the amusement park.

Exactly when Morton's group started performing at Wayside Park is also a matter for speculation, but it is certain that by May 1922 his group was playing there regularly. An announcement in the Eagle billed a performance by "Jelly Roll's Indispensable 10-Piece Jazz Symphony" at Wayside Park featuring "Dancing from 2:00 p.m. till 3:00 a.m."78 Subsequent notices in the paper indicate that Morton's orchestra became Wayside Park's house band for several months, playing every Thursday and Saturday at dances that were produced "Under responsible management—Good order always assured."79 It seems that Morton played at Wayside until sometime before the end of 1922, when he left Los Angeles for Arizona.

The Wayside Park dances became a focal point of social life in Los Angeles's African-American community during the 1920s. Apparently running all afternoon, all evening, and into the early morning hours, they drew large and diverse crowds ranging from families seeking a venue for an outing or a picnic to stylish nightlife types looking for some fun and action. Visiting black celebrities also found their way to Wayside Park dances on occasion. In April 1922, for example, Morton entertained Joe "King" Oliver there.80 Some of the faces in the band were no doubt familiar to Oliver, since Morton's groups by this time were made up almost exclusively of expatriate New Orleans jazz players: Pops Woodward, Bill Johnson, Buddy Petit, Frankie Dusen, and Wade Whaley (or Waley), to name a few.81 According to one source, Oliver himself played a "short appearance at Leake's Lake," supported by a band that included Sonny Clay on drums.82

Petit, Dusen, and Whaley moved to Los Angeles at the invitation of Morton and Bill Johnson, both of whom were enjoying prosperous careers and thought it would be a good investment "to bring a real New Orleans band to the coast in order to build Leek's Lake up."83 Dressed in their sharpest clothes, Johnson and Morton went to the train station to pick up their old cronies, riding in Johnson's very fine MacFarland automobile. As Morton reports in *Mister Jelly Roll*:
We knew they would arrive in the antiquated dress habitual to New Orleans musicians, their instruments all taped up to keep them airtight and Waley's clarinet in his back pocket. . . . We were afraid somebody would see them and think they were clowns, so we rushed them to the tailors and put them in some decent-looking clothes . . .

But, man, those guys could really play. Petit was second only to Keppard on the cornet, had tremendous power in all registers and great ideas. He was a slow reader, but if the tune was played off first, he would pick up his part so fast no one knew he couldn't read. And, as for Dusen, he was the best there was at that time on trombone. So we had a very hot five-piece band and made plenty money—$75 a night and the tips doubled the salaries.99

The music and the money may have been great, but Petit, Dusen, and Whaley, by Morton's account, could not adjust to the high style of West Coast living preferred by Jelly Roll, Johnson, and other transplanted New Orleans musicians. The newly arrived jazz artists would show up for gigs at Wayside Park with "a bucket of red beans and rice and cook it on the job." Morton and drummer Dink Johnson (brother of Anita Gonzales, Jelly Roll's girlfriend)98 began to ridicule their lowbrow bandmates mercilessly. "And Buddy and Frankie blew up," recalled Morton, "threatened to kill us. Next day, they left town, without notice, and went back to New Orleans. Which shows you never fool with a New Orleans musician, as he is noted for his hot temper."96

The indignant departure of Petit and Dusen took place in 1922 by Morton's reckoning. As Pops Foster remembers it, Dusen did depart Los Angeles in 1922, but for different reasons than those described by Morton. According to Foster, it was Dusen's inability to make the scene musically, rather than in terms of social etiquette or style of dress, that prompted him to leave California. Dusen, Petit, and a couple of other New Orleans musicians had a band that got a job playing at a vaudeville theater, Foster says. "The first week they played their music and the people raved over them. The next week the vaudeville acts came in and they had to play music for the acts. None of them could read and that was it." Dusen reportedly caught the train back to New Orleans that same night.67

If there is truth to Foster's account, Dusen was but one of many players who moved to Los Angeles from New Orleans, Chicago, Texas, and other parts of the country with hopes of improved professional prospects, only to find that whatever their merits as improvisers, "syncopators," and "fakers," the particular demands of the Los Angeles musical scene were not geared to their success. Even with the rising popularity of jazz, opportunities to play "hot" jazz remained limited in Los Angeles. For a great many musicians from the South and East, a lack of music-reading ability rendered professional survival impossible. As Jack McVea explains, they "couldn't make a living here because they didn't read well enough."88 As jazz bands increased in size and musical aesthetics changed through the 1920s, New Orleans "hot" jazz gradually transformed into the more polished and arranged big-band styles of the "swing era" of the 1930s. "Un schooled" jazz musicians
faced a steady decline in marketability nationwide, but in Los Angeles, the obstacles for non- or poor-reading musicians were severely limiting from the very beginning.

Even in the playing and appreciation of "hot" jazz, the musical priorities of Los Angeles musicians and their audiences seem to have been somewhat different from those of their counterparts in other parts of the country. Because of the European art music background of most local players and the conservative aesthetic sensibilities of Los Angeles's black establishment, well-schooled local musicians with limited skills in improvisation tended to enjoy greater professional success than hot-blowing improvisers from New Orleans, Chicago, and elsewhere. For example, Reb Spikes states: "I was never much of a jazzman. I played baritone sax and I never could play a lot of hot jazz. I played a lot of counterpoint like cello parts. That's what made our music good and different from anybody else. All them other guys was jammin' and jammin', but when we'd play, I'd be carryin' a counter-melody, and I always tried to play two melodies." Jack McVea's assessment of his own abilities as a jazz saxophone player reflects a similar perspective: "I wasn't a great jazzman, not a real improviser, but I really knew how to play a melody, get that right sound and phrasing." One would not expect to hear comments like these from early Chicago jazz stars. Although on the basis of available phonograph recordings it is difficult to challenge Gioia's assertion that "in the 1920s there was no 'West Coast jazz,' if by that one means a distinctive regional style," the musical skills that enabled one to make it on the Los Angeles jazz scene apparently differed from those that helped one succeed in, say, Chicago. From this one might reasonably speculate that such distinctions would have been reflected, at least to some extent, in a regional distinctiveness in musical style. Perhaps the long-standing, sometimes inappropriate perception of an essential contrast between the intense, adventurous jazz characteristic of the East Coast and the more laid-back, "refined" West Coast jazz aesthetic has an even longer history than we are currently aware of, dating back to the earliest days of California jazz. The comments by Spikes and McVea and the relatively conservative cultural inclinations of the Los Angeles African-American community of the 1920s outlined in Bunch and other writings would seem to support such a notion.

In any case, the musicians from New Orleans and other parts of the country who did achieve professional success in Los Angeles tended to be "schooled" musicians. Jelly Roll Morton, Kid Ory, Ernest Cugault, and Sonny Clay, for example, were all skilled readers in addition to being great improvisers, and they called upon their formal musical training not only on society dance-band gigs but in their jazz playing activities as well. Ory, who played with Morton in Los Angeles before he was a member of Morton's famous Red Hot Peppers recording bands in Chicago, told Floyd Levin in an interview that Morton "was a very tough man to work for. . . . He knew what he wanted and would not permit any variation from the arrangements he had written. They were tough to play—the tempos were difficult—lots of key changes. But he was right. The records sound great!"
Sonny Clay was another talented composer/arranger/bandleader who had impressive formal musical skills and required the same of the musicians he hired for his bands. Clay learned to read music from his first music teacher, one Professor Ariola, with whom he studied while growing up in Phoenix. As Clay told John Bentley, Ariola “made me read every fly speck on the sheet music.” The trombonist in Clay’s band, Luther Gravens, lacked comparable training and thus struggled to keep up with the demands of Clay’s musical arrangements. In the early part of his tenure with Clay, Gravens was very resourceful (but not always successful) in trying to work around his limited reading skills, as illustrated in an amusing anecdote told by Clay to John Bentley:

Though the band was playing only blues and stomps during this period the music was still arranged, which presented a small problem to current trombonist Luther Gravens. Whenever the sheet music handed him proved difficult Luther somehow managed to lose it during the course of the evening. For the balance of the night he would lean heavily towards Coyault and follow the cornet lead. After this had taken place several times Coyault became aware of what Gravens was doing and began taking liberties with the melody that left the trombonist a little distraught at what course to follow. Gravens was, however, a fine musician and was finally made to accept the fact that he had to read to maintain his spot in the band.

Individual musicians responded differently to the musical demands of 1920s Los Angeles. Faced with the reality of his inadequacies as a reader but aware of his tremendous talents as a jazz trombonist, Frankie Dusen chose to leave the city and seek out a more hospitable musical environment very shortly after his arrival out west in 1922. Luther Gravens, conversely, chose to stay in Los Angeles and through diligent effort was eventually able to bring his reading skills up to the necessary level of competence.

For Jelly Roll Morton, who, like Dusen, left Los Angeles in 1922, the decision to move on had little if anything to do with musical considerations; it was, rather, a matter of personal concern. Morton left Los Angeles to follow his “paramour and muse,” Anita Gonzales, to Arizona, where she was going to open a restaurant. The restaurant did not last long, and soon the couple had moved back to the West Coast, this time to San Francisco, where Morton opened a club called the Jupiter. Eventually, Morton moved on to Chicago, New York, and other places before ultimately returning to Los Angeles in 1940, dying in poverty and obscurity in 1941.

Though the Los Angeles stage of Morton’s career has been treated as little more than a footnote by most historians, during the five years he resided there he produced some of his most important work. According to Martin Williams, “it was probably during the California years that Morton came to understand that music was his real calling, and his composing there seems to have been prolific.” Entering into a publishing venture with the Spikes brothers, Morton’s earliest musical manuscripts, “Froggie Moore Rag,” as well as “Wolverine Blues” and “Kansas City Stomp,” were first published in Los Angeles. According to one source, Mor-
ton may have even made his first recordings in Los Angeles, although if this is true they were apparently never released.99 Trombonist Kid Ory moved west to Los Angeles in 1919. Like Morton, Ory soon became professionally connected in Los Angeles with the ubiquitous Spikes brothers, not in the area of music publishing but rather in recording. The Spikes brothers initiated their Sunshine record label by producing two recordings of Ory’s band in June 1921:100 “Ory’s Creole Trombone” and “Society Blues,” (along with two other sides in which Ory’s Sunshine Orchestra backs up female vocalists Roberta Dudley and Ruth Lee).101 According to Reb Spikes, he and his brother borrowed their recording equipment from the Nordskog record company, which left the original labels on the disks (explaining why these recordings are credited to Nordskog in discographies). Actually, the involvement of Nordskog and Sunshine in producing the Ory recordings is a complex and convoluted issue, detailed in an excellent article by Levin.102 For our purposes, what is most important is that the 1921 recordings made in Los Angeles by Ory’s Sunshine Orchestra have the distinction of being the first records ever made by an African-American instrumental jazz band.103 The band for these classic sides consisted of Ory on trombone, Mutt Carey on cornet, Dink Johnson on clarinet, pianist Fred Washington, bassist Montudie Garland, and drummer Ben Borders, all of whose musical roots (with the exception of Borders) traced back to New Orleans. According to Reb Spikes, six sides were actually recorded, but four of the masters melted in the sun while being transported through the California desert.104 Beyond these historic recordings, Ory’s five-year sojourn to Los Angeles has received little notice from jazz scholars, who have tended to treat the period almost as a hiatus between his early career in New Orleans and his illustrious later achievements in Chicago, where, most notably, he became a member of the great Louis Armstrong recording bands of the mid-1920s. Yet Ory had a very busy career in Los Angeles, especially, it would appear, from 1922 until 1924, during which time his appearances were regularly announced in the Eagle.

