

QUEERING THE INFERNO:
SPACE, IDENTITY, AND KANSAS CITY'S JAZZ SCENE

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ABSTRACT

The music later called “jazz” flourished in Kansas City from the 1890s until the end of World War II, when city boss Tom Pendergast’s patronage of jazz clubs ended with his incarceration for tax evasion. The city was home to a wide array of clubs, cabarets and performers from every corner of America. As a railroad terminus, the jazz scene in Kansas City was the last stop on performance circuits such as the Theatre Owner’s Booking Association (TOBA). While famous people and events of the jazz scene remain in popular memory, many other important aspects of the complex jazz scene were silenced by the grand narrative of jazz history. What about the lives and experiences of brothel madams, drag performers, table dancers, and other citizens who do not appear in the written history of Kansas City jazz? This dissertation will attempt to excavate the lived experience of those Kansas City jazz scene citizens through an analysis of its geography of desires. Geography of desires is an attempt to understand the complexity of life in Kansas City’s jazz scene in spatial terms. It is also an approach intended to answer an important question: did citizens who considered themselves marginalized in the Kansas City jazz scene engage in what Jose Esteban Munoz termed “worldmaking” in spaces they identified as “theirs?” Through the geography of desires, I theorize that cabarets, drag clubs and brothels in Kansas City also served as worldmaking spaces. In order to explore the role

that jazz scene spaces played in worldmaking, this work attempts an intersectional analysis of the performance of gender, sexuality, class and race in Kansas City. The first chapter focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the geography of desires approach. The second chapter examines the grand narrative of jazz history as it represents Kansas City. The third chapter explores the intersections of identity in the Pendergast machine. Gender transgression in the jazz scene is the focus of the fourth chapter. Prostitution and sex tourism are the center of chapter four. Finally, chapter five investigates the life of table singer Edna Mae Jacobs.

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CHAPTER 1:
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GEOGRAPHY OF DESIRES

Foucault saw his writing not as examinations of the past, but as studies of the present. In addition, Foucault saw his work as biographical. “In a sense,” Foucault explained, “I have always wanted my books to be fragments from an autobiography.”¹ In that way, my proposed study is not unlike those of Foucault. My dissertation, “Queering the Inferno: A Geography of Desires in Kansas City’s Jazz Scene,” is intended to raise and explore questions of power, identity, and space. The jazz scene in Kansas City, Missouri, was fertile ground for the training of famous jazz performers such as Count Basie and Charlie Parker, along with the vice and prostitution often associated with the period. My research, however, examines a forgotten aspect of Kansas City’s jazz scene: the way that non-normative gender performance, combined with working-class women and racial segregation, and space, created Kansas City’s jazz scene.

I was first drawn to this topic by my own search for space. According to scholar Christopher Nealon, academics who identify as queer engage in historical research in order to find themselves, or “get closer to what they love.”² I developed my own sense of queer identity as an undergraduate student. As I

¹ David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 471.

² Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 96.

sought out spaces where I felt my own identity was accepted, I began to wonder about the history of such spaces, places, and people like myself. As I discovered that many of the spaces that I called home originated in the jazz scene of Kansas City, I considered the subcultural and spatial connections between me and that past. I came to understand that spaces such as the El Torreon Ballroom were founded in the jazz scene. While the El Torreon was founded as a “blacks only” dance hall during Kansas City’s jazz scene, the El Torreon I know was (and still is) the home of Kansas City’s predominately white heavy metal and punk scene. At the El Torreon I was one of a crowd of “metalheads:” I was an outsider, but in the El Torreon I had little concern about my safety or my acceptance. It was a space that felt not only like my *place*, but also a *space* where “my people” outnumbered “the man” that included our employers, those who derided “our music,” and the mainstream world at large. This was an experience often repeated at neighborhood lesbian bars and heavy metal clubs in Kansas City. In those scenes I could exhibit whatever identity I wished, and I seriously wondered about the use of those spaces in the past: did individuals in the past identify the space, and themselves, as I did? *Did the lesbian bars always contain lesbians?* While a “holy grail” of *self-identity* in the past does not exist, I did rediscover pieces of a forgotten and vital part of Kansas City’s jazz scene. It is those forgotten, silenced lives in the city’s past that serve as the foundations of the present. Indeed, it is those spaces that led me to see a *world*, in the community, a world where my identity was both accepted and bounded by the walls of the

space. While the proposed study is indeed one of the spatial and historiographical positions of Kansas City's jazz scene, like Foucault's studies of homosexuality and mental illness, there are bits of my autobiography in these pages.

