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# Between Duty and Romance: The Attraction of Sounding 'Black' in Paris

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The histories of Black Americans who significantly influenced French life and culture,<sup>1</sup> whether lauded musicians or the four hundred thousand troops brought into France during WWI, are hardly marked or visible across the most frequented tourist destinations nor within state-sponsored museums dedicated to national history.<sup>2</sup> There are neither “environments of memory” nor “sites of memory,” for either visitors or residents interested in the historical presence of African-descended Americans in Paris.<sup>3</sup> Instead, performance events meet the demand of curious travelers who would not otherwise find any commemoration of Black Americans in the form of buildings, statues, plaques, or artifact collections. In the absence of inanimate objects and structures formally dedicated to black-bodied American soldiers and musicians who helped to shape Paris’s culture and history since WWI, certain tourist-oriented live performances constitute *audible monuments* to Black soldiers and musicians. Audible monuments are sound objects constructed through live orature, collective participation, or sound-producing movements that recall history and memory for the purpose of witness engagement or tourist consumption.<sup>4</sup> Toward a critical analysis grounded in performance studies theory, this essay first replays and reinterprets the music and the military histories shared between African-descended US soldiers and the nation of France as a gendered and misaligned romance, and then suggests how that romance was rehearsed and then ruptured by a contemporary African presence during a “Black Paris Tour” performance event in Spring 2015.<sup>5</sup>

Paris tourism events that promise “Black” content are often likely to recall historical military and musical service through contemporary lenses in ways that concurrently create and satisfy nostalgia for tourists and local participants.<sup>6</sup> There are at least three distinct tourist experiences that offer a guided tour of Paris with an emphasis on Black or *noir* experiences, history, and culture in the city. The longest

running of these, the “Black Paris Tour,” conveys the historical interaction between France and the Black soldiers who served American and French militaries as entertainers, soldiers, or both, during the iteration that is the subject of this analysis. The tour helps to romanticize American–French histories in ways that diminished or muted memories of anti-Black violence at the hands of the French. The tour narratives oscillate between contestations of US imperialism alongside anti-Black state action on the one hand, and rehearsals of historical moments when Black soldiers achieved racial harmony on the other. The tour narratives present Black American soldiers and musicians as symbols of racial progress despite social and political conditions and state action, such as French colonialism, indicating the contrary.

### **History Reinterpreted**

The tour guide who led the tour that I experienced in 2015 presented history and folklore in two overlapping threads. The central drama posited distressed European allies, namely France, in great despair and on the brink of losing the war until rescued by Negro troops. The underlying narrative of the tour was a story about Negro soldiers constructing and exhibiting masculinity and manhood through military service in hopes of acquiring the rights of full citizenship. Elements constituting the romantic nature of French–African American histories got amplified during the Black Paris tour, namely, the sound of jazz music that is heard or imagined, the gendered yet alternating roles of lover and beloved in a drama of attraction, heroic action, and long-distance separation across the ocean.

The sentiment of the tour was that Black soldiers, having proven their abilities as men through the ultimate test of active combat, should have been granted the rights of full citizenship by the US government which had long placed restrictions on Black humanity. Before the heroic actions and victorious combat of Negro US soldiers who ultimately saved the day, US armed forces had limited Negro troops to working in service capacities or in support of other US soldiers. The guide shared how France had to plead with the US during WWI to even allow Black soldiers to engage in actual combat instead of only playing music or cooking and cleaning for white-bodied peers of equal or lesser rank. Military service restrictions, alongside voting restrictions, were symptomatic of the race (and sex) limitations to full US citizenship at that time. US military policies, both official and social, barred the inclusion of African-descended soldiers in combat during WWI, which meant barring them from the ultimate duty of (exclusively male) full citizenship according to recurring rhetoric, on the grounds that they were not intelligent or trustworthy enough to participate. One strategy of Negro soldiers toward gaining such rights was to prove their humanity by proving manhood since that latter concept had been an American ideology and ideal “from the Revolution onward.”<sup>7</sup> Many during the era considered active combat to be the ultimate act of masculinity and citizenship. In addition to that fact, labor historians assert that while being barred from active duty in combat, Negro soldiers unloaded all

ships, built port infrastructures where none existed and also the railroads between ports that still function throughout Europe presently.<sup>8</sup> When they fought at the request of *La France*, musician soldiers, in particular, saved the world through the masculine act of combat in conjunction with the spirited yet refined act of musicianship. They demonstrated that they were indeed men not animals or ingrates as the US military had falsely determined.