Ory’s choice to head west rather than north when he left New Orleans was actually the result of a decision made by his wife. “I asked my wife if she’d rather live in Chicago or California,” he recalled years later. “She thought she’d like California. I said, ‘We’re going to leave Thursday.’”105

Upon arriving in Los Angeles, Ory’s first engagement was at the Cadillac Café on Central Avenue. He sent word to Louis Armstrong, who was still living in New Orleans at the time, to come out and join his band. Armstrong declined the offer, so the job was offered to Mutt Carey, who had been a member of Ory’s band back in New Orleans. Carey settled in Los Angeles and became an important part of the city’s jazz scene through the 1920s, first as a member of Ory’s band and then, after Ory left for Chicago in 1924, as the leader of his own band, Papa Mutt and His Syncopators.106 Carey would certainly have achieved wider fame had he moved on to Chicago. “Most everybody has heard of Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong, but few ever heard of Mutt Carey in his prime,” claims Preston Jackson.
“Mutt Carey, in his day, was equal to Joe Oliver. . . . I never will forget Mutt Carey.”

Another musician who moved to Los Angeles to play with Ory, apparently in 1922, was bassist Pops Foster. Ory sent for Pops after having a falling out with his regular bassist, Montudie Garland. As Foster remembers it, “Montudie and Ory got in a fight like they always did. Montudie went to work for the Black and Tan Band, and Ory didn’t have a bass player. He wrote to me to come out. I wanted to get away from my first wife, Berta, so I went. Back then if a bandleader wanted you to play with him, he’d write and send you money for the trip. After you started working you had to pay it back.”

When Foster arrived, Ory’s band had a regular engagement at a place called the One-Eleven Dance Hall at 111 West Third Street, a “taxi dance hall.” At this type of establishment the male customers paid ten cents for the privilege of dancing with glamorous hostesses. Each dance was only about a minute long, so the band constantly had to change tunes and tempos. Lionel Hampton, who also commenced his Los Angeles career with a steady job at a taxi dance hall, fondly recalls the musical challenges of the situation: “Timing was very important in that job. When the place got crowded, the manager always wanted us to speed up so the numbers would be shorter and the guys would have to pay more nickels. Since I was the drummer, I controlled the tempo, and the owner always gave the signal to me. I liked experimenting with the tempo of songs anyway, and I like things fast, anyway.”

Foster was perhaps less enthusiastic about taxi dance halls than Hampton and soon moved on to a job with Mutt Carey’s group at the Liberty Dance Hall on Third Street near Main. But for Foster, “Los Angeles proved to be a dull place,” and in 1923 he left and headed for St. Louis. He returned to Los Angeles for a few months in 1927 at the invitation of Carey, who had taken over Ory’s band when Ory left for Chicago and renamed it The Liberty Syncopators. Besides Carey and Foster, the band included drummer Minor Hall, who had first moved to California from New Orleans in 1921 with Joe Oliver, returning to settle in Los Angeles permanently in 1927; trombonist Leon White, formerly the drummer for the Black and Tan band; and clarinetist Joe Darsenbourg.

Both during and after Foster’s tenure, the Kid Ory band appears to have been continually busy. Judging by the number of engagements advertised in the Eagle between 1922 and 1924, they were apparently rivaled only by the Black and Tan Orchestra in popularity. Following the group’s first notice in the Eagle in June 1922, ads for performances by Ory’s Creole Jazz Band appeared regularly in the paper through 1924. The band’s first mention occurs in an announcement of a “Grand Old Fashioned Picnic and Barbecue” at Roschiilll Park featuring music by the Black and Tan Jazz Band, with Ory’s group receiving second billing. Ory has been cited as saying that during his years in Los Angeles, his was the most talked-about jazz band in the area and that the group “cut” the Black and Tan band in front of appreciative audiences on a number of occasions. The Rose-
hill Park picnic and barbecue was likely the scene of one of these “cutting contests” between the two bands, another of which apparently occurred at an Elks picnic at Eagle Rock Park on June 19, 1924.

Between 1922 and 1924, Ory’s band played at all kinds of functions, such as a “Grand Benevolent Benefit Dance” at the Moose Hall De Luxe in December 1922 and another “Grand Dance” given by the Young Men’s Afro-American Republican League five days later at Normandie Hall (at Normandie and Jefferson), where the band conducted its own dance every Tuesday night. As of February 1923, Ory’s group was featured three nights a week at the Hiawatha Dancing Academy, “the largest and cleanest place of amusement for the race in Los Angeles,” according to “Ragtime” Billy Tucker, a well-known local promoter who co-owned and managed the Hiawatha along with M. T. Laws. Ory was also featured every Sunday at Watsida Park (“the only park and cafe in the city owned by the Race”), apparently taking over as leader of the house band following Jelly Roll Morton’s departure, and had just completed a fourteen-week engagement at the Plantation Cafe, “the largest white cafe on Coast.” The Plantation Cafe was one of a great many clubs in Los Angeles and throughout the country where black entertainers performed for exclusively white audiences.

Ory’s band was also featured during special one-day boat and train excursions to nearby destinations such as Catalina Island, San Diego, and Tijuana, Mexico. These excursions emerged as a novel feature of early-1920s black social life in Los Angeles and furnished yet another type of venue for jazz band dances. They were sponsored by the Panama Social Club and its president, M. T. Laws. Each excursion featured entertainment by a top local jazz or dance band (sometimes two) such as the Black and Tan, Wood Wilson’s “Satisfied” Orchestra, or the Angel City Brass Band. Each included a picnic and barbecue, a trip to a bullfight or a baseball game, and a big dance. A “Scenic Special Trip Deluxe” train excursion to San Diego and “Tia Juana, Old Mexico,” on August 5, 1922 (round-trip $5.35, $2.75 for children), featured “Music for the Entire Trip Furnished by Ed. Ory’s Sunshine Orchestra.” The page-four advertisement in the July 29 edition of the Eagle is interesting both for its inclusion of a photograph of Ory and his band and for its pronouncement of Ory’s Sunshine Orchestra as “the only race jazz band that has made phonograph records on the coast,” an obvious reference to the Sunshine/Nordiskog recordings.

In addition to his formal musical engagements, Ory is reported to have led the house band at the Ranch Club, “a jamming, after-hours spot” where resident New Orleans jazzers, local players, and touring musicians, both white and black, would congregate and jam after their regular gigs. A young Benny Goodman is reported to have sat in with Ory at the Ranch Club. Some years later, it was another Los Angeles after-hours venture by Goodman, to the Paradise Cafe, that resulted in Goodman’s first meeting and musical encounter with Lionel Hampton, an occasion marking the beginning of their very important musical partnership.

In 1924 (possibly as late as early 1925), Ory moved to Chicago to join King
Oliver's Creole Syncopators. He was the trombonist for Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven recording bands, which featured Armstrong in his prime and produced some of the greatest and most influential recordings of all time. Ory returned to Los Angeles in 1929, but musical tastes had changed with the dawning of the swing big-band era, and his style was no longer popular. By about 1933 he had moved away from music and was making his living sorting mail and running a chicken farm with his brother. In 1942 he was "rediscovered" and became an important part of the "Dixieland Revival" of the 1940s. Between 1949 and 1954, his Los Angeles-based New Orleans revival band featured trumpeter Teddy Buckner, who fondly remembers Ory as "a great guy and a superb cook." As Buckner told me, "All those guys from New Orleans could cook!" He made sure to clarify that in this case he was using the term "cook" literally rather than as a metaphor for playing music well.119

The Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra

There are few early jazz enthusiasts who could not tell you something about both Jelly Roll Morton and Kid Ory; there are probably just as few who could tell you anything about the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra. Yet in its day the Black and Tan was at least as popular in Los Angeles as either Jelly Roll Morton's or Kid Ory's bands and may well have been more popular on the local scene than either.

As mentioned earlier, the Black and Tan Orchestra moved to Los Angeles from Texas as a ten-piece "cake-walking, ragtime brass band" in 1916 or earlier and was refashioned into a jazz band in 1918 by local trombonist Harry Southard. Renamed the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra, it was reduced to a quintet and redesigned in instrumentation, repertoire, and musical style on the model of the Creole Band and other hot New Orleans jazz units. The group featured Southard, reedman Paul Howard, tuba/bass/piano player James "Tuba Jack" Jackson, drummer Leon White, and cornetist Ernest Coycault.120 Southard and Howard were longtime Angelenos. I have been unable to determine whether Jackson and White were local products or Texans who migrated to California with the original Black and Tan Orchestra. Coycault was the hot soloist of the group and its genuine link to the New Orleans jazz tradition. Gushee describes Coycault as "a very effective ragtime player whose rhythmic verve ought to have made a great impression on any cornetists who might have heard him between 1910 and 1930."121 Judging by a few rare recordings featuring Coycault with bands led by Sonny Clay, he appears to have been an exceptional player who, like Mutt Carey and others who moved to California and chose not to leave, was destined to historical obscurity by his West Coast address.

In 1922, Coycault was replaced in the Black and Tan by trumpeter James Porter122 and joined a new jazz band being formed by Sonny Clay. Leon White
also left the Black and Tan group to play with Clay, for whom he worked as a trombonist rather than drummer. The new trumpeter, Porter, had migrated from Chicago and ultimately came to be known as “the King of the Coast.” He would go on to play with most of the premiere bands in Los Angeles during the twenties and thirties, including the Sunnyland Jazz Band in the mid-twenties, Curtis Mosby’s Dixieland Blue Blowers in the latter part of the decade, and Les Hite’s big band in the thirties. Porter was apparently a rather abrasive individual. A teenaged Teddy Buckner once got up the courage to ask him for trumpet lessons, only to be cussed out and told to go away. Years later, Buckner became a member of the trumpet section of Les Hite’s big band, in which Porter played lead trumpet. Buckner found the experience rather humbling: “Having James Porter on the stand made me feel like I was playing trombone.”

Whether with Coycalt or Porter, the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra enjoyed tremendous popularity in the late teens and early twenties. Jelly Roll Morton and Kid Ory each claimed to rule the roost in Los Angeles during their respective tenures there, but the evidence in 1918–1924 issues of the Eagle indicates that the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra was at least as popular locally as the bands of either of these jazz legends. The Black and Tan had extended nightly engagements at major nightclubs such as the Cadillac Cafe and the Dreamland Cafe; held weekly dances at the Arion Hall on East Third Street on Thursdays and at Washington and Central Hall on Mondays; performed at Sunday baseball games at White Sox Park; played at holiday balls and dances such as the 1923 Elks Thanksgiving Ball and the 1924 Iriquois Friday Morning Club’s May Fete Dance, both held at Blanchard Hall; was featured on boat excursions to Catalina Island and Tijuana; and participated in fund-raising events—e.g., Social Benefit for the Delegate to the 1921 Pan-African Congress in London, held at Caldwell’s Recreation Garden in Santa Monica on July 30 (an event that also featured the Westside Jazz Band and Wood Wilson’s “Satisfied” Vendome Band), a “Dance for Charity Benefit” for the Eastside Mothers’ Home (May 1922), the “Pilgrims Home Grand Benefit” for the black community’s senior citizens’ home and hospital, on May 8, 1922, and an “Educational Fund Benefit Musical Dance” in July, the latter two both at Wayside Park. Finally, the band provided entertainment at political meetings and patriotic events, such as the Washington’s Birthday Grand Patriotic Ball (February 22, 1918) at the Shrine Auditorium, the Patriotic Meeting of the Republican Protective League (April 21, 1918) at the Mason Hall on Central Avenue, and a Grand Ballot Ball held at election time in November 1923 (also featuring the Sunnyland Jazz Band). In addition to all of these advertised performances, the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra performed regularly at the One-Eleven Dance Hall at Third and Main.