Introduction

Jazz flourished in Kansas City from the 1890s until the end of World War II, when city boss Tom Pendergast's patronage of jazz clubs ended with his incarceration for tax evasion. The city was home to a wide array of clubs, cabarets and performers from every corner of America. As a railroad terminus, the jazz scene in Kansas City was the last stop on performance circuits such as the Theatre Owner's Booking Association (TOBA). While famous people and events of the jazz scene remain in popular memory, many other important aspects of the complex jazz scene were silenced. What about the lives and experiences of brothel madams, drag performers, table dancers, and other citizens who do not appear in the written history of Kansas City jazz? This dissertation will attempt to excavate the lived experience of those Kansas City jazz scene citizens through an analysis of its *geography of desires*.

Geography of desires is an attempt to understand the complexity of life in Kansas City's jazz scene in spatial terms. It is also an approach intended to answer an important question: did citizens who considered themselves marginalized in the Kansas City jazz scene engage in what Jose Esteban Munoz termed "worldmaking" in spaces they identified as "theirs?" Are the terms

“subjugation” and “oppression” applicable to the spatialized identities of Kansas City’s jazz scene performers and club patrons? According to Munoz, “worldmaking” comprises cultural practices that serve as “oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of ‘truth’ that subjugate minoritarian people.”³ Through the geography of desires, I theorize that cabarets, drag clubs and brothels in Kansas City also served as worldmaking spaces. In order to explore the role that jazz scene spaces played in worldmaking, this work will attempt an intersectional analysis of the performance of gender, sexuality, class and race in Kansas City. It is in the confluence of these identities that there is a “space for thinking/acting” about the meanings of those discursive formations.⁴ While there is a greater focus on gender and sexuality in this study, this is not intended to create a hierarchy of difference. As historian of theater Kristina Straub has noted, any exploration of sexuality among performers must be seen in combination with class, race, and ethnicity. “Sexuality is a means by which the actor’s position as marginal to socially dominant definitions of class, ethnicity, race, and gender is constructed,” wrote Straub, “Conversely, discourse about actors figures in the construction of sexual and gender ideology itself.”⁵ The work of David Ake, Kevin Mumford and Kyle Julien, all further discussed in this study, have also examined the intersectional aspects of worldmaking and

³ Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 195-196.

⁴ Arthur Flanagan-Saint-Aubin, “‘BlackGayMale’ Discourse: Reading Race and Sexuality Between the Lines,” in Fout and Tantillo, 402.

⁵ Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 25.

identity in various American jazz scenes. By concentrating on the spatialization of identity, my goal is to avoid a hierarchy of difference and instead better understand how such identities commingled spatially, politically, and discursively. “Instead of conceiving of a space of subalternity, insurgency, and resistance ‘outside’ of power, domination, or hegemony,” wrote critical geographer Donald Moore, “the challenge becomes to understand their mutual imbrication.”⁶

Geography of desires is a theoretical approach I developed during my coursework in American Studies. It combines critical cultural geography and the theories of Foucault in order to prioritize space in the study of identity, representation and performance. Essentially, the geography of desires depends on three theoretical moves. First, my approach depends on a critical understanding of space and the important role that space plays in identity formation. This means developing a map of spaces considered marginal in Kansas City’s jazz scene history, and positioning those spaces as sites of identity formation. Second, geography of desires depends on using the critical map of spaces as a template to locate the possible identities and workings of power through a Foucaultian analysis. Finally, these two metaphorical “maps” are used to explore the possible ways in which space served as a vehicle for worldmaking.