The narrative structure of the tour presented *La France* as the feminine subject—a damsel in distress—with American Negro soldiers in the role of the masculine and spirited hero. Those soldiers fought the dragons of US white supremacy on one side and the imposition of German fascism on another. In one sense, France in the feminine role is good casting because this gendering aligns with the custom of its citizens to refer to their own country with a feminine pronoun and there has also been a longstanding expectation that individuals subsume their identities within a larger singular national identity. By 1917, when the US joined the Allies in battle, most Frenchmen were in active duty, leaving behind a disproportionate population of women civilians in towns, including Paris.<sup>9</sup> Between battles, the time that soldiers spent in towns with civilians was very likely to be in an environment where they saw more women than men, a situation that might have led some to project feminine characteristics onto the group for which they were fighting and whom they were protecting.

The Black Paris Tour presents narratives that echo and sample histories of Black expatriates who loved and were beloved by the city of Paris and the nation of France. These narratives had already been widely accepted, repeated, and circulated in various forms as fact, fiction, and folklore immediately after WWI.<sup>10</sup> In one example, a war correspondent who wrote for the *Chicago Defender* recounts unattributed statements asserting that “officers and men in authority in the French billeting places had difficulty in keeping the villagers from following the band away when it played plantation airs and syncopations as only Negroes can play them.”<sup>11</sup> These comments suggesting affective attachments by civilians throughout France were in concert with accounts that some Black soldiers found French women to be very “affectionate people.”<sup>12</sup>

Like many great romance narratives, forced separation thwarted the affair between Negro troops and *La France*. Toward what one might consider a happier ending, numerous biographies and histories have consistently affirmed the existence of “better employment opportunities, freedom from the discrimination faced in the States, and a high demand for black musicians,”<sup>13</sup> conditions which kept many soldiers in Paris. Still, aside from those well-documented occurrences, the vast majority of about two hundred thousand troops were in fact separated from French admiration by the Atlantic Ocean, and by a surge in anti-Black violence, inequality, and dishonor from the US government and civilians alike. White supremacists speedily countered the triumphs and affections of WWI through anti-Black violence during the Red Summer that marked an increase of mob attacks and lynching of Black US citizens, particularly soldiers who had returned from the war.<sup>14</sup> Another example of such

dishonor that the guide shared surrounds the mothers of American soldiers killed in battle while fighting for France. She conveyed that the French government had invited the grieving women to Paris for a special occasion honoring their fallen sons. With a sign of disgust, the guide performer explained with quiet tones that US officials had forced the handful of Black mothers among the group to travel in the servant quarters during the sea voyage and then uninvited them to the festivities once they arrived in Paris.

In order to amplify the inequalities that Negro soldiers and their families endured at the hands of US military both abroad and on American soil, the storyteller guide repeatedly contrasted these with the high levels of acceptance and admiration toward Black soldiers within Paris and across France. In contrast to the disdain that Negro soldiers met upon their return to the United States, World War I brought wartime victory and jazz music to France and subsequently the nation warmly embraced the Black bodies who simultaneously rendered both. We can find one example of historical support for this sentiment in a letter that French general Vincendon wrote to soldiers that he commanded in the exclusively Black 370th Infantry, who, like all Negro units, were not permitted to engage in combat as US soldiers<sup>15</sup> but fought in the French army wearing French uniforms:

“You are leaving us. [...] In the name of your comrades of the 59th Division I say to you, au revoir. In the name of France, I thank you. [...] [T]he American government generously put your regiment at the disposition of the French High Command. [...] We at first, at Mareuil Sur Ourcq, in September, admired your fine appearance under arms, the precision of your review and the suppleness of your evolutions that presented to the eye the appearance of silk unrolling in wavy folds. [...] [I]n offering to me your regimental colors as proof of your love for France and as an expression of your loyalty to the 59th Division and our Army, you have given us of your best and you have given it out of the fullness of your hearts. The blood of your comrades who fell on the soil of France mixed with the blood of our soldiers, renders indissoluble the bonds of affection that unite us. We have, besides, the pride of having worked together at a magnificent task, and the pride of bearing on our foreheads the ray of a common grandeur. VINCENDON<sup>16</sup>

Vincendon's affectionate letter is consistent with the storyteller's suggestion that the nation of France fell in love with Negro American soldiers during and after WWI. Even while a US backlash aimed to diminish the affective power of romantic and heroic narratives circulating in the United States, and as the Negro Renaissance gave way to the Great Depression, those narratives of French affection continued to flourish in the imaginations of African Americans.

The pursuit of this romance, or at least its residue, is what has helped to bolster the presence of Black Americans immediately after the war through the 1920s and beyond. Figures including Chester Himes, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin looked to Paris for intellectual and creative cultivation as well as physical safety that could not be guaranteed in their hostile country of origin. The continued interest is evident through the present day as it fuels the success of the Black Paris Tour among the scores of Black Americans, Parisian locals, and foreign tourists who have participated over the course of its thirty-year existence.