The entertainment programs for these fund-raising events were especially interesting. For the 1922 Pilgrims Home benefit, the band was advertised in the Eagle (April 29) as “The far famed and unbeatable Black and Tan Band—Nuf Sed” on
a bill with "That Famous Star—Mayme [sic] Smith—who Sings for the Okeh Record Company.... Here you will see and hear her in person as she sings the Crazy Blues." The recording mentioned in the notice represents a major landmark in American music history. As Martin Williams explains,

*Crazy Blues* by Mamie Smith and Her Jazz Hounds sold three million copies.... The success of *Crazy Blues* is, as is often said, the success of the first Negro woman singer to record an authentic blues. Unquestionably, it paved the way for recordings by even more artistically successful singers like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. But it also established the regular recording of Negro music of all kinds by Negro musicians.

Following the success of "Crazy Blues," many record companies began recording African-American musicians in order to capitalize on the music's perceived market potential. "Race" record catalogues aimed primarily at black audiences were soon established. The race record phenomenon spawned by "Crazy Blues" helped pave the way for instrumental jazz recordings by African-American musicians as well, beginning with the aforementioned classics recorded by Ory in Los Angeles in 1921. Though Chicago- and New York–based companies dominated the recording of African-American jazz during the twenties, Los Angeles became the principal recording center on the West Coast. Beginning in 1929, when Louis Armstrong recorded a number of sides for the Okeh label with the house orchestra from Sebastian's New Cotton Club in Los Angeles, the city entered the mainstream of the recording industry. Between the time of Ory's pioneering 1921 recordings and the 1930 Okeh sides featuring Armstrong, several top local Los Angeles bands made recordings.

Although the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra never recorded, it broke ground at other levels. At the "Educational Fund Benefit Musical Dance" of July 1922, for example, the Black and Tan was programmed alongside a program of "classical singing and dancing." This may have been one of the first events ever in Los Angeles to include art music and jazz performers on the same bill. The only other such combination of which I know occurred some six years later during the 1928 NAACP National Convention.

The infrequent occurrence of mixed programs of jazz and art music in Los Angeles during this period is not especially surprising, given the condescending attitude toward jazz professed by many in the black Angeleno establishment. From the viewpoint of middle-class and upper-class blacks, jazz was an unsophisticated rhythmic dance and entertainment music that had no place alongside art music in the concert hall; thus, programs including both classical and jazz music were rare. John Gray, a well-known African-American pianist and music teacher in Los Angeles during this period who wrote a column for the *Eagle* called "In the Music World," had the following to say about jazz in 1919:

The popularity of Jazz is due to its appeal to the primitive in man. Itself is primitive since it consists principally of strong rhythms, and rhythm is the foundation of
music... It can be observed that in many cases melody plays a very little part, indeed there are times when there is none... At least we can say that Jazz, sans noise and sans harshness, or in other words, stripped of its crudeness, will leave us that basic principal of music, RHYTHM.133

LOS ANGELES JAZZ BANDS OF THE MID-1920s

By 1924 the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra had fallen out of currency in the increasingly competitive Los Angeles jazz-band scene. After August of that year, the group received no further notices in the Eagle, with the exception of one for an appearance at the Elks Annual Picnic in Luna Park on June 19, 1926.134 Whether the band reunited especially for this occasion or continued performing between 1924 and 1926 is unclear. In any case, a key member, saxophonist Paul Howard, left the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra in 1924 to form his own band. Prior to that time, he had been gigging with other groups, and in 1923 he had formed a quartet, the Quality Four, for a stint at the Quality Cafe. Under the name of the pianist, Harvey Brooks, this group recorded six sides for the Hollywood label in 1924.135 Adding a banjoist, Thomas Valentine, the Quality Four became a quintet and changed its name to the Quality Serenaders. After backing up blues singer Hazel Myers on a disastrous 1924 tour, the Serenaders returned to Los Angeles and temporarily disbanded. Howard became a member of Sonny Clay’s band for a short period, there being reunited with old Black and Tan bandmates Ernest Coycault, Leon White, and James Jackson, who had also switched over to Clay’s organization.

Sonny Clay

The apparent demise of the Black and Tan ensemble around 1924 seems to have had much to do with the rise of Sonny Clay as a bandleader around that same time. Of the original five members of the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra, as seen in a 1918 photograph,136 Coycault and White left to join Clay in 1922 (1923 at the latest), Tuba Jack Jackson had become a regular with Clay’s band by 1924,137 and Paul Howard had made his way into the Clay organization by January 1925.

Sonny Clay is by some accounts one of the great but forgotten masters of early jazz. Teddy Buckner, who played in Clay’s band in the late twenties, told me, “Sonny Clay was a genius. He could walk down the street talking to you—having a conversation—and be writing an arrangement at the same time.”138 According to John Bentley, in his time, Clay’s musical abilities as a composer and arranger were “favorably compared with those of his friend and contemporary, Jelly Roll Morton.”139

Clay was born in 1899 in Chapel Hill, Texas, and moved to Phoenix, Arizona, with his family when he was nine. He began his musical career as a drummer at age eleven. Over the years he became a multi-instrumentalist, playing xylophone, trumpet, trombone, and C-melody saxophone, among other instruments, but his
principal instruments were always drums and piano. In his teens he worked as a musician in dance pioneer Arthur Murray's Phoenix studio. Early on, Clay developed a fondness for Mexican music and culture, listening to Mexican bands in Phoenix playing piano in a duo with clarinetist Charlie Green in Mexicali, Calexico, and Tijuana. Clay's experiences with Mexican music influenced his musical style; Jelly Roll Morton liked to refer to the manifestations of this influence as "the Spanish tinge" in Clay's music. On record, the best example of this "Spanish tinge" is "an unexpected rumba-like phrase" heard in a 1921 recording of Clay's composition "Cho-King."

Sonny Clay first met Jelly Roll Morton in Tijuana; he was hitchhiking to San Diego, and Morton happened to pick him up in his big touring car. The two became fast friends and ended up playing together frequently with Morton on piano and Clay alternating between drums, saxophone, and xylophone.141

Around 1921, Charlie Green decided to move to Los Angeles to join Wood Wilson's Original Satisfied Orchestra, and Clay based himself in Tijuana for a time, shuttling back and forth across the border to San Diego for gigs. By January 1921, Green had left Wilson's group to join Reb Spikes's Famous Syncopated Orchestra, and he convinced Spikes to summon Clay to Los Angeles to play drums with the band. Clay accepted Spikes's invitation and joined the group just in time to embark upon a tour that was supposed to cover most of California. The tour was a disaster, however, and the band went broke, its members finally earning enough money for the bus fare back to Los Angeles with three one-night stands in small California towns.142

Back in Los Angeles, Clay struggled, gigging around with different groups and playing solo piano jobs. In July and August 1921, he filled in with Kid Ory's Sunshine Orchestra on drums, temporarily replacing the ailing Ben Borders. Clay also claims to have played with King Oliver at the Royal Gardens in Leake's Lake, "a country club-type spot in Los Angeles," during Oliver's short appearance there, also in the summer of 1921.143

In 1922, Clay decided to form his own jazz band. Enticing Ernest Coycault and Leon White away from the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra, Clay formed a top-flight ensemble of locally based players. At the time of the group's first recordings in 1923, the group also included "Big Boy" Leonard Davidson on clarinet, saxophonists Bob Farrell and Johnny King, banjo player Thomas Valentine, and drummer Willis McDaniel, with Clay playing piano.144 According to Bentley, "Tremendous drive proved the asset most responsible for this new group's ease in obtaining bookings and they immediately found steady employment... The year slipped by quickly and the band was beginning to enjoy tremendous popularity."145

Clay also made his first recordings in 1922, accompanying a young blues vocalist named Camille Allen on two songs released by the Hollywood Record Company's Sunset label. Responding to the ever-growing popularity of Clay's jazz band on the Los Angeles scene, Sunset hired the group to record two sides in 1923.
Two original compositions by Clay, "Lou" and "What a Wonderful Time," were recorded during the session, with the band going under the name The California Poppies. These recordings are extremely rare.

Clay's star continued to rise through 1923 and 1924, as "the band added to its reputation playing in the more prominent night spots in and around Los Angeles." In May 1923, the group, billed as The Stompin’ Six, recorded four more titles for Sunset and began an association with a major record company, Vocalion, recording three sessions in 1925 and 1926. The first side recorded for Vocalion was "Chicago Breakdown," but the most popular was "Bogaloosa Blues," which sold approximately 8,000 copies in Chicago on the first day of its release in that city, attesting to the widespread national reputation that Clay had established by the mid-twenties. McCarthy has located references to Clay's bands in the Chicago Defender, one of the nation's largest African-American newspapers of the period, and the Pittsburgh Courier, from 1922 and 1923, respectively. In both instances, the list of band personnel includes Clay's longtime musical partner, clarinetist Charles Green (identified as "Cash Green" in the Defender).

Despite Clay's high level of prominence on the Los Angeles scene and even at the national level in the first half of the 1920s, his first appearance in the pages of The California Eagle did not occur until February 12, 1926, when a front-page notice hailed his eight-piece group (which included trombonist William B. Woodman Sr. by this time) as the "one and only orchestra of our group West of New York recording for Vocalion." The article continues:

This wonderful musical organization which has made history for our group along musical lines is well worthy of the compliment paid them as without a peer for their particular line of work . . .

This aggregation of men who make real music, already have attained a national reputation. It was made by playing to millions over the radio K. F. I. [sic] and highly commended from all sections of this continent.

The mention of radio performances corroborates Bentley's reference to evening radio broadcasts by Sonny Clay's Stompin' Six during the mid-twenties. However, Bentley's claim that the broadcasts were heard on radio station KNX is possibly an error, assuming that the Eagle's reference to KFI is accurate. In any case, by the time of the 1926 Eagle article, Clay had already achieved unprecedented national attention for a Los Angeles-based jazz bandleader. Clay's fame was further enhanced during this period by well-known white bandleader Herb Weidolt's band, which performed many of his compositions and arrangements. Weidolt capitalized on Clay's talents in much the same way that Benny Goodman capitalized on the talents of Fletcher Henderson. Clay's popularity with white audiences was also fostered by his regular nightly engagement at the Plantation Cafe in Culver City, a premiere whites-only nightclub for the rich and famous (filmmaker D. W. Griffith was a regular customer). Thus, as jazz was appropriated on a grand scale by white mainstream society beginning around the mid-twenties, the
music of Sonny Clay, through his recordings and radio broadcasts and the playing of his works by leading white bands, came to have a significant impact not only locally but nationally as well.