This attempt at an excavation of Kansas City’s jazz scene has two goals. The first goal is to critique the grand narratives of jazz history as written, and the

⁶ Donald Moore, “Remapping Resistance: ‘Ground for Struggle’ and the Politics of Place,” in *Geographies of Resistance*, Steve Pile and Michael Keith eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 92.

ways in which that grand narratives reinforce and replicate the myths of the jazz scene so often portrayed in American popular culture, including films such as *Chicago* and *The Cotton Club*. The second is to explore and identify ways to frame the jazz scene experience in Kansas City in terms of identity and space. The purpose is not to argue that Kansas City was exceptional, but that Kansas City represents the complexity of the jazz scene in American rather than the monolithic singularity depicted most often in written Kansas City history. A recent example of that singularity is from the cover description of *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop- A History*, by jazz historians Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix:

There were but four major galaxies in the early jazz universe, and three of them—New Orleans, Chicago, and New York—have been well documented in print. But there has never been a serious history of the fourth, Kansas City, until now. In this colorful history, Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix range from ragtime to bebop and from Bennie Moten to Charlie Parker to capture the golden age of Kansas City jazz. Readers will find a colorful portrait of old Kaycee itself, back then a neon riot of bars, gambling dens and taxi dance halls, all ruled over by Boss Tom Pendergast, who transformed a dusty cowtown into the Paris of the Plains. We see how this wide-open, gin-soaked town gave birth to a music that was more basic and more viscerally exciting than other styles of jazz, its singers belting out rough-and-tumble urban style of blues, its piano players pounding out a style later known as “boogie-woogie.” We visit the great landmarks, like the Reno Club, the “Biggest Little Club in the World,” where Lester Young and Count Basie made history, and Charlie Parker began his musical education in the alley out back.⁷

While the book by Driggs and Haddix is a major work in and on Kansas City jazz history, its marketing reinforces the stereotypes of the jazz scene so

⁷ Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop- A History* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2006), jacket description.

popular in its singular portrayal before the reader even opens its covers. Here the terrain of drag performers and brothel madams is only a backdrop for the real story of the evolution of jazz music and its leaders—it serves as a setting for the “true story.” This Kansas City “Jazz Age,” reframed in “Queering the Inferno” as a jazz scene, occupies an interesting space in American popular culture. Images of flappers, speak-easies and jazz music that permeate the popular image of the “Jazz Age” have created a concept of the 1920s as an age of cultural shift and social freedom. Those images of the 1920s are just that: specific snapshots of a period filled with contention and social clash. The so-called “Jazz Age” was in fact a period in American history just as contentious and complex as any other. The lived experiences of Kansas City’s jazz scene, as well as the layers of experience buried under dominant written history, illustrate the ideological nature of that popular image. This is a genealogy of Kansas City’s jazz scene.

The key theories in this study are those of Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, power was a relation, not a substance.⁸ His experiences in mental wards, schools and as a gay man led Foucault to be suspicious of concepts of institutional power as repressive.⁹ Foucault’s conception of power is understood only through his definition of discourse. Discourse, or discursive practice, provided a language to the classification systems of power.¹⁰ According to

⁸ David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16.

⁹ Stuart Brown, Diane Collinson and Robert Wilkinson eds., *One Hundred Twentieth Century Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1998), 559.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Random House, 1970; reprint, 1994), xix.

Foucault, discourse is a series of practices that produce meaning, or the rules that generate knowledge. Foucault believed that discursive analysis could determine the strategies of power (where power is and what it rules) instead of the focus on language content in structuralist theories.¹¹ Power, in Foucault's theory of discourse, is a productive system permanently linked to knowledge. It is the knowledge that produces "truths" of society and deploys such truths as social power.¹² Discursive production, in fact, is the conduit through which power/knowledge produces identity and representation.¹³ Therefore, Foucault saw power as a system of knowledge and discourse that produced subjects.¹⁴ According to Foucault, in the Victorian Era the discourse of sexuality "was incited and activated as an instrument of power."¹⁵ Sexuality is, in Foucault's theory, "a result and an instrument of power's design."¹⁶ Foucault believed the relationship between power and discourse was basic to understanding the discursive production of "deviant" identities that served as the subject of his work. For Foucault, discourse produced subjects who were then categorized as "normal" or "abnormal," and people then policed themselves according to that

¹¹ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, 38.

¹² Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Women in Culture and Society series, ed. Catherine R. Stimpson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 24.

¹³ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 48-50.

¹⁴ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, 19.