### **Misaligned Gendered Romance**

Interpreted through Adria Imada's lens of "affective bonds," the affections between US American Negro soldiers and *La France* sound like a transatlantic love-triangle with misaligned gender roles due to an imbalance of power. The absence of complete reciprocity between the Negro soldiers and those who represent France corresponds with the huge disparity in power between the colonial force and the disenfranchised Negro servicemen. The letter that General Vincendon wrote to Negro soldiers of the 370th Division exemplifies the asymmetrical affection that was not amplified during the tour. The letter conveys his admiration for the "fine appearance" of Negro soldiers and describes their formations with words like "supple" and "silk," which invoke tactile sensations in a way that might have evidenced layers of homoeroticism in the all-male environment if only it was a gesture with the potential for reciprocity or collective engagement. In this instance, however, Vincendon represents France as a single observer in a unilateral missive that is unlikely to be answered publicly and collectively by the soldiers who served, and any response would not likely include praise for how appealing the letter writer himself looked in uniform. His 1919 report with its unreciprocated gaze upon the soldiers who pleased him aesthetically is in some ways akin to the male gaze that many now interpret as an act of domination that helps to feminize the object of desire. As the letter continues, Vincendon attributes a "love" for France, "loyalty," and that they gave their "best" from the fullness of their hearts only to the Black soldiers. Although the letter suggests that the soldiers are united with France through bonds of affection and the blood of fallen comrades, there is no clear indication in the letter that the love and loyalty attributed to Black soldiers was fully reciprocated by French soldiers of the nation more broadly.

Imada's theory of imagined intimacy addresses the "fantasy of reciprocal attachment"<sup>17</sup> surrounding a relationship formed through military action. This study draws from Imada's work surrounding the "service"<sup>18</sup> of *aloha* packaged for tourism in Hawai'i, with *hula* performance as a primary animation of the aloha love metaphor. She explains how live performances in addition to the circulation of photos, films, and songs depicting hula dancers in close proximity to US servicemen produced imagined intimacy not only between soldiers and Native Hawaiian women but between Hawai'i and the United States empire. Imada explains that the fantasy generated for tourists

suggests a mutually consensual interaction between “companions” in a way that “eroded the distinction between conquest and consent as it insisted on affective bonds”<sup>19</sup> in contrast to the lived experiences of forceful hierarchies. She also explains that the hospitality that Native Hawaiians rendered, including hula performances under the banner of “Aloha,” were proffered “with no expectation of return.” In a similar manner, the oral depictions shared by the tour guide helped witnesses of her performance imagine the non-sexual intimacy between Black soldiers and the people of France.

The lack of opportunity for reciprocity and the racialized expectation of service in conjunction with the imbalance of power between Negro soldiers and France as a military power with a colonial history undermined the romantic retrospective narrative presented on tours of Black Paris. The absence of bilateral participation in the process of romantic objectification—a symbolic game where participants take turns consuming each other as love objects visually and otherwise—marks the subjection of Negro soldiers even when it was expressed as admiration for stellar military and musical performance.

On the surface, one might not initially recognize common threads between the narrative of Negro soldiers who sail away from *La France* leaving a sad and perhaps indebted feminine subject and the *Doudou* song in which a French soldier sails away from Martinique leaving behind a sad woman with amorous attachments on the shores of the island. With a closer listen, however, one can detect the more striking similarities between the Negro soldier and the Martinican lover, who both engage in temporary and pragmatic relationships with those who represent colonial power. In both the spoken narratives of Negro soldiers as well as the songs rendered of the *Doudou*, those with military authority give affection for a season, but there is no permanent change in the social or political status of the Black-bodied person rendering complete devotion. Complete reciprocity is implausible. In another sense, the story of Black men—who arrived in France during WWI strong enough to fight yet sensual enough to play arousing and upbeat music—is a direct contrast to the colonial *doudou* narrative. The *doudou* figure was repudiated by intellectuals of the *negritude* movement for her incessant sorrow over being left behind.<sup>20</sup> The *doudou* narrative was repeatedly presented in the sad song of loss depicting an African-descended woman who cried on the shores of Martinique as she watched the ship of her beloved French captain sail away for good. While the sound image of multi-dexterous troops of Black men who arrive by ship wielding both weapons and instruments is markedly different from the sound image of a woman weeping alone because she was left behind on the shores, the structures of power informing the affect are quite similar in both scenarios. In both cases, the romantic attachments that might fit Adria Imada’s description of imagined intimacy constitute the subjection of Black bodies valued only when they serve at the leisure, or in the duty, of their respective governing authorities.

While romantic attachments are often understood as affective bonds between potentially erotic love interests, it is important to note that romantic affinities also

frequently parallel or mimic the earliest formed affective bonds between parent and child. Within the Black Paris Tour narratives, slippage occurs between the relational structures that frame romantic attachments between war heroes and civilians, and those more akin to parent–child relationships involving hierarchy, care labor obligation, and physical subjugation by a dominant figure. By visiting a nation that has been known to foster or adopt Black American soldiers, artists, and intellectuals who were legally and socially declared unnatural and unwanted historically by their birth nation/father, Black-bodied tourists can imagine what life might have been like growing up with a different nation/father in a different home country. The tour provides a vehicle for those seeking an alternative father figure in the same cultural origin model that pairs mother Africa with an imperialist father nation having a history or military strength and systems for commodifying Black bodies. The tour allows visitors to imagine a different form of paternalism involving France, which is a nation with a different colonial history.