In addition to its other activities, Clay’s band remained active in Los Angeles’s African-American community. Editions of the *Eagle* from 1926 indicate appearances at Arion Hall on February 22, at the grand opening of Eagle Hall (at 822 Central Avenue) on February 24, and at the Elks Annual Picnic and Barbecue at Luna Park on June 19 (a double bill with the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra). In 1927 a February edition of the paper advertised a performance of Clay’s band at the Annual Pre-Lenten Benefit Dance for the St. Philip’s Building Fund. The band then disappears from the pages of the *Eagle* through at least the end of 1929 (where my archival search concluded).

In January 1928, Clay recorded six more sides for Vocalion, only two of which were issued. One of the unissued tracks was “Australian Stomp,” presumably in homage to Clay’s upcoming tour down under, where his group became “probably the first black jazz group ever to tour that continent.” The last of the 1928 Vocalion sessions reportedly took place only a day or two before the band’s departure for Australia. The Australian venture, which featured a large band (probably a ten-piece) and vocalist Ivie Anderson (who would later achieve fame through her association with Duke Ellington), was terminated abruptly when the band was deported because of rambunctious behavior by certain of its members, who most likely were accused of consorting with white women. McCarthy suggests that Clay’s band “must have stayed in Australia for about three months altogether,” although he does not indicate a source for this information. Another Los Angeles–based musician, Teddy Weatherford, was responsible for introducing jazz to China for the first time in the 1920s.

After returning to Los Angeles, Clay restructured his band and secured an engagement at the Vernon Country Club, again playing for all-white audiences. Through 1929 and the early 1930s, he directed a new band. This group, which became the house band at the local racetrack’s café, included a young Teddy Buckner as well as Les Hite. This was a posh gig; Buckner recalls making a base salary of $25 a night, on top of which it was not uncommon for him to pull in $60 in tips. The band also had a stint in San Diego at the Creole Palace and made some film soundtracks. For club dates during this period, Clay replaced the Stompin’ Six designation he had previously used for his gigging bands with the name Rhythm Demons. One of Clay’s aggregations also appeared on screen in a motion picture, with the musicians paid ten dollars each “to don grass skirts and assume the identity of a Zulu band in a café.”

Clay’s final recording sessions with bands took place around August 1931 and featured a ten-piece band dubbed the Dixie Serenaders. Clay’s arrangements of “Cho-King,” “St. Louis Blues,” “River Stay ‘Way from My Door,” “When It’s Sleepy Time Down South,” and “Some of These Days” demonstrate his considerable talents as an arranger.
Throughout most of his life, Clay had a serious drinking problem, and his health began to deteriorate in the 1930s. His drinking, combined with economic hardships brought on by the Depression, rendered the demands of keeping a band together insurmountable, and he turned to solo piano playing and freelance work with bands to make a living. During World War II he was appointed an army band director, returning to club work on the Los Angeles scene following his discharge and reaping the benefits of the city's booming wartime economy for a time. His alcoholism and increasingly poor health, however, interfered with his ability to get and keep jobs. Following an extended hospital stay, he found work at the post office, supplementing his income by tuning pianos.

The Sunnyland Jazz Band

Almost nothing has been written about the Sunnyland Jazz Band by jazz historians, even those who have taken an interest in less prominent 1920s Los Angeles bands and musicians. Furthermore, it seems that the group made no recordings. The main sources of information on the band are Berta Wood's 1956 Jazz Journal article based on an interview with Charlie Lawrence, "one of the few jazz musicians born in Los Angeles", an undated photograph of the group, and a published interview with band member Andrew Blakeney.

In the Wood article, Lawrence claims that he directed the Sunnyland Jazz Orchestra, made up of himself on alto sax, James Porter on trumpet, Ashford Hardie on trombone, Buster Wilson on piano, Howard Patrick on banjo, Clarence Williams (not the New Orleans Clarence Williams) on bass, and Ben Borders on drums. With the addition of tenor saxophonist Jesse Smith, Lawrence's roster is identical to the list of musicians identified in a photograph of the group reprinted in McCarthy.

Blakeney was brought to Los Angeles from Chicago to replace Porter in 1924 after Porter announced his plans to leave the group. However, when Blakeney arrived, Porter changed his mind and decided he wanted to stay. Attempts were made to reorganize the group around a two-trumpet lineup, but Blakeney wanted nothing to do with that. "I said I didn't come out here to play second trumpet, or play with anybody," Blakeney told Floyd Levin. "I was here to take [Porter's] place." After just one gig alongside Porter, Blakeney left the band but stayed in Los Angeles, picking up work where he could find it. A financial settlement between him and the Sunnyland organization was worked out with the help of mediation by Reb Spikes, a close friend of Blakeney's. A short time later, Porter left the band to join Curtis Mosby's Dixieland Blue Blowers at Solomon's Penny Dance Hall, and Blakeney finally got the job he had moved to Los Angeles for in the first place, playing with the Sunnyland every Thursday night at a large dance hall at 15th and Main and at many other engagements.

Charlie Lawrence's claim that he was the leader of the Sunnyland Jazz Band is at least partially contradicted by Blakeney, who reported to Levin that
pianist Buster Wilson was the group’s musical director and spokesperson but that the group was essentially a cooperative organization in which all members had a say in all decisions.169

Though information on the Sunnyland Jazz Band is scarce and the band is little remembered today, all evidence suggests that in its day it was extremely popular in Los Angeles’s African-American community. Between 1924 and 1926, the group received more notices in the *Eagle* than any other jazz band, replacing the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra as the most frequently mentioned group in that publication. Two of its earliest *Eagle*-advertised appearances were a “Pre-Halloween Masquerade Ball” and a “Grand Thanksgiving Ball” in 1923.170 The following month the Sunnyland was one of several musical organizations involved in the “Xmas Chimes Dance and Musical Fiesta” at Washington and Central, an M. T. Laws production that ran from December 22–26 and featured “4 Days—4 Nites—4 Matinees—4 Bands—4 Chimes! The Event Unforgettable! FIRST OF ITS KIND IN LOS ANGELES.” The Sunnyland band played the Christmas Eve engagement dance and the farewell ball Boxing Day Eve; the Black and Tan played the opening Saturday night dance and the “Continuous Round of Merrymaking” from 2:30 p.m. till 1 a.m. Christmas Day. Also featured, in matinee performances, was the Ferris Family Orchestra, consisting of four sisters who played piano, clarinet, violin, and drums and their saxophonist father.171

In 1924, in addition to the usual dances and picnics, Sunnyland was featured at an “Emancipation Celebration” at Lincoln Park Skating Rink on June 19 (with the Ferris Family Orchestra also on the bill) and played at the “Extraordinary Opening” of the Humming Bird Cafe (formerly the Quality Cafe, where Paul Howard’s Quality Four had been the house band one year earlier). Located at 1143 E. 12th Street, the Humming Bird was one of the hottest nightclubs in the area, presenting vaudeville acts and dance music (see Figure 1.4).

Two of the last notices for the Sunnyland Jazz Band in the *Eagle* appear in the April 9 and 16, 1926, editions of the paper:172 The April 9 edition includes an ad for the “Sunnyland Orchestra with Amplifiers” at the Shrine Auditorium, with a rather expensive admission charge of $1 rather than the 50 cents charged for most advertised events of this time. Though the particular type of amplification is not specified, the presence of *any* amplification in a 1926 musical performance is noteworthy.

In March 1925 the Sunnyland band began a weekly Sunday engagement at the Pavilion in Eureka Village. Located in the Eureka Mountains, Eureka Village was a suburban, resort-like residential community for African Americans. It was promoted as the “Destined Greatest Race Community Center—Buy Your Lots Now for Choice Position; They are $100 Up.”173 The Sunnyland band attracted potential home buyers to Eureka Village and provided regular entertainment for residents.

African-American neighborhoods in Los Angeles became increasingly over-
ANNOUNCEMENT EXTRAORDINARY
OPENING
SATURDAY EVENING, JUNE 7th
---THE---
HUMMING BIRD
(Formerly The Quality Café)
UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT
Entertaining and Dancing
The Management Wishes to Announce
---That---
THE HUMMING BIRD
THE GREATER SUNNYLAND JAZZ ORCHESTRA
Will Be An Every Night Feature
Reservations---Call FAber 5066
1143 EAST TWELFTH
UNDER MANAGEMENT TESSIE PATTERSON

Figure 1.4. Advertisement notice of opening of the Humming Bird Café featuring the Sunnyland Jazz Band, The California Eagle (6 June 1924): 10.

crowded during the 1920s as a result of rapid population growth and tightening residential restrictions. This trend, combined with escalating racial discrimination, heightened the allure of suburban areas like Eureka Village. Increased racial discrimination within the city was another factor. By mid-decade, the Ku Klux Klan wielded strong political influence in Los Angeles. The 1925 mayoral election pitted Benjamin Bledsoe, the candidate supported by the African-American community (as represented by The California Eagle), against George Cryer, who was strongly
supported by the Ku Klux Klan. On May 2 the *Eagle* came out with a special extra issue exhorting readers to vote for Bledsoe. Among the individuals who wrote articles in support of Bledsoe in this issue was Professor William T. Wilkins.

Wilkins, as mentioned earlier, was one of the top European-trained pianists and piano teachers in the community and the director of his own music school. His comments in support of Bledsoe provide an interesting perspective on the social problems connected with jazz, particularly the condescending attitudes the white community of Los Angeles displayed toward African Americans. Many whites considered jazz a symbol of the “backwardness” of blacks, and it is therefore not surprising that many in the African-American community, especially the long-established residents representing the upper echelons of black society, refused to accept jazz as a respectable musical form. Wilkins illustrated this resistance, commending Bledsoe and a group of his colleagues for the respectful and enlightened behavior shown him during a piano recital: “Judge Bledsoe and that body of intellectuals didn’t ask us to render ‘Your folk’s good old plantation melodies’ which the white people like so well. The Judge did not ask me or my pupils to play ‘rag time’ or ‘jazz,’ as the white American generally does, but he wanted to encourage us in the performance of the classics.”

Despite the combined efforts of the *Eagle* publishers and concerned citizens such as Wilkins, Bledsoe was defeated in the election, and George Cryer became mayor, exacerbating an already worsening racial situation.

*Reb Spikes and the Spikes Brothers*

The names of the Spikes brothers, John and Reb (see Figure 1.5), have already come up many times in this chapter. It is virtually impossible to discuss any aspect of early jazz in Los Angeles without some reference to them. Though the Spikes brothers are today remembered mainly for their pioneering achievements in music recording and publishing, especially through their affiliations with Kid Ory and Jelly Roll Morton, their musical endeavors in the 1920s went far beyond these areas. McCarthy goes so far as to state that “there was no corner of jazz activity in Los Angeles in which one or other of the brothers was not deeply involved.”