¹⁵ Laura Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 6.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978; reprint, 1980), 152.

discourse.¹⁷ With the idea that all social relationships were based on such microphysics of power, Foucault demonstrated that the body itself was colonized, leaving “no spaces of liberty.”¹⁸

Foucault’s theories of power/knowledge and discursive formation apply to three key concepts in this study: critical historiography, the positioning of gender and sexuality as discursive formations, and the importance of space as a site of representation and identity formation. Foucault was critical of history, and saw written history as an important political force.¹⁹ In fact, Foucaultian theory positions identity as a purely ideological construct, one that has no transhistorical or “timeless” quality.²⁰ Foucault preferred to think of his work as “effective histories of the present,” not objective representations of the past.²¹ Historians such as Gail Bederman and Emma Perez have used Foucaultian theory in order to revise and excavate the “truths” beneath historical master narratives.

Another aspect of Foucaultian theory critical to this study is the positioning of gender and sexual identity as discursive formations. Foucault’s explanation of power in the history of gender and sexuality involved a multiplicity of forces operating in a highly specific context.²² Power was exercised from multiple points, played a role in every aspect of social context, and was

¹⁷ Edith Kurzweil, *The Age of Structuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 196.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1988), 168.

¹⁹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 83.

²⁰ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 1.

²¹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 18.

²² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *Introduction*, 47.

intentional.²³ In essence, power/knowledge produced a set of “truths” about identity that have marked those “truths” as contextual, historical, and ideological processes.²⁴ Given the fact that identity was *produced* by discourse, it seems only logical that the “truths” of those identities would belong to a specific historical moment. It was those moments, according to Foucault, that created the present. As Foucault wrote in his groundbreaking book, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*:

Briefly, my aim is to examine the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its own hypocrisy for more than a century, which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounced the powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function.²⁵

The third important application of Foucault’s theories to this study is his positioning of space and spatialization. The work of Foucault inherently relied on space as a path to power/knowledge. Critical geographer Derek Gregory wrote that Foucault located both subjection and subjectification within spaces, even if that concept was not Foucault’s project.²⁶ Though each of Foucault’s projects dealt in some sense with space, it was *Discipline and Punish* that dealt explicitly with the formation of space and power. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault positioned institutions as “microphysics of power.”²⁷ Foucault then discussed the prison as an example of the ways in which this microphysics of power disciplined

²³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *Introduction*, 94.

²⁴ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 7.

²⁵ Foucault, *A History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *Introduction*, 8.

²⁶ Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 28-29.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977; reprint, 1995), 26.

bodies. According to Foucault, it is discipline that creates subjects, and then those subjects used the truth of such discipline to identify themselves as “delinquents” or “criminals.”²⁸ The prison, along with its system of disciplines and punishments, in effect controlled not only actual corporeal bodies, but the identities and subjectification of those bodies as collective units. Therefore, with such subjects as “delinquents” and “criminals,” Foucault demonstrated how discipline operates as the power to define and control difference both discursively and spatially.

Foucault further explored spatiality throughout *The History of Sexuality*, and marked spaces as sites where power/knowledge was experienced. For instance, Foucault positioned the discourse of children’s sexuality as a discourse centered in a “tiny, sexually saturated, familial space.”²⁹ In later works, Foucault wrote that space was an increasingly important subject, and explained in interviews and essays the importance of spatialization as a conduit of power/knowledge. During a 1976 interview with the French journal of geography *Herodote*, Foucault responded to a question about the seeming disconnect between geographical metaphor and lived space in recent theoretical work. Foucault replied: There is indeed a task to be done of making the space in question precise, saying where a certain process stops, what are the limits beyond which one could say ‘something different happens’.³⁰ Foucault further discussed

²⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

²⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *Introduction*, 47.

³⁰ Stoler, 208.

the importance of space in discursive formation in a 1986 essay for *Diacritics* entitled “Of Other Spaces:”

This problem of the human site or living space is not simply that of knowing whether there will be enough space for men in the world—a problem that is certainly quite important—but also that of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation according to achieve a given end. Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites.³¹

The spatial implications of Foucaultian theory are especially applicable to this study due to the concept of worldmaking. While it is commonly believed that Foucaultian theory leaves no room for resistance and change, that reading of Foucault’s work is incorrect. Foucault himself was heavily involved in radical politics in his lifetime, and said in a televised debate with Noam Chomsky: “The proletariat makes war with the ruling class because, for the first time in history, it wants to take power.”³² While such direct political statements are not explicit in Foucault’s academic work, the concepts of resistance and agency are present in Foucaultian theory. The key, however, is discursive formation. While the discourse may only create and allow certain “truths,” it also creates the *possibility* of resistance to those “truths.” I frame that resistance in Kansas City’s jazz scene as “worldmaking.”