In a manner oriented toward sound rather than sight, many African Americans who have *heard* stories about key Black figures who spent time in Paris or relocated there permanently, develop a desire to be where those people were and possibly get a taste of the freedom described.<sup>21</sup> Since the 1980s when the tour began, mostly African American travelers have been drawn to the tour offering histories suggesting that Paris offers a different experience for Black bodies than what has been most commonly available in the United States. As the Black Paris Tour exemplifies, the dynamics of attraction precede the actual travel itself. One explanation of the attraction process is that images and objects draw potential tourists and stir interest. For example, a person might desire a Paris vacation in order to see the Eiffel Tower after first consuming romantic images of the structure in print or film for decades. The Black Paris Tour attracts African–descended American visitors without any specific promise of a Black American sight to behold in contrast to one longstanding definition of a tourist attraction that requires a “sight” that evokes “respectful admiration”<sup>22</sup> and a marker that conveys information about the sight. In this case, the dynamics of a tourist *attraction* extend beyond the attractiveness of any material objects. The tour was inconsistent with theories suggesting that tourist experience must rely on visual representations that “replace aural codes.”<sup>23</sup> The tour had no visible markings and no visual representations upon which to rely in terms of a Black American history in the city. The romantic audible monuments to Paris generated during the tour alongside histories, autobiographies, and long-circulated folklore surrounding the love and acceptance of Black people can constitute a tertiary nostalgia and direct longing on the part of tourists.

### **Rehearsal**

The form and content of the Black Paris Tour facilitates participants’ ability to enact the rehearsal and performance of movement, status, and romance that tourists might



associate with Black American expatriates in Paris both historically and through imagination. In form, the Black Paris tour is an activity that relies less upon the visual, and more upon the audible, the experiential, and the practice of assisted imagining through guide-led performance. Unlike other walking tours where the spoken content is most often directly connected to a specific landmark site, an official government marker, or physical structure of emphasis, the content of this tour of Black Paris was often only loosely related to the few buildings and monuments along the route. Generally, there were no physical plaques or objects purposed to remember Americans of African descent. For example, the tour included a visit to the park which Langston Hughes most likely frequented during his 1925 stay. On a sunny spring day in March, tourists could imagine, with the help of the orator guide, where Hughes *might* have sat on a bench writing poetry. Also with her help tourists might imagine Hughes entering the adjacent metro station to take the train to where he worked as a waiter in a famous jazz club yet there was no imprint or placard attached to the government-managed space to declare “Langston Hughes was here.” For the standard fee of 175 Euros per person for a full-day walking and public transit tour across Paris, participants on the tour moved, between war stories, through the city on trains and buses to visit neighborhoods where notable Black artists and intellectuals were once present, but not officially recognized.

In conjunction with the transient nature of the tour, the guide’s vocal performance and lore also recalled how collective imaginations absorb Black music and histories into an “imperial fantasy” where hegemonic practices of hearing “Black people on the move” have played a role in developing a “French imperial imagination.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, independent of how the music has functioned for practitioners and their communities, the sounds within imperialist circuits across the US and France have often functioned to evidence Otherness, and ultimately inferiority, toward “musicological violence” through colonial practices of discovery and subjugation.

The transneighborhood mobility contrasts the *real property* and physical structure of a museum and its walls. Still, monuments can be transported from one location to another physically and imaginatively just as French colonial powers transported the Luxor Obelisk from Waset, Egypt to Paris in 1833, and just as city planners and architects reimagined the ancient obelisk design as the Washington Monument, with construction beginning in 1848. The tour in Paris draws upon this example of transnational mobility to perform structure in a way that is not often associated with physical monuments. The guide suggests and demonstrates a process of monument-making that requires only the body and voice as “materials” for a grand structure of memory.