The music store John and Reb opened at 12th Street and Central Avenue in December 1919 sold sheet music, instruments, radios, Victrolas, and recordings. It also served as the headquarters for Los Angeles’s African-American music community. According to Reb, “In Los Angeles, if a musician didn’t know where the Spikes Brothers Music Store was, he hadn’t been to Los Angeles.” The store “almost imperceptibly developed into a booking agency, with as many as seven or eight bands under their control” and important connections to the Hollywood movie industry. Reb Spikes’s own band was featured in one short film in 1927. Ultimately, the booking agency spawned a black musicians’ union, as Reb describes: “I supplied Negro musicians for all the Hollywood parties and motion pictures. Anytime they wanted to make a picture, and needed Negro musicians,
Figure 1.5. Jazz clarinetist and saxophonist Reb Spikes. From Floyd Levin's Jazz Archives. Used by permission.
they’d call me because we was the headquarters. We made a little change bookin’ bands for those things. With all the boys comin’ in here, we got to talkin’ about a Union, so some of them got together, and we started one.}\(^{180}\)

The store also became the major outlet in Los Angeles for race records, which were all the rage among the rich and famous in Hollywood during the twenties. Reb remembers that these celebrities "would drive up in long limousines and send their chauffeurs in to ask for ‘dirty records.’"\(^{181}\) The "dirty" records, wild dancing, spectacular shows, and hot jazz all added up to an irresistible package of excitement and fun for the nouveau riche mavericks (and wannabes) of the Hollywood movie industry. Through the 1920s, thrill-seeking whites (otherwise known as "slummers") flocked to Central Avenue in steadily escalating numbers for top-flight black entertainment and the titillation that only African-American artistic culture seemed capable of providing. According to Bunch, the slummers were "lured by the music, the exotic notion of associating with Blacks and the desire to flaunt accepted racial conventions. . . . This practice was not meant to encourage better communication between the races. Rarely did the two groups interact."\(^{182}\) At least the last part of Bunch’s statement has been refuted by Jack McVea, who spent many years playing for racially mixed audiences in the clubs of Central Avenue. McVea told me, "There was no segregation in the clubs. People found out they could have more fun being mixed."\(^{183}\)

The pursuit of pleasure may have been the first order of business for slummers, but for those in the business of popular entertainment a trip to the Avenue was also a research venture. The musical sounds, dance steps, fashion trends, and show routines of Central Avenue today heralded the direction of white American popular culture tomorrow, and any savvy white entertainer or show-biz entrepreneur knew better than to fall out of step.

The stomps, blues, and rags African-American jazz bands played on the latest race records and in the integrated clubs along Central Avenue, in the chic, segregated nightspots of Hollywood, and in other parts of town represented the cutting edge of West Coast music for black and white audiences alike. The Spikes brothers enjoyed a virtual monopoly on race record distribution in Los Angeles in the early 1920s and had professional ties to most of the city’s major venues for African-American music and entertainment. With their music store acting as a central base of operations for their diverse business ventures, they became quite prosperous for a time and with their profits were able to branch off into more adventurous areas of the music business. The most notable of these ventures was the establishment of the Sunshine record company, which pioneered the recording of African-American instrumental jazz with Kid Ory. The brothers also owned and ran several restaurants and nightclubs during the twenties, including Reb’s Club, the Dreamland Cafe, and the Wayside Park Cafe.

At some point, the music store was moved up the street to 4011 Central. Curtis Mosby, who succeeded the Spikes brothers as the leading Los Angeles–based African-American music and entertainment entrepreneur in the late 1920s, be-
came a partner in the store, which was renamed Mosby & Spikes. In 1929, Mosby became sole owner, expanding the establishment and renaming it Mosby’s Music Store.184

The opening of the original Spikes Brothers Music Store in 1919 coincided with Reb’s return to his “hometown” of Los Angeles on a permanent basis. Born in Dallas, Texas, in 1888, the son of a middle-class businessman of mixed descent—part African, Norwegian, Irish, and native American—Reb lived in a mainly white neighborhood of Dallas as a small child but moved with his family to Los Angeles in 1897, when he was nine years old, after the family house and all his father’s businesses were set ablaze in one night, presumably in a racist-inspired campaign of arson.

Reb started his musical career playing drums in a piano-drum duo with his brother John. The duo left Los Angeles around 1907 and became, by Reb’s account, “a sensation around Arizona. They’d never heard drums and piano, but that’s what they used to have in dance halls in Frisco. So, all the dances, black and white, and saloons, and everything, they had around there, we played.”185 Reb soon took up wind instruments and began alternating between winds and drums on jobs. The Spikes duo toured the Southwest, playing in New Mexico, Texas, and even Nogales, Mexico. As Reb recalls, “We traveled for four or five years, doin’ a musical act. . . . We had chimes, marimbas, harps, saxophones, piano, trumpets, and we’d go from one instrument to another. It was the old-fashioned musical act where we’d play about seven different instruments.”186

Their musical act was often performed in the context of a traveling medicine show or minstrel show. The entertainment programs for the medicine shows could be quite elaborate. One such show, produced by one “Doctor Ferdon,” included a “ten- or twelve-piece orchestra, six or seven entertainers, comedians, a quartet, a magician, dancers, or whatever he could pick up.”187 These early experiences provided the Spikes brothers with a solid foundation for their contributions to African-American vaudeville in the 1920s. Their music was featured in the highly successful touring vaudeville show “Steppin’ High,” starring Hazel Myers, which played at the Philharmonic Auditorium in Los Angeles at Fifth and Olive Streets in 1924. The show was billed in the Eagle as “the fastest, classiest and most brilliant and scintillating jazz and musical offering that has toured the coast.”188

After some five years of touring, Reb spent several years residing semipermanently in San Francisco in the mid-teens, mainly playing baritone saxophone for bands that were part of the exciting jazz scene on the Barbary Coast. He became a member of Sid LePratti’s So Different Orchestra, one of the finest groups of its time on the West Coast.189 Though based in San Francisco, the So Different Orchestra occasionally had engagements in Los Angeles, such as a 1916 stint at Byron Long’s Tavern at 108th and Central Avenue in Watts (later renamed the Plantation and then Jazzland). The floor show at this whites-only club also featured exhibition dancing by Rudolf Valentino, and the clientele included celebrities Charlie Chaplin and Fatty Arbuckle.190 Blacks were able to hear the band at the
Dreamland, where it performed several nights a week in addition to its principal gig at Byron Long’s. Reb also performed occasionally with local Los Angeles bands during visits to his hometown, an example being his performance at a picnic with Wood Wilson’s band in 1913, documented in a photograph.\(^{191}\)

Following a six-month engagement in Honolulu in 1917, Spikes and several of his So Different bandmates were drafted into the army. The members of the band who had not been drafted enlisted, and the So Different Orchestra became the resident jazz band for the 25th Infantry Division in the Pacific Islands, being re-stationed to Nogales, Arizona, after about a month. According to Reb, “They’d never had a jazz band in the army before.”\(^{192}\) After the war, Reb returned to the San Francisco area with the So Different Orchestra for an engagement at the Canary Cottage, then worked in Oakland for four or five months, where he played with Jelly Roll Morton, whom he describes as “the greatest piano player I ever heard.”\(^{193}\)

Reb’s career shifted direction dramatically when he decided to resettle in Los Angeles permanently in 1919 and opened the music store on Central Avenue with his brother. States Reb, “I never went back up to San Francisco to stay. After that, I got into the business end of music more.”\(^{194}\) And it is in terms of the business end of music that Spikes made his most lasting impact. As McCarty has noted, “Whatever the qualities of Spikes’s bands during the ’twenties—and musicians have said that some at least were excellent—his activities in other directions were probably more significant in the long term in the development of jazz on the West Coast.”\(^{195}\)

Nonetheless, as bandleaders and players, both Reb and John Spikes were important contributors to the Los Angeles jazz scene of the 1920s, especially Reb, who led bands under several names. Reb’s Legion Club 45’s and Reb Spikes’s So Different Orchestra, his “gigging” bands, worked four or five nights a week on average during a six- or seven-year period culminating with the onset of the Depression, which caused a severe curtailment of the Spikes brothers’ activities.\(^{196}\) Another group, Reb Spikes’s Majors and Minors Orchestra, had a long-standing engagement at the Follies Theater on Main Street.

The Legion Club 45’s were named after their main place of employment, the local Legion Club dance hall, where Reb’s group furnished music both for regularly scheduled dances and for occasional special events. For example, a full-page notice in the June 4, 1926, edition of the Eagle advertised an extravaganza benefit for “a most worthy cause, the N.A.A.C.P. Baby Contest” held on June 10. The floor show featured “The Only Bo Didley [sic] Dolly featuring ‘Blues’” and “Sebastian’s Original Cotton Club Creole Cuties—starring Mildred Washington,” along with Reb’s Legion 45’s and other entertainers (see Figure 1.6).\(^{197}\)

In addition to performing live, the Legion Club 45’s recorded two sides in late 1924 for a very small label and two sides in 1927 for Columbia. The former are virtually impossible to find but are historically significant as the first records ever
THAT BIG NIGHT

Dining, Dancing, Entertaining At Legion Club
THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 10TH
BENEFIT OF N. A. C. P. BABY CONCERT

Reb’s Legion Forty-Five
Leslie Walton

The Only Bo Didiley
Dolly featuring “Blues”

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS
Sebastian’s Original Cotton Club Creole Cats—starring Mildred Washington, with Mildred and Meno Boyd, Ernestine Porter, Edna Cunningham
Bene-Ellisse-Renee, rendering their $500.00 prize song bid, “My California Maid”.

FLYING FORD
Surprise Number—We promised on our word of honor not to advertise them, but they are always a riot! Guess Who?

ADMISSION 50 CENTS
COVER CHARGE 25 CENTS

WAITRESSES:

Figure 1.6. NAACP benefit dance featuring Reb Spikes. Advertisement notice of NAACP Baby Contest Extravaganza, *The California Eagle* (4 June 1926): 2.
made by Lionel Hampton. Hampton remembers that the two tunes recorded were "My Mammy's Blues," featuring the full eight-piece band (Hampton on drums, Reb on bass sax, Les Hite and William Calhoun on clarinets, saxophones, and vocals, plus two trumpets, trombone, and piano), and "Sheffield Blues," which Hampton describes as having been performed by a trio including him, Hite, and reedman/vocalist William Calhoun.\textsuperscript{198} It is likely though not certain that this recording of "Sheffield Blues" is the same one referred to by Spikes in an amusing anecdote.\textsuperscript{199} "My Mammy's Blues" was recorded again by Reb's Legion Club 45's in 1927 for Columbia, along with "Fight That Thing." According to McCarthy, "My Mammy's Blues" is the superior of the two cuts by virtue of "the powerful playing by one of the trumpeters and the drive of the whole group."\textsuperscript{200}

\textit{Lionel Hampton and the Jazz Scene of 1920s Los Angeles}

Lionel Hampton is the most famous and influential musician, nationally and internationally, to have come out of the jazz scene of 1920s Los Angeles. Born in 1908 in Birmingham, Alabama, and raised in Chicago, he went to high school with saxophonist Les Hite, three years Hampton's senior, and played drums in Hite's all-teenage band.\textsuperscript{201} The band broke up when Hite decided to go to Los Angeles sometime in the early 1920s. As Hampton remembers, "He promised me and the other guys that he would send for us once he got himself established out there. . . . After a while, [he] wrote back and told me, 'If you come out here I'll get you a job in a big band.'"\textsuperscript{202}

Hampton accepted the invitation, moving to Los Angeles in 1923 or 1924, when he was in his mid-teens. When he arrived, however, he found that Hite was not doing as well he had indicated in his letter. Hite had been playing with Reb Spikes but had quit to form his own group, which was not getting much work. He thought that the addition of Hampton might provide the spark needed to put the band over, but even with the talented young drummer, the group still struggled.