Worldmaking is a term I borrow from Jose Esteban Munoz, another scholar trying to deal with connections between space, representation, performance and identity. Munoz’ work is a synthesis of Foucaultian theory and

³¹ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16: 1, Spring 1986, 23.

³² James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 202.

queer theory, along with studies and interviews with performers. In his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Munoz investigated the ways minoritarian subjects situated themselves in majoritarian society. Munoz was concerned with the ability of such subjects, specifically queers of color, to develop a sense of self in the face of a discourse that constructs normative subjects by othering them. Rather than emphasize either side of the constructionist versus essentialist debate in queer studies, Munoz established the importance of an intersectional space of identity formation by introducing his theory of disidentification. In order to illustrate the political and social implications of disidentification, Munoz discussed a variety of queer performers of color and their work as a disidentificatory practice.

Munoz located the space between constructionism and essentialism, and between race and sexuality, as a space of identity formation. According to Munoz, racist and heteronormative protocols in social systems force minoritarian subjects to reconfigure the “phobic object” [themselves] of those social systems.³³ Munoz, however, did not place this reconfiguration in defined space, but rather within the performances and internal narratives of the subjects themselves. In a sense, minoritarian subjects used disidentification as a method of worldmaking, to construct an identity and correlating community. As Munoz wrote: “Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning.”³⁴

³³ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 3.

³⁴ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 31.

Finally, these theoretical moves are as much about Kansas City today as they are about Kansas City's jazz scene. "Queering the Inferno" is not just a critique of existing historical narratives or a recuperation of Kansas City's past. It is also an examination of Kansas City's present. In his representation of genealogy, Foucault clearly stated that any such work was in fact a search for the present.³⁵ For Foucault the role of history was not to simply explore the past, but to examine and critique written history from the perspective of the present.³⁶ According to Foucault, the goal of his work was to disrupt and interrupt dominant "truths" about the past. Foucault explained that he sought to position:

History in the discontinuity that no teleology would reduce in advance; to map it in a dispersion that no pre-established horizon would embrace; to allow it to be deployed in an anonymity on which no transcendental constitution would impose the form of the subject; to open it up to a temporality that would not promise the return of any dawn.³⁷

"Queering the Inferno" follows the work of Foucault and Munoz, along with many other scholars in cultural studies, in an effort to upset the hegemonic and "affixed" history of Kansas City's jazz scene. In order to achieve this goal, this work depends on four important facets of Foucault's work, as seen in the aforementioned quotation: the anonymity of identity, the discontinuity of the margin, the temporality of the jazz scene, and the dispersion of space.

³⁵ James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson and Richard H. Schein ed., *A Companion to Cultural Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 87.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 203.

³⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 203.

The Anonymity of Identity

One of the primary sites of disruption in this study is gender and gender identity. In this study, however, the gender identity of individuals remains anonymous. In the Preface to the tenth anniversary edition of her monograph *Gender Trouble*, scholar Judith Butler wrote that feminist theory needed to avoid idealizing gender in ways that created new hierarchies.³⁸ This idealizing of gender precipitates the reaffirmation of hierarchy, something about which scholars of women and gender have expressed great concern. As Joan Scott wrote in her essay “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis,” a more nuanced understanding of experience is necessary for the use of gender as a category of study.³⁹ In order to evade hierarchy and essentialism in the study of women and gender, scholars must better comprehend the role of discursive production in creating gendered and sexualized subjects. As Scott demonstrated, scholars need to see experience not as a fact but interpretation. “Experience is, in this approach,” wrote Scott, “not the origin of our explanation, but that which we seek to explain.”⁴⁰ Judith Butler used Foucault’s theories of power/knowledge, along with the work of theorists such as Scott, to further discuss the ability to understand gender. As Butler wrote: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid and regulatory frame that

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 43.

³⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender As A Useful Category of Analysis,” from *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 42.