In terms of content, heroic soldier stories were the central and recurring subjects. The narratives produced through the tour of Black Paris undulated between France’s pleasure in embracing the Black American Other, and the duty of Black entertainers in Paris to perpetually earn or justify said embrace through military service

in wartime and musical performance labor. Key figures were jazz bandleader James Reese Europe, along with fighter pilot and jazz drummer Eugene Bullard. Toward an audible monument in honor of Europe, the guide explained that he was a Harlem resident and well-known jazz musician who led an all-Black military band comprised of professional jazz musicians. The guide solemnly recounted that when the first exclusively Black group of soldier–musicians arrived, France had been occupied by Germany and forbidden to sing or play the French national anthem for many years. Her monotone voice then quieted with secular reverence to convey that when the United States ship carrying the Harlem soldiers approached, the music they were playing on the deck of the ship caused French listeners to weep. She assured her audience that French civilians shed tears as the vessel drew near because they recognized the sound of the French national anthem. According to the guide, the familiar sound that they had not heard publicly in almost a decade had been gift-wrapped with a jazz swing to embellish the anthem. The guide underscored the chronological fact that it was only after Black soldiers participated in active combat that France and the Allies started to win the war. Europe and his soldier musicians were, like the music they played, heroic and sensual in ways that ultimately brought deliverance and celebration.

Through their own movement across the city and with a guided commentary, tour participants rehearsed the way in which Black soldiers beginning in WWI moved across the French landscape with both weapons and instruments in an effort to protect the people and property of nations that did not recognize them as citizens. One underlying tension for historic performances rehearsed by tour participants is the dialectic between the romantic acceptance of Black performing bodies and the fractured national belonging for African Americans as quasi-citizens of both yet neither France nor the United States. The tour begins with a love story between entertainer-turned-soldier James Reece Europe and concludes, most comprehensively, with another love story between France and entertainer-turned-soldier Josephine Baker. Both stories involve a high level of affect and affinity on the part of France toward foreign, non-francophone, Black bodies. Both examples demonstrate the paternal willingness of France to foster Black American entertainers who demonstrated loyalty to the nation through military service alongside the labor of cultural production. Throughout the tour, the romantic embrace is rendered like a memorable and often repeated chorus, while the aspect of duty and subjection is less pronounced, like the lyrics to a verse that nobody knows or remembers.

The tour rehearses a hybrid form of national belonging that African-descended US soldiers embodied when they fought as members of the French army under French command during WWI. When US military leaders finally consented to deploy Negro troops in active battle, those fighters were not issued US uniforms. With a hybridity reminiscent of Negro US soldiers beholden to France, the founder of the Black Paris Tour is an African–descended American woman who was born in France to United States military parents. She founded the oldest and longest–running tour more than thirty years ago when she returned to Paris as an adult. The founder’s personal military

history and origins position her as an insider in terms of US military as well as Parisian geography and culture. Her very existence is an intersection of Black American identity and US military presence on French soil, which contributes to the credibility of her tour. The founder, who has mediated transnational geography and culture through her Black body since birth, is ostensibly qualified to be the primary builder of an *audible monument* that has attracted multiple generations of mostly Black American tourists who seek to experience and understand such mediations. Awareness of her tour has spread through word of mouth for more than two decades and, more recently, she launched a website and also listed the tour on mobile travel applications. During early Spring 2015, while the founder of the tour was back in the US visiting family, another African-descended woman who had dual American and French citizenship guided the tour. With an equal amount of “Black Paris” credibility based on her personal history, she described herself as a “military brat” who had lived in both the United States and France. She wore a multicolored head wrap that completely covered her hair and tightly framed her cream-colored face.

### **Rupture**

As the guide led participants through a rehearsal of stories and themes that many Black Americans have long associated with Black men who served overseas, she also facilitated a rupture of those themes with the way that she included Black women. The Black Paris attraction constituted a womanist approach to the tourist experience through collective and collaborative direction, the centering of Black women, and a culminating narrative presenting the Black woman as heroic and worthy of honor. A particularly womanist action was the guide’s acknowledgment of Black deities and extra-logical ways of knowing to establish legitimacy for African-based belief—independent from subsequent adoption by European migrants. An early assertion by the guide was the role of the deity Isis, the African goddess for whom the city of Paris is named. Consistent with Black feminist modes of thinking and theorizing, the sound monuments were fluid, not phallic, and mutable rather than static. More than once during the eight-hour excursion the guide asked for consent rather than assuming authority and sought collective feedback toward collaborative decisions on what turn to take next. As one might expect from a walking tour, transitory vocal performance constituted the delivery of the content, but the event also included a somewhat improvisational component. The guide sometimes gave participants options for what could happen next in terms of bus routes and the order of content presented.

The Black Paris tour centered Black women and their shared experiences in contrast to museum-like structures designed for “mastering otherness.”<sup>25</sup> The spatial and motion design of the tour of Black Paris eluded hierarchical frameworks that might objectify subjects or encourage tourists to experience dominance over contained artifacts or bracketed representations. Rather than perceiving subjects as exoticized oth-