Soon Hampton found himself out of money and without work. He got a job as a counterman at a Culver City drugstore but did not have to keep it very long before being hired to play drums with Reb's Legion Club 45's, a job he got through a recommendation from trumpeter George Orendorff, another Chicagoan who had come out to the coast. Hite rejoined Spikes's band shortly thereafter, much to Hampton's delight. The band had a steady gig at a taxi dance hall.

When not playing with Spikes's band, Lionel Hampton often sat in with Curtis Mosby's Dixieland Blue Blowers. Mosby himself was a drummer but, according to musicians who heard him and played with him, not a very good one. In his introduction to \textit{West Coast Jazz}, Gioia cites reports that Mosby brought in Hampton to play drums at key gigs and on recording sessions but notes that Hampton denies ever having recorded with Mosby's band.\textsuperscript{203}
Paul Howard’s Quality Serenaders, 1926–1930

In 1926, possibly as early as 1925, Paul Howard, following up on his bandleading activities with the Quality Four/Quality Serenaders of 1923–24 and a short-lived band called the California Cotton Pickers, left his job with Sonny Clay’s band to reform the Quality Serenaders. The new Serenaders quickly established themselves in the top echelon of black Los Angeles dance bands, and when an opening for a new drummer came along (sometime in 1926), Lionel Hampton was offered the position. He explains, “I said good-bye to Reb Spikes and Curtis Mosby [sic].... The band [i.e., the Serenaders] was the most popular band among the quality black folks. ... [They] played every dance and ball and cotillion there was. We did a good ten gigs a week and made the huge sum of fifteen dollars a week, plus tips. The music was not too exciting. It was mostly slow, romantic tunes, and I didn’t beat the drums so much as I brushed them. All this was fine and mellow. We jammed together when we were off duty.”

When Hampton joined the Serenaders in 1926, Howard had already expanded the five-piece 1924 unit to a seven-piece band with himself and Leon Herriford (Hereford) on saxophones and clarinet, Hampton on drums, George Orendorff on trumpet, Louis Taylor on trombone, Thomas Valentine on banjo and guitar, and Harvey Brooks on piano. By 1929 the Serenaders had been expanded to an eight-piece group with the addition of James Jackson on tuba. Charlie Lawrence, who played alto sax and clarinet, became the group’s principal composer and arranger after replacing Herriford, on reeds, and future Ellington band member Lawrence Brown replaced Louis Taylor on trombone. This group went into the studio, first in 1929 and again in 1930, to make records for the Victor label.

Beginning in 1926, Howard and his Quality Serenaders were associated with Frank Sebastian. Through 1929 they were the house band at Sebastian’s New Cotton Club in Culver City, a premiere whites-only establishment for black entertainment in Los Angeles in the latter part of the 1920s that would achieve even greater fame in the 1930s. In 1928 the Quality Serenaders’ prominence among Los Angeles bands led to their being included in the official entertainment for the NAACP Convention, which consisted of a “Grand Musical Review and Reception at Shrine Auditorium” headlined by the well-known soprano Florence Cole-Talbert. This event was scheduled to coincide with the opening of the glamorous Hotel Somerville. Following the main concert there was a big dance in the Shrine Pavilion featuring three bands: the Quality Serenaders, Kennedy’s Syncopators, and Speed Webb and His Melody Lads. Webb, a bandleader from South Bend, Indiana, based himself in Los Angeles for a period during the late 1920s and gave Teddy Buckner his start as a professional musician. Unfortunately for Buckner, Webb skipped town and high-tailed it back to South Bend one day with the band’s payroll, not to be seen again by Buckner for some thirty years. It was not until after the unfortunate incident that Buckner was informed that such unscrupulous behavior was typical of Webb.
On March 14, 1929, the Serenaders moved from the Cotton Club to the new Kentucky Club Café (2220 Central Avenue), which opened as a premiere nightclub for the African-American community and a major drawing card for the white Hollywood party set as well. The announcement of the grand opening in the *Eagle* advertises “a Galaxy of Stars and a Jam Up Review” featuring entertainer Mildred Washington in a show with a toecapper, a tap dancer, a “silver tone blues singer,” a “song bard,” a famed baritone, “and dance music by Howard’s Quality Serenaders.” The ad invites readers to come and “see your favorite movie stars.”

After a year at the Kentucky, the Serenaders moved on to a short-lived residency at the exclusive Montmartre in Hollywood, a favorite and exclusive nightclub for leading Hollywood stars. The club could not survive the economic devastation of the Depression and closed in 1930. With the close of the Montmartre, the Quality Serenaders disbanded.

The work of the later versions of the Quality Serenaders has been preserved in their recordings for Victor in 1929 and 1930, including “Moonlight Blues” (Lionel Hampton’s first recorded performance as a vocalist), “Overnight Blues,” “New Kinda Blues,” “Gettin’ Ready Blues,” “California Swing,” “Charlie’s Idea” (an arrangement of “Tiger Rag” by Charlie Lawrence), “Harlem,” “Cuttin’ Up,” “Quality Shout,” “Stuff,” and “The Ramble.” In assessing some of these recordings, McCarthy asserts that the band shows itself to be “a well-disciplined unit that, on recorded evidence, was by far the most professional band then playing on the West Coast.” McCarthy seems to have been particularly impressed by the “well conceived, nicely balanced, and swinging” trumpet solos of George Orendorff, whom he credits as being unquestionably “the outstanding soloist of the band.”

McCarthy also gives positive notes to the soloing abilities of trombonist Lawrence Brown and pianist Harvey Brooks. He concludes, “Of all the Californian bands recording during the late ’twenties and early ’thirties, Paul Howard’s was the one most obviously in the mainstream of contemporary big band development.” Jazz critic Irving L. Jacobs, in a 1949 *Playback* review, went so far as to claim that “Paul Howard’s Victor recording band is one of the most thoroughly underrated in the history of jazz.”

According to Lionel Hampton, the 1929 Serenaders recordings were produced in Culver City, where Victor had rented some film studio space from movie producer Hal Roach. Hampton’s description of the session graphically portrays the challenging conditions under which many recordings were made in these early days:

I remember it was April 1929, and it was like a steam bath in that studio—to keep out the noise, they kept out the air. Every once in a while, when the musicians were about to drop, we could have a break and go out to the street for five minutes. There was a huge microphone in the middle, and the musicians moved up close or far away from it, depending on what kind of sound they wanted. That was the 1929 version of
“mixing.” The engineer sat over in a corner trying to get the sound on wax, and you usually didn’t get a good cut the first time, so you had to do it over and over until he got it. But for me this was a little piece of heaven—recording for a label that at least somebody had heard of.213

By the time of the Serenaders’ 1930 recording sessions, Victor had set up its own recording studio in Hollywood, and the recording process went much more smoothly and efficiently than it had the previous year, with a better final product. Through a variety of unanticipated circumstances, the sessions became a show-piece for Hampton’s multiple talents as a musician, with the young virtuoso not only playing drums but also singing on certain tracks (“Overnight Blues,” “California Swing,” and “Cuttin’ Up,” featuring a vocal style described by Hampton himself as “his best Louis Armstrong imitation”). He even played piano on one selection, “New Kinda Blues,” when regular pianist Harvey Brooks arrived late for the session. Though not a pianist by trade, Hampton had taken some piano lessons with Jelly Roll Morton and had “listened to every record Earl Hines ever made” and was thus prepared for this unexpected debut.214

Judging from Hampton’s recollections, the Quality Serenaders were a very busy band indeed, playing an average of two gigs daily, and were an integral component of black Angeleno social life during the late 1920s. “I was working steady. . . . We played for afternoon dances for the teenagers. There was a dance hall down at Fifty-fifth and Central, and all the kids went upstairs there for afternoon dances. They didn’t let kids go to parties at night in those days. In the evening we played the big parties for the grown-ups.”215

It was at one of these “big parties for the grown-ups” that Hampton met his future wife, Gladys. The event was the 1929 annual ball of the Antique Art Club, one of the biggest African-American society clubs in Los Angeles. Many club members were maids, butlers, and chauffeurs for “the rich white Hollywood folks, or porters and attendants in the ‘comfort rooms’ of the big stores on Rodeo Drive, and in those days if you worked for the high and mighty, you were pretty high and mighty yourself.”216 At the time Lionel met her, Gladys herself was “a career woman—worked for the movie studios as a seamstress.”217

Though his membership in the Quality Serenaders provided a good livelihood and recording opportunities, Hampton ultimately found the situation musically stifling and decided to leave. “I wasn’t content with the kind of music I was playing with the Quality Serenaders,” he recalls. So when Les Hite, his old cron from the early Chicago days, asked Hampton to join a new big band he was putting together, “I left the Quality Serenaders without thinking twice. It didn’t matter to me that the country was going into a depression and that I might be better off with an established group. . . . The Quality Serenaders weren’t playing my kind of music. I wanted to swing, and with my old buddy from Chicago, Les Hite.”218

And swing they did. Les Hite’s band became the number-one African-American big band on the West Coast during the Depression years and beyond,
the best known and most successful of the Californian bands of the ‘thirties.”219 As the house band for Sebastian’s New Cotton Club, they backed up Louis Armstrong during his extended engagement there in 1930–1931 and recorded more than a dozen sides with Armstrong during that time.220 One of the songs, a version of Eubie Blake’s “Memories of You,” featured a vibraphone introduction played by Hampton—according to him, “the first time jazz had ever been played on vibes.”221 In addition to working with Armstrong, Hite’s big band also backed up many other jazz stars—Fats Waller, for example—and profited from an abundance of soundtrack work and on-screen appearances in Hollywood movies, including the Marx Brothers’ A Day at the Races.222 In August 1936, Hampton left the band when he was “discovered” by Benny Goodman during a gig at the Paradise Cafe with a small group that also included trumpeter Teddy Buckner. His 1936–1940 membership in Goodman’s famous quartet (with Teddy Wilson and Gene Krupa) catapulted Hampton to superstardom in the jazz world as a pioneer of the vibraphone. With his new celebrity status, Hampton formed a Los Angeles–based big band in the 1940s that helped elevate the careers of many local musicians, including Jack McVea and Teddy Buckner.