⁴⁰ Joan Wallach Scott, “Experience,” in Joan Scott and Judith Butler, eds, *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 22-40.

congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”⁴¹ Butler theorized gender identity as a formation that constantly changes both individually and collectively. Along with Foucault, Butler also discussed gender identity as one of the power/knowledge systems that locked subjects into socially defined positions. The key point of Butler’s work is that gender identity is a repetitive performance.⁴²

The disruption of gender, however, lies not only in its concept as performance, but also with the *representation* of gender. As Stuart Hall explained, representation signifies the act of giving meaning to the world, a vehicle for defining.⁴³ Meanings then become fixed through our systems of representation, such as words, images, and stories.⁴⁴ These representations become, through Foucaultian theory, discursive formations that contain subjects within the discourses about them.⁴⁵ Representation is not a snapshot of an unspoken truth—it is the produced “reality” of discursive formation. Through the process of signification, representations of gender are reconciled in discourse into binaries: good/bad, male/female, straight/gay. In seeking to explore the experience and performance of gender identity, how can we also avoid the oversimplified representation of those individuals subjectified by their discursive formation? This is especially troubled in the study of history. Prominent scholars

⁴¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43-44.

⁴² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 173.

⁴³ Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, in association with The Open University, 1997), 3.

⁴⁴ Hall, *Representation*, 7.

⁴⁵ Hall, *Representation*, 45.

of identity, experience and agency (such as Jose Esteban Munoz) have the ability to ask their subjects about their identity. For scholars of history, no such opportunity exists. We must rely instead on the representation of gender performance in the historical record, a record where subjects often did not have the opportunity, ability, or even the social and cultural desire to express a gender identity. The difficulties posed by studying historical subjects are further troubled when the subjects were actual professional performers in an economy in which performed gender variance was popular, whose performed gender identity was a factor of their livelihood. How do you analyze the “experience” of gender when the represented gender is only biological, or only theatrical, or both? When is the performance of gender purely a performance, and when it is the discursively formed performance of gender? Can the two ever be separated?

This study centers on gender identity as a field of disruption, and looks to the work of postmodern theater studies in order to understand the role that gender identity played in Kansas City. Rather than seek to understand or define the gender identity of the performers, I focus instead on the disruptive space between the performers and the audience/historian. In this scheme, performers were not simply the vehicles for the representation of gender. They were, in fact, agents who used their bodies in performance as a way to trouble gender for the audience. A good example of this work in theater history is Daphne Brooks’ *Bodies in Dissent*. According to Brooks, the hypervisibility of professional performers gave them the ability to queer the produced categories of gender themselves. In what

Brooks referred to as “opaque performances,” performers used their work to challenge the acceptable categories of gender, even if they appeared to reify them.⁴⁶ “Dense and spectacular, the opaque performances of marginalized cultural figures call attention to the skill of the performer who,” wrote Brooks, “through gestures and speech as well as material props and visual technologies, is able to confound and disrupt conventional constructions of the racialized and gendered body.”⁴⁷ In addition, the focus on the space between the performer and the audience/historian provides fertile ground for the critique of a master narrative of history that places gender in socially constructed categories. The gender identity of a historical figure cannot be known or completely understood. What can be understood is the desires of the scholar who seeks to subjectify them. Joan Scott wrote that the understanding of gender was hampered by the fact the scholars did not see their own agency in the textual representation of gendered experience. This work, for those reasons, will not attempt to define that which cannot be defined: the gender identity of the subjects. Instead, this work will explore the ways in which individuals were subjectified to the regulatory and disruptive definitions of gender, and the methods those individuals used to disrupt and interrupt those definitions. As Brooks explained: “In sum, this book aims to read the tensions between what the archives record of the performers at hand and the ruptures and blind spots where the same performers defy the expectations and

⁴⁶ Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies In Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

⁴⁷ Brooks, *Bodies In Dissent*, 8.

desires of the audience member/recorder.”⁴⁸ The gender identity of the performers themselves will remain as they must: in the historical archives of anonymity. This is not, however, a reason *not* to write about identity. As a historian, and a queer scholar, I equate subjectivity and disruption. For me, being “out and proud” is itself a disruptive act, and a worldmaking one. As with Brooks, I will attempt to read the experiences of my subjects as an audience member, whose desires are played out on the bodies of the performer. I will not be able to assign a singular “gender identity” on my subjects, but I do seek to explore and explain the desires that I, and hopefully others in the audience, discursively assigned to the subjects.