ers or temporally distant primitives, the guide emphasized common experiences between the Black-bodied listeners and the Black-bodied figures she presented. The tour began with a breakfast meeting in a cafe near the Arc de Triomphe where participants introduced themselves and discovered mutual acquaintances back in the States. The group then walked over to an open area near the Arc and sat close together on a single bench to hear the first narration. The storyteller guided five African-descended women travelers from the United States including a mother–daughter pair and four others who were each traveling alone. Four of the five women were from the area surrounding Oakland, CA and one, the youngest, was a student from the Midwest about to enter law school. The all-women group of tourists along with the woman tour guide and the woman founder together embodied the contrast between the all-male Black military bands. The guide helped to affect a sense of continuity between the key figures of the narrative and her listeners. In contrast to what the guide described surrounding those Black mothers of soldiers whom US personnel relegated to the servants' quarters and uninvited to the celebration, this tour attracted and invited Black women. Her periodic usage of pronouns like “they” when referring to the nondescript yet ominous presence of governments and dominant social structures on either side of the Atlantic, in contrast to her usage of “us” and “we” in reference to people with Black bodies across nationalities and time periods, rhetorically denoted an emotional investment not sounded in her tone of voice.

Rupturing the pervasive narrative of male soldiers rescuing a feminine nation to demonstrate heroic masculinity, the most developed audible monument that the guide constructed was in honor of Josephine Baker, which functioned to represent Black women as heroic and worthy of honor. The guide placed much emphasis on Baker as a soldier and spy for the Resistance, which functioned to rupture the idea that Baker's greatest significance was as an exotic and erotic entertainer. The pinnacle of the tour took place at the Madeline Cathedral where the funeral service for Baker was held in 1975. Beyond the mentions of Baker's meteoric popularity and the astounding financial success surrounding her early performance career, the tour narrative highlighted Baker's military exploits and honors with great detail. After speaking about Baker's skill as a spy, pilot, and wartime smuggler of people and information for the French Resistance during WWII, the tour guide explained how Baker was honored with unprecedented esteem at her death for her extraordinary military service. After the tour guide highlighted Baker's military accomplishments—flying planes and saving lives—she explained that Baker was the only woman in France's history to ever receive a state funeral, which is an honor usually reserved exclusively for presidents. The romantic affair between *La France* (feminine) and *Le Baker* (masculine), culminated with a memorial attended by thousands, while many more thousands flooded the area around the cathedral as far as the eye could see. Tour participants stood at the top of the Madeline Cathedral stairs with their backs to the cathedral, facing the Luxor obelisk street, and gazed down the avenue in order to imagine the entire space packed with the bodies of adoring fans wanting to bid her *adieu*.

The story of Baker's widely mourned death marked with military honors ruptures the romantic narrative wherein only Black men were the heroes that saved the feminine European (white) subject, *La France*. In prevailing historic military narratives, US Negro women are mostly absent except perhaps when mourning lost sons. In contrast, the tour presents Josephine Baker as a central military hero and gestures toward her career as a cover used to carry out death-defying feats. Additionally, the tour celebrates the very act of publicly mourning the death of a Black woman with a burial site secured by Princess Grace of Monaco. In the United States, historically, there have not been widespread outpourings of sympathy or mourning surrounding the death or demise of African-descended women, and the labor of Black women in America has long been unacknowledged and undercompensated.<sup>26</sup> Even for celebrated African-descended women artists and intellectuals like Phillis Wheatley, Henrietta Vinton Davis, and Zora Neale Hurston the unmarked event of death signified by an unmarked grave, which parallels unacknowledged labor, has become a familiar American trope.<sup>27</sup> With the story of Baker's grand funeral following a lucrative career, the Paris tour narrative presents a symbol of racial progress in France and an alternative to the US practice of erasing Black women's contributions to the nation and not noticing Black women's deaths (or lives). In the process, the narrative credits France as a nation for rightfully demonstrating sorrow at the significant loss of Baker and proving its great love.

### Monumental Exclusions

In order to maintain the romantic narrative thread throughout the tour, the audible monuments excludes facts and accounts of Black-bodied soldiers who did not experience the affection sometimes shared among soldiers, musicians, and the nation of France. The tour was mostly silent on any subjugation that Black American soldier-musicians experienced at the hands of the French but repeatedly confirmed the injustice they endured from their own US government. Additional groups who were less celebrated or not mentioned at all during the tour include Negro women who served the US military overseas as nurses and laborers, Negro soldiers who were not musicians, and Negro soldiers never allowed to fight but who contributed manual labor. Of the two hundred thousand Negro soldiers in France, only twenty-four thousand got the opportunity to work "together" with the French in active combat toward the demonstration of manhood, which many defined as "masculinity and eligibility for equal citizenship."<sup>28</sup> Reese was one of the only high-ranking officers who maintained command of his unit during the entire war (the US Armed Forces transferred all others), and his unit was one of the few all-Negro units to engage in active combat while the US restricted almost eighty percent of the Negro soldiers in France to labor assignments.<sup>29</sup>