Curtis Mosby and the Dixieland Blue Blowers

Curtis Mosby was a musician and entrepreneur whose prominence on the Los Angeles music and entertainment scene spanned a long period, from the 1920s through the 1940s. As a leading club owner, drummer, composer, bandleader, music store owner, “man about town,” and the “honorary mayor of Central Avenue,”223 Mosby was a dominant figure in Los Angeles who “bridged the gap between . . . two generations of black music.”224 He was also a controversial figure who has been remembered with disdain and disrespect by some of his peers. According to Floyd Levin, who has interviewed many musicians who knew and worked for Mosby, the bandleader was notorious for not paying or grossly underpaying his players and was unscrupulous in other realms of his business operations.225 Gioia writes that although “Mosby appears at first glance to be a black Renaissance man of the day,” virtually all of his talents have been challenged by musicians who worked with him, saxophonist Marshall Royal among them. The scathing criticisms from his peers include assertions that Mosby “couldn’t drum to save his life, completely lacked skills as a composer, called in Lionel Hampton to play drums on key gigs and recording sessions, etc.”226 Although Gioia points out that many of the criticisms levied against Mosby seem easily refutable by information found in newspapers and other primary source documents, the abundance of “acerbic comments” directed at him, “however ungrounded in the facts, nonetheless reveal the low esteem in which Curtis Mosby was held by his fellow musicians.”227

Whatever his merits or deficiencies as a musician, businessman, or human being, Mosby’s impact on the history of Los Angeles jazz cannot be ignored. Born
in 1895 in Kansas City, he moved to Chicago at some point and led a dance band around 1918 before moving west to Oakland, opening a music shop there in 1921. He toured for two years with Mamie Smith’s Jazz Hounds before settling permanently in Los Angeles in 1924, perhaps earlier. In Los Angeles he formed a sextet, the Dixieland Blue Blowers, which between 1924 and 1926 had a regular engagement playing for whites-only audiences at Solomon’s Dance Pavilion De Luxe. McCarron cites a 1926 reference to the Blue Blowers’ job at Solomon’s in Variety, which reports the group “playing opposite a cowboy band, that is not as good.” The featured trumpet player with the Blue Blowers was James Porter, who left his job with the Sunnyland Jazz Band to join Mosby at Solomon’s.

Mosby’s Dixieland Blue Blowers reached new heights of popularity in the late 1920s, making recordings for Columbia, (1927, 1928, and 1929) and rivaling Howard’s Serenaders and Sonny Clay’s groups for the title of top black Los Angeles band. Going strictly by the measure of number of notices in the Eagle from 1927 through 1929, Mosby’s group may have been the most popular of the three. However, this measure may be deceptive, because Mosby, as the unofficial “mayor of Central Avenue” and one of the most successful black businessmen in Los Angeles, probably had easier access to the media than any of his musical competitors.

By the late 1920s, Central Avenue was thriving as never before as the center of black entertainment on the West Coast. Amid rampant overcrowding (brought on by the steady flow of new immigrants and newly imposed residential restrictions), heightened racial tensions, and an overall deterioration in the standard of living in the black community, lavish new clubs and theaters were opening on the Avenue. Jazz, now generally played by bigger bands (eight to ten pieces) whose styles were beginning to foreshadow 1930s swing, was the music of choice. The passion for jazz among African Americans had grown with the music’s increased status and popularity nationwide and with the diversification of the city’s black community, which barely resembled the isolated, provincial, and exclusive community of a decade before. Hollywood was booming, and Central Avenue’s status as a near-mandatory late-night hangout for movie stars and others in the Hollywood crowd kept climbing. The segregated, whites-only clubs featuring black entertainment expanded the realm of opportunity for jazz musicians, providing the most lucrative financial rewards despite the fact that the musicians were miserably underpaid in comparison with their white counterparts.

Black entertainment, its anchor firmly planted in the music and spirit of jazz, had become big business, and Curtis Mosby became the biggest African-American entertainment mogul in late 1920s Los Angeles. Mosby’s entrepreneurial skills, combined with his bandleading activities, enabled him to monopolize the scene at many levels. Following their long engagement at Solomon’s, the Blue Blowers moved on to the Bronx Palm Gardens at 423 East Seventh Street. Later they became the resident band at the brand-new Lincoln Theater on Central Avenue at 23rd, accompanying elaborate musical comedies and vaudeville acts and playing jazz sets between acts.
In October 1927, Mosby’s Blue Blowers signed a recording contract with Columbia Records. They recorded a song called “In My Dreams,” written by the René brothers, Leon and Otis, Creoles from New Orleans who had settled in Los Angeles in 1922 and whose songwriting credits also included “When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano,” “Sleepy Time Down South,” and “Rockin’ Robin.” [Leon René was also the leader of a successful Los Angeles dance orchestra in the late 1920s.] “Tiger Stomp” (actually “Tiger Rag”), “Whoop ‘em Up Blues,” and the excellent “Weary Stomp” were also recorded during the 1927 Blue Blowers’ sessions. The personnel of the band for these sessions is somewhat in doubt, but it seems clear that the hot trumpeter was the ubiquitous James Porter. A 1928 recording session for Columbia produced “Hardee Stomp” (presumably by trombonist Ashford Hardie) and “Blue Blowers Blues.” Saxophonists Les Hite and Charlie Lawrence are “almost certainly” present on these sides. The Blowers’ final recording session for Columbia, in January 1929, resulted in “Louisiana Bo Bo” and “Between You and Me (and the Deep Blue Sea),” assessed by McCarthy as “a dismal effort, not least the vocal by an unidentified male singer accompanied by a Hawaiian guitarist.”

In August 1928, Curtis Mosby opened the Apex Nite Club at 4015 Central Avenue. By November 1928 this elegant club had become the hot spot on Central Avenue, both for well-heeled black Angelenos and for white Hollywood celebrities. As was the case in other clubs in the area, including the chic Kentucky Club Cafe, which opened in 1929, the clientele at the Apex was racially mixed, although the performers were all African American.

During the Apex Club’s first year, Mosby engaged the African-American actor and composer Clarence Muse to produce floor shows. The Blue Blowers worked in support of a permanent cast of entertainers that included comedian Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, future Ellington band vocalist Ivie Anderson, and tap dancer Lee Young. Other stage shows at the Apex, such as “Mosby’s Chocolate Revue,” were co-produced by Mosby and dancer Mildred Washington and featured beautiful dancing girls, comedy acts, vaudevilles, and jazz numbers and popular songs of the day. The house band was Mosby’s Blue Blowers, featuring Mosby himself on drums along with trumpeter James Porter, saxophonist Marshall Royal, and trombonist Lawrence Brown. Two Los Angeles radio stations featured live remote broadcasts of the band’s nightly performances. Mosby’s many duties as manager of the club and man about town often precluded him from playing, and his main sub on such occasions was Lionel Hampton. The Apex Club house band recorded the soundtrack for the 1929 film Hallelujah.

On November 1, 1929, just four days after the stock market crash, which ushered in the Great Depression, the Apex Nite Club was raided by the police and shut down. Mosby was brought to trial. According to the Eagle, the charges brought against him were ill-founded and were the result of racism.

On the very face of things the attempt to crucify the Apex looked shady. It looked like a preconceived and well laid plan to destroy this particular club, in spite of the
Mosby was ultimately found innocent of the charges, and the Los Angeles Police Commission dismissed the action that had been filed by the police to revoke his club operating license.

CONCLUSION

Jazz historians have characterized Los Angeles before 1930 as "a provincial outland, separated by several thousand miles from the music centers of the country." Perhaps that is what it was. Nevertheless, jazz was very much alive in Los Angeles in the 1920s and preceding years, and the rapid growth and development of the African-American jazz scene on and around Central Avenue came to reflect the radical transformation of the city's black community and that community's relationship to the city as a whole. The jazz bands and their music were at the center of African-American social life, drawing people together and fostering a sense of communal identity in a dazzling array of diverse contexts, from after-hours nightclubs to baby contests, political rallies to teenage dances, and society balls to picnics. They were also at the center of controversy, bringing a loud and unmistakable voice of change to a community intent on conserving its insular identity but unable to do so in the face of overwhelming social, economic, and political forces. The jazz scene in Los Angeles was more than a derivative offshoot of a national musical phenomenon. It was also a product of the dialogue between that phenomenon and the demands, desires, and constraints of the particular urban and cultural community in which it evolved. From Jelly Roll Morton, Kid Ory, and Lionel Hampton to the Black and Tan Jazz Orchestra, Reb Spikes, the Sunnyland Jazz Band, Sonny Clay, Paul Howard's Quality Serenaders, and Curtis Mosby's Dixieland Blue Blowers, the musicians and bands that swung their way into the cultural history of Los Angeles helped to define the ethos of a city and the collective identity of its African-American community while making some lasting contributions to the American jazz legacy.

DISCOGRAPHY

ORY, EDWARD "KID"

1921 (June), Santa Monica, CA: Norskog Laboratories

"Ory's Creole Trombone" and "Society Blues" (Reissues: Paradox 3, Hip Hi-290-1, Jazz Collector L-253, Assoc Francaise des Collectioneurs de Disques du Jazz A-032)
Sunshine 3003: Ory's Sunshine Orchestra
Nordskog 3005: *Spikes’ Seven Pods of Pepper*
Nordskog 5001: *Kid Ory’s Sunshine Orchestra* (reissue 9/1/51)
“When You’re Alone” and “Krooked Blues”
Sunshine 3001 (=Nordskog 3007): *Roberta Dudley* (vocalist) and *Ory’s Sunshine Orchestra*
“That Sweet Something Dear” and “Maybe Some Day”
Sunshine 3002 (=Nordskog 3008): *Ruth Lee* (vocalist) and *Ory’s Sunshine Orchestra*—Kid Ory (trombone, leader); Mutt Carey (cornet); Dink Johnson (clarinet); Fred Washington (piano); Ed Garland (string bass); Ben Borders (drums)

CLAY, WILLIAM ROGERS CAMPBELL “SONNY”

1922. Hollywood: Sunset Studios

“Mama Likes To Do It” (unnumbered test pressing): Sonny Clay (piano); Camille Allen (vocals)

“Gang O’ Blues” and “Punishing the Piano” (unnumbered test pressings [208 and 210]): Sonny Clay (solo piano)

1923. Hollywood: Sunset Studios

“What a Wonderful Time” and “Lou”
Sunset (unnumbered [506]): *The California Poppies*—Sonny Clay (piano, leader); Ernest Coycault (cornet); Leon White (trombone); “Big Boy” Leonard Davidson (clarinet); Bob Farrell, Johnny King (saxophones); Thomas Valentine (banjo): Willis McDaniel (drums)

1926 (February 2). Los Angeles

“Plantation Blues” and “Chicago Breakdown”
Vocalion 1000, 15254, or 1000, Br A-180: Sonny Clay’s *Plantation Orchestra*—Sonny Clay (piano, leader); Ernest Coycault (cornet); Andrew Blakeney (cornet/trumpet); William B. Woodman Sr. (trombone); Leonard Davidson (clarinet); James Carson (clarinet, tenor saxophone); —Fitzgerald (banjo); Willis McDaniel (drums); Louis Dodd (alto saxophone, banjo, guitar)

1926 (Spring). Hollywood: Sunset Studios

“Jintown Blues” and “Roamin’ Around”
Sunset 1098 (673 and 670): *The Stompin’ Six*

“Down and Out Blues” and “Creole Blues”
Sunset 1099 (678 and 679): *The Stompin’ Six*—Sonny Clay (piano, leader); Ernest Coycault (cornet); William B. Woodman Sr. (trombone); Leonard Davidson (clarinet); Louis Dodd (banjo); Willis McDaniel (drums)

1929. Los Angeles: Brunswick Studios

“When It’s Sleepy Time Down South”
Sonny Clay label, #22: *Sonny Clay’s Hartford Ballroom Orchestra*
“River Stay ‘Way from My Door”
Sonny Clay Label, #25: Sonny Clay’s Hartford Balloon Orchestra—Sonny Clay (piano, leader); “Doc” Porter, ?—Hart (trumpets); Leon White (trombone); Leonard Davidson (clarinet); Sherman Williams, Carlton Wade (saxes); Frank Watkins (banjo, vocal); Bert Holiday (brass bass); David Lewis (drums)

HOWARD, PAUL

“Mistreatin’ Daddy” and “Frankie and Johnnie Blues”
Hollywood 1008 (41 and 43): Brook’s Quality Four
“Down on the Farm” and “Who Will Get It?”
Hollywood 1022 (39 and 44): Brook’s Quality Four—Paul Howard (clarinet, alto sax); Leon Herrford (alto sax); Harvey Brooks (piano); Henry “Tin Can” Allen (drums & horn effects); Jessie Derrick (vocals on “Mistreatin’ Daddy” and “Who Will Get It?”)