The Discontinuity of the Margins

Another problematic feature of this study is the discontinuity of the margins. While many scholars utilize the concept of the margins versus the mainstream, the question is really about the line itself. Where is the margin and where is the mainstream? In this study, the margin is not a continuous, clearly defined border. Instead, this study draws on recent works in cultural studies to present the margin as a discontinuous, constantly contested boundary. Through this lens, the margins can be seen as something dynamic, changing, and just as problematic as identity to define and categorize.

⁴⁸ Brooks, *Bodies In Dissent*, 10.

Positioning the margins as a site of contested territory is not a new phenomenon in cultural studies. Frequently scholars use terms such as “borderlands,” “interstitial,” and “contested terrain” to represent the margins as a cultural and social phenomenon that is not easily defined. In each of these examples, scholars have recognized that the “margins” and the “mainstream” move and overlap, and depended entirely on the standpoint of the subject. An excellent example of this recent field of work in cultural studies is Kyle Julien’s *Sounding the City*. Julien’s study of jazz performers in 1940s Los Angeles positions marginalization in the city as a function of movement. According to Julien, the racial segregation of African Americans in Los Angeles resulted in two things: the centralization of urban, black culture, and the complete denial of a “marginalized” life on the part of urban Angelinos.⁴⁹ Consequently, while white, non-urban Los Angeles inhabitants considered African American urban city dwellers to be marginalized, and constructed their identities through seeing African Americans as “other,” African Americans did not consider themselves to be on the margins. Julien then identified an array of places in which persons were defined—the segregated city, the controlled mobility of minority individuals, and the “patterns of acceptable movement” placed on marginalized groups.⁵⁰ Clearly, the exact location of the margin was a moving, contested boundary for city dwellers. It is no less so for those scholars trying to represent those margins.

⁴⁹ Kyle Julien, *Sounding The City: African American Nightlife and the Articulation of Race in 1940s Los Angeles* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California-Irvine, Department of History, 2000), 238.

⁵⁰ Julien, *Sounding The City*, 41.

To further disrupt the question of the margins, this work also draws heavily on cultural studies' critiques of dominant written histories. Not only was the margin a moving boundary inside a socio-cultural scene, it continues to be a contested boundary among historians. Some informative work on the historical construction of the margins is taking place in New Jazz Studies. For instance, jazz historian David Ake discussed the concepts of marginalization and racialization in his collection of essays *Jazz Cultures*. According to Ake, while jazz history records only two "races" in jazz scene New Orleans, white and black, city dwellers in New Orleans identified at least three: black, white and Creole. Ake demonstrated that Creole musicians such as Sidney Bechet and Jelly Roll Morton did not consider themselves "black," a racial identification that came with marginalization in the lower-class Uptown district of the city. These Creole musicians did not consider themselves to be culturally marginalized in New Orleans, but jazz historians have successfully represented Creole jazz performers as black, and therefore racially marginalized them from the so-called American "mainstream."⁵¹ Ake further explained the problem of imprinting a modern view of marginalization on the past:

The alternative [to disrupting traditional jazz history] only reduces individuals and historical communities to impermeable if internally mutating constructs and hampers opportunities for increased understanding across, and even within, cultural boundaries.⁵²

⁵¹ David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 18-25.

⁵² Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, 41.

Given the problematic nature of defining a margin/mainstream boundary, it appears on the surface practically impossible to identify. The key, in my study, is to emphasize the ways in which this margin/mainstream boundary was continuously contested in Kansas City's jazz scene. Rather than discuss groups identified by historians as marginalized, this study focuses on the groups of people who lived and performed in the jazz scene. As much as possible, this study focuses on groups who were marginalized *within* the jazz scene, as well as by the external, hegemonic *mainstream*, that saw the jazz scene as dangerous and damaging. This study relies on archival information and interviews with Kansas City jazz performers to understand how the margins were identified by those living and working inside the scene, and then critiques the ways in which those margins were moved, delineated and defined by jazz historians.