There was no audible acknowledgment during the tour that anti-Black sentiment toward Senegalese and West African soldiers prevailed widely in the French

government. While the tour of Black Paris celebrated the sentiments that French officials like Gen. Vincendon expressed in his letter in order to construct monuments to Paris and to display her affection for Negro American soldiers, there was no mention that such sentiments were both rare and incongruent with the national posture toward Senegalese and West African soldiers and civilians during the same eras. Missing from most of the narrative was the current and historical context of anti-Black culture and discourse from the French government toward francophone Black-bodied subjects from countries that France colonized. The silence surrounding African people from the French colonies who also contributed to the history implies that the overall structure between France and Black-bodied people rendering service to the French military is far from romantic. The French model for subjection has historically been different from the US model because “ethnographic-racial statistics are banned under French law.”<sup>30</sup> There is no French equivalent to US Jim Crow laws that states based solely on the color of one’s skin. Still, the Black bodies of US travelers have been historically differently categorized within Europe than those tracing origins directly to francophone African countries. For example, the amorous engagement that met Black American soldier–musicians was unmatched compared to the treatment of Senegalese soldiers in the same war. France offered citizenship to Senegalese fighters when the military was in great need during WWI, but now often acts in demonizing and dehumanizing ways towards the offspring of those culturally Senegalese citizens who are often presumed to be immigrants.<sup>31</sup>

After several hours of witnessing and participating in the construction of audible monuments that celebrate numerous accounts of affection between France and Black Americans, the tour shifts from historic to contemporary, from soldier to civilian, from ephemeral to material, from American to Pan-African, and from audible to edible, in ways that move beyond romantic fantasies toward structural critique. While the Black Paris Tour attracts and captivates participants with the narrative lure of love for and acceptance of Black bodies in Paris, the tour ultimately facilitates the critique of US hegemony and anti-Black violence in both the US and in France through collective dialogue. Initially, the historical context of anti-Black French colonialism was absent from the tour entirely, as it only conveyed romanticized versions of Paris negrophilia through orality deemed credible. While the tour constructs audible monuments that preserve imaginings of Black love and acceptance in France, the tour concludes with a real-time critique of present hegemonic conditions and the participatory agreement that Pan-African strategies can disrupt both US imperialism and French paternalism in a colonial context. The tour ends by facilitating a conversation among Black Americans and francophone Africans.

Consistent with the tour’s oral orientation, the concluding segment of the full-day tour is a gastronomical experience at a Senegalese restaurant in the section of Paris known as Little Africa. The material space of the Senegalese restaurant and the association of African national identity thereby evoked provides a space for participants to critique anti-Black colonial structures and imperialism. The conversation at the

tiny restaurant expands beyond the African American women tour participants to include Francophone African male patrons on the topic of anti-Black violence in France as well as in the United States. Over delicious *mafe*, participants including the guide bounce examples of anti-Black sentiment, collective repercussions, and possible remedies that include forms of Pan-African solidarity across geographies. In Little Africa, there were no “sights” in terms of monuments or statues. The location was attractive to the Black women tour participants because the space was bustling with Black bodies, who identified with more than thirty countries or territories and spoke three times as many languages and dialects. The sound of being Black in Paris—away from tourist markers, in a place not listed as an attraction on the official Bureau of Paris tourism map—was a glorious cacophony of business transactions, friends greeting each other, children running to keep up, and workers who had gathered to protest labor conditions at a major intersection.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire.” *Representations* (1989): 7–24.

<sup>2</sup> The reported number of Negro soldiers involved in WWI varies. Four hundred thousand is the number given by Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (Homewood Press, 1919), 9.

<sup>3</sup> However, 128 miles north-east of Paris near a town called Ardeuil-et-Montfauvelles there is a remnant of an obelisk that was damaged by German artillery in the Second World War (1940). That war-torn structure bears the names of Black soldiers of the 371st Infantry of WWI killed nearby in 1918. Frank E. Roberts, *The American Foreign Legion: Black Soldiers of the 93d in World War I* (Naval Institute Press, 2004), Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Roach borrows the concept of orature from Ngugi wa Thiong'o to reference a “range of forms” including “gesture, song, dance, processions, storytelling, proverbs, gossip, customs, rites, and rituals.” Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (Columbia University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>5</sup> The tension between physical monuments and museums on one hand, and performed audible monuments constructed and disappearing through live embodied performance on the other, builds upon the work of Diana Taylor and Peggy Phelan respectively. Peggy Phelan. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge, 2003). Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2003). This work builds upon the ideas of Fred Moten, who resists the notion that the physical ‘end’ of any given live performance signals its temporal or affective completion and compels us to consider ghostly encounters with disembodied presences—including through memory—as a type of performance. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (U of Minnesota Press, 2003). This

work also heeds the admonition of Sandra Richards, who cautions against calling upon Africa to function only as symbolic or “mythological” past when scholars should look to incorporate the contemporary specificities” of African and pan-African experiences. Sandra L. Richards, “Function at the Junction: African Diaspora Studies and Theatre Studies,” *The African Diaspora and the Disciplines* (2010): 206.