SPIKES, BENJAMIN M. “REB”

I have been unable to find any information about Spikes’s recordings beyond what is discussed in the text of the paper.

MOSBY, CURTIS

1927 (October 14). Los Angeles
“Weary Stomp” and “In My Dreams (I’m Jealous of You)”
Columbia 1191-D, J-486: Curtis Mosby and His Dixieland Blue Blowers
“Whoop ‘Em Up Blues” and “Tiger Stomp”
Columbia 1192-D: Curtis Mosby and His Dixieland Blue Blowers—Curtis Mosby (drums, leader); James Porter (trumpet); Charles Hite, Leo Davis (clarinet, alto saxophone); “Bumps” Myers (tenor saxophone); Attwell Rose (violin); Henry Starr (piano, vocals); Thomas Valentine (banjo); ?—Perkins (brass bass)

NOTES

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Collette, Hadda Brooks, Lonnie Bunch, and Lawrence Gushue for their various forms of assistance.

11. See discography at the end of this chapter. My own access to some of these recordings has been made possible by jazz historian Floyd Levin, whose generosity in providing me with relevant recordings, writings, and photographs from his extensive personal jazz archive has greatly aided this project. I also have Levin to thank for contacting John Bentley on my behalf. Materials from Bentley’s archives provided most of the information for my discussion of Sonny Clay and for the included discography.


22. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast.

23. Ibid., 43.


28. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 31–32. Sid LePratti, an African American, was born in Oakland, California, November 25, 1886, and died August 30, 1958 (Willie Collins, personal communication, 11 July 1996). Photographs of both Sid LePratti and the So Different Jazz Band appear in Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 164–167, 176. The band was called "So Different" because band members could play both jazz and classical music (Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 50).

29. Ibid., 118.

30. Ibid.

31. Gioia, West Coast Jazz, 8.

32. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 143.

33. Bunch, Black Angeles.
34. Ibid., 33.
35. Ibid., 30.
36. Ibid., 32.
37. Ibid., 30.
38. Ibid., 29.
40. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 56.
42. Ibid., 96–97. The original quote is found in George Baquet, “Address to the New Orleans Jazz Club, April 17, 1948,” The Second Line (September/October 1965).
43. Ibid., 97.
45. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 53.
47. Bunch, Black Angelinos.
49. Southern, Music of Black Americans, 339. In some circles, European art music is referred to as “classical” music. The terms are used interchangeably here, but “art” music is preferred.
52. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 61.
53. Ibid.
56. Gioia, West Coast Jazz, 7–8.
57. See photo in Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 160. At different points in its history, the Wood Wilson Band was known by various names: the Wood Wilson Syncopators, the Wood Wilson “Satisfied” Orchestra, the Wood Wilson Satisfied Vendome Band, and the Wood Wilson Original Satisfied Orchestra.
59. Ibid., 6.
60. Ibid., 7.
62. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 160.
65. Foster, Pops Foster, 122.
66. Williams, Jazz Masters, 50, and Gushee, “A Preliminary Chronology.”
67. Spikes cites a date of 1914, but this seems unlikely; see Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 61.
72. Ibid, 162.
75. Ibid.
80. Williams, *Jazz Masters*, 52.
84. Ibid.
88. McVea, personal interview.
89. Stoddard, *Jazz on the Barbary Coast*, 67.
90. McVea, personal interview.
99. Levin, "Untold Story," 41. As Levin indicates, the 1922 date often attached to those recordings is incorrect.
100. Levin, "Mystery Shrouds," 20.
101. Ibid., 17.
102. Ibid.
104. Levin, "The Spikes Brothers."
106. This is one of five Los Angeles bands reviewed in a very interesting piece, "Musicians: How and Where They Strut Their Stuff," *The California Eagle* (28 June 1926): 10. The other bands included are the Vernon Elkins Dixieland Jazz Band, which featured Elkins on cornet and was directed by Les Hite, who was to become the top swing bandleader in Los Angeles in the 1920s; the California Cotton Pickers Orchestra, led by Harry A. Southard, the former director of the Black and Tan Jazz Band; Buster Wilson’s Hot Six; and Curtis Mosby’s Dixieland Blue Blowers.
108. Foster, *Pops Foster*, 120.
115. Ibid.
120. See photo in McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 170.
125. Buckner, personal interview.
132. Born in Norfolk, Virginia, John Gray moved to Los Angeles in 1910. Not only did he obtain training in music from schools in Los Angeles (e.g., the University of Southern California and the University of California at Los Angeles), but he attended l’Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, France. He was a highly respected teacher and performer of European art music in Los Angeles; see Cox, *Central Avenue*, 19.
136. McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*.
137. Ibid., 173.
138. Buckner, personal interview.
140. McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 173.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


McCarthy, Big Band Jazz, 173; Bentley, “Sonny Clay, Part 2,” 13-14, cites a date of 1926.


According to Steve Isardi (telephone conversation, July 1996), a jazz historian who has interviewed numerous Los Angeles jazz musicians for the UCLA Oral History Program, William Woodman Sr. moved to Los Angeles from Mississippi in 1918. Woodman had three sons who became professional musicians—trombonist Britt, pianist Coney, and William Jr., who played both trumpet and saxophone. The three brothers were the nucleus of the Woodman Brothers Band, one of several “family bands” active in Los Angeles in the 1930s; see Reed, The Black Music, 23. During the 1950s, Britt Woodman achieved fame as a trombonist with the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

“Sonny Clay’s Orchestra,” 1.


McCarthy, Big Band Jazz, 173.

Ibid.

McVea, Personal interview.

McCarthy, Big Band Jazz.

Buckner, personal interview.


McCarthy, Big Band Jazz, 173, cites the date as August 1931; Bentley, “Sonny Clay, Part 2,” 14, gives a date of 1929.

During my initial period of research for this chapter, in 1988, my preliminary findings led convincingly to the conclusion that a band called the Sunnyland Jazz Band, a Los Angeles group whose performances during the period 1923–1926 were frequently announced in the Eagle, was a band directed by Sonny Clay. My source for this information was Teddy Buckner, who told me in a 1988 interview that the Sunnyland Jazz Orchestra of the mid-twenties was a Sonny Clay–led organization featuring Clay on piano, Paul Howard on saxophone, and James Porter on cornet and trumpet. I had no reason to question the accuracy of Buckner’s memory relative to the Sunnyland/Sonny Clay connection, but more recent findings strongly indicate that the Sunnyland Jazz Band was a separate organization having nothing to do with Sonny Clay’s band, other than that both were among the most popular Los Angeles jazz bands of the mid-1920s.
164. McCarthy, Big Band Jazz, 171.
165. Levin, “Andrew Blakeney.”
166. McCarthy, Big Band Jazz, 171. The photograph, which must have been taken before trumpeter Andrew Blakeney joined the band, provides rather compelling evidence in support of Lawrence’s memory of the Sunnyland group over Buckner’s recollection, with the only commonality being the presence of James Porter in both personnel lists.
175. William T. Wilkins, “Prof. W. T. Wilkins on Bledsoe,” The California Eagle (2 May 1925): 4. For further information about Wilkins, see Cox, Central Avenue, 14–18.
176. McCarthy, Big Band Jazz, 168.
177. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 54.
178. McCarthy, Big Band Jazz, 168.
179. Ibid.
180. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 77.
181. McCarthy, Big Band Jazz, 68.
183. McVea, personal interview. However, it should be noted that McVea played in Los Angeles nightclubs in the thirties and later.
185. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 57.
186. Ibid., 58.
187. Ibid., 59.
190. Stoddard, Jazz on the Barbary Coast, 74.
191. Ibid., 160.
192. Ibid., 75.
193. Ibid., 60.
194. Ibid., 75.
McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 168.

Ibid.


See Stoddard, *Jazz on the Barbary Coast*, 77–78.

McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 169.

Hampton, *Hamp*, 26. The biographical details of Hite’s early life, found in McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 176, present some contradictions relative to the Hampton version of Hite’s life history prior to his departure for Los Angeles in the early 1920s. My account is based on the Hampton version.


McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 170.


McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 170.

Ibid., 169.


Ibid., 30–31.

Ibid., 32.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 32, 34.

McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 176.


Ibid., 38.

McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 176–177.


Ibid.

Levin, personal correspondence and interview with author, 1993.


Ibid.


Quoted in McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz*, 174.

Some of the very light-skinned African-American musicians such as Charlie Lawrence and Ernest Coycault were occasionally able to pass for white and play gigs with the much higher-paying white bands; see Wood, “Charlie Lawrence,” 7.


New York’s New Lafayette Players was one of the first groups to present live theater at the Lincoln, which opened in 1927.

234. Ibid.
235. Ibid.
"Pitchin’ up a Boogie"

African-American Musicians, Nightlife, and Music Venues in Los Angeles, 1930–1945

Ralph Eastman

Most of the nation has long considered Los Angeles to be a cultural backwater. In the sphere of jazz, blues, and popular music, eastern musicians and critics erroneously claimed that the city lacked any music or musicians of consequence. In 1941, for example, well into the period that this chapter considers, *Down Beat* editor Dave Dexter dismissed all Los Angeles musicians as less competent than their eastern and midwestern counterparts.1 This attitude took root early, and by the 1950s Los Angeles wore the bitter sobriquet “the place musicians go to die.” However, a survey of the breadth and depth of Los Angeles’s ignored or forgotten African-American musical heritage corrects this entrenched critical myopia. Though it is true that the city is located far from the traditional centers of jazz and blues and that, with the exception of Charles Mingus, no one of the stature of a Duke Ellington or Count Basie emerged from it, African-American musicians in Los Angeles were creating and recording vital popular music by the 1930s.

In the preceding chapter, Michael Bakan surveyed the activities of jazz musicians attracted by Los Angeles’s growing African-American community early in the century.2 As Bakan illustrates, the real architects of the local African-American music world during the twenties and thirties were primarily transplanted rather than native-born musicians. The influence of people such as Lionel Hampton and Nat “King” Cole and less-well-remembered players such as Sonny Clay, Les Hite, Curtis Mosby, the René brothers, and the Spikes brothers continued through World War II and, in some cases, far longer.

Although African Americans may have enjoyed better wages and opportunities in Los Angeles than in the South, they nonetheless met familiar patterns of racial discrimination in the city. Several members of the Los Angeles City Council were open in their advocacy for continued racial segregation.3 Though small African-American enclaves grew in Pasadena, Long Beach, and Santa Monica, restrictive covenants confined 70 percent of Los Angeles’s black population to the narrow