<sup>6</sup> The use of the term “Black” instead of “Noir” in French-language advertisements signals an American-specific sensibility that can include both oppression and resistance. For a more in-depth study of how “Black” and “Noir” have non-static meanings and applications at different times, see Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Stovall, *Black France / France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness* (Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth L. Karst, “Pursuit of Manhood and the Desegregation of the Armed Forces, The,” *UCLA L. Rev.* 38 (1990), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur E. Barbeau and Henri Florette, *The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I* (Temple University Press, 1974), 89–110.

<sup>9</sup> Imagining the absence of European men within towns contributes to a romantic structure that relies on masculine Black soldiers coming to the rescue of France as a feminine subject. Susan Grayzel points out that the geography of the “‘home’ front” was feminized for the first time during WWI but that the actual home dwellers throughout France and England included a significant amount of men who did not enlist. Susan R. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (UNC Press Books, 2014), 45.

<sup>10</sup> One example is a collection of Negro soldier songs gathered with some ethnomusicological methodology by John Jacob Niles, 1892–1980; in *Singing Soldiers* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1927), 0–7. Another example is Howard Washington Odum, *Wings on My Feet: Black Ulysses at the Wars* (Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> William Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War: His Splendid Record in the Battle Zones of Europe, Including a Resume of His Past Services to His Country in the Wars of the Revolution, of 1812, the War of the Rebellion, the Indian Wars on the Frontier, the Spanish-American War, and the Late Imbroglia with Mexico* (Cuneo-Henneberry Company, 1919).

<sup>12</sup> Craig Lloyd, *Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris* (University of Georgia Press, 2006), 63.

<sup>13</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 8.



<sup>14</sup> Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War: A Complete and Authentic Narration, from Official Sources, of the Participation of American Soldiers of the Negro Race in the World War for Democracy ... A Full Account of the War Work Organizations of Colored Men and Women and Other Civilian Activities, including the Red Cross, the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A. and the War Camp Community Service, with Official Summary of Treaty of Peace and League of Nations Covenant.* (Chicago, Homewood Press, 1919) Web. <https://lccn.loc.gov/19011646>.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts, *The American Foreign Legion: Black Soldiers of the 93d in World War I*, Introduction.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in William Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War: His Splendid Record in the Battle Zones of Europe, Including a Resume of His Past Services to His Country in the Wars of the Revolution, of 1812, the War of the Rebellion, the Indian Wars on the Frontier, the Spanish-American War, and the Late Imbroglia with Mexico* (Cuneo-Henneberry Company, 1919), 154–55.

<sup>17</sup> Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the US Empire* (Duke University Press, 2012), 154.

<sup>18</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Imada, *Aloha America*, 11

<sup>20</sup> Edwin C. Hill Jr., *Black Soundscapes, White Stages: The Meaning of Francophone Sound in the Black Atlantic* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Black periodicals like the *Chicago Defender* consistently included accounts of key figures traveling to Paris or living abroad in France for more than a century after WWI.

<sup>22</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (University of California Press, 1999), 40.

<sup>23</sup> MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Hill, *Black Soundscapes, White Stages*, 64, 104, 260.

<sup>25</sup> MacCannell, *The Tourist*, xxi.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the Black feminists of the Combahee River Collective worked through the 1970s to counter the way that missing and murdered Black women were not deemed newsworthy. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket Books, 2017). A contemporary example of related work is the effort of the African American Policy Forum with the #SayHerName initiative. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Andrea J. Ritchie, Rachel Anspach, Rachel Gilmer, and Luke Harris, "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women," (African American

Policy Forum, Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, Columbia Law School, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Concerning the unmarked grave of Henrietta Vinton Davis, see William Seraile, “Henrietta Vinton Davis and the Garvey Movement,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 7 (1983): 7; regarding Phillis Wheatley being buried in an unmarked grave, see Charles W. Akers, ““Our Modern Egyptians’: Phillis Wheatley and the Whig Campaign Against Slavery in Revolutionary Boston,” *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no. 3 (1975): 400. Alice Walker secured a tombstone for Zora Neale Hurston, whose place of burial had been previously unmarked; see Alma Freeman, “Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker: A Spiritual Kinship,” *Sage* 2, no. 1 (1985): 37.

<sup>28</sup> This definition of manhood draws upon an Aristotelian equation of civic duty with manhood adapted throughout US history but limited along racial lines. Kenneth L. Karst, “Pursuit of Manhood and the Desegregation of the Armed Forces, The,” *UCLA L. Rev.* 38 (1990).

<sup>29</sup> Scott, *Scott’s Official History of the American Negro in the World War (1919)*, Negro Soldiers of France and England, 117–29.

<sup>30</sup> Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall, *Black France/France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness*, 1, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall, *Black France/France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness*, 65.

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