The Temporality of the Jazz Scene

Despite the image of the jazz scene in Kansas City (and the rest of America) as a unified age of cultural shift, the jazz scene was a temporary, culturally and socially specific phenomenon. A major aspect of this project is a critical examination of Kansas City written history as one that presents a grand narrative of the city's jazz scene. While Kansas City was the site of gender, racial and class clash in the first half of the twentieth century, its written history does not consistently reflect such contested territory. The history of jazz scene Kansas City is instead filled with stories of cowboys, big business, and the excesses of

crime, vice and jazz music more easily associated with Broadway musicals than lived experience. These stories provide the foundation for the official and scholarly knowledge of Kansas City as a history of civilized roughness. For all its concentration on progress and civilized urban prosperity, Kansas City was (and still is) a city where inhabitants were unwilling to shed the city's "rough and ready" Western reputation. As one historian wrote: "machismo was marketable, and bawdiness was big business. The city that limped out of the Civil War had become a cocksure, burgeoning town literally drunk with success."⁵³ Ross Russell, a historian of Kansas City's jazz scene, depicted the city as a center of heterosexual male pleasure:

For the people of the Plains and the American Southwest "Kaycee" came to be known as a heavenly place. To its attraction as a prime market was added the allure of high good time as they were then envisioned by the American male- a great plenty of everything, good food, good beer and liquor, dancing, exciting women, and dice rolling on green felt tables- all these pleasurable commodities served well-ladled with the sauce of lively music.⁵⁴

Such heteronormative examples reveal the grand narrative of Kansas City's jazz scene history as the story of heterosexual male consumers and willing female commodities. The city's masculine aura, however, depended on the strict control of gender, class and racial difference, a control since forgotten and silenced in that history. The "pleasurable commodities" that Russell suggests clearly included the performances of varieties of gender variance and sexuality.

⁵³ Rick Montgomery and Shirl Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story* (Kansas City, MO: Kansas City Star Books, 1999), 85.

⁵⁴ Ross Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 4.

Were these commodities not also part of the desires of the “American male?” The “heavenly place” for the people who came to Kansas City during its jazz scene came with a variety of desires, but “machismo was marketable.” In fact, the very legend of Kansas City’s “wide open” jazz scene continues to ignore the knowledge of the jazz scene by constantly defining and defending the dominant hierarchy. There was a co-constitutive zoning of non-normative gender performance, race, class and jazz in the city, but the existence of gender variance, and varied gazes and desires in the city’s jazz spaces, were subsumed in the city’s written history. Through this study, I intend to introduce critical studies of the temporality of Kansas City’s jazz scene spaces into the annals of Kansas City history.

Along with a critical reorientation of Kansas City history comes an equally important reorientation of jazz history. A major factor in the history of the American jazz scene is the positioning of jazz music as an inherently American and transgressive genre. The positioning of jazz as both American and transgressive is inextricably linked to the racialization of jazz as a black art form that assimilated its African American performers into a European system.⁵⁵ While many scholars of jazz history have examined the role of identity and difference in the development of jazz, the popular and dominant history of jazz more often focuses on the great performers of “American music.” For example, musician Charlie Parker appears in jazz histories as a matter of course as the

⁵⁵ Scott DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography,” *Black American Literature Forum*, 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1991), 545.

father of bebop, whose untimely death signaled a shift in the production of jazz. The story of Parker as an African American jazz musician, a pioneer of sound, is immortalized in everything from the *Grove Encyclopedia of Jazz* to the autobiographical film “Bird.” Interestingly, however, drugs, sexuality, and inclusion in the jazz “underground” is also part of this Parker history- it serves as a backdrop to describe his downfall, the story of a man who could not deny his desires in favor of his genius. It is one example, among many, of the ways the Kansas City’s written jazz history reflects a society that polices what it produces. At the same time, this backdrop in Parker’s story illustrates the importance of this study- ascension into the heights of jazz fame became the “real story” of Parker, while the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class that surrounded him faded into the background.

Foucault wrote extensively on the fact that societies produce knowledge, and then police that same knowledge. Gender variance and sexuality were mainstays in the jazz scene, but they are found most commonly in the background of written history, a kind of theater stage set for the “real story” taking place on stage. The important aspect of this backstage affair is, however, that the backstage was always present, always talked about, a part of the knowledge of the temporary jazz scene, *especially among the players*. Foucault’s thought that societies work to speak of the things they cannot say can be seen in the backstage in written jazz history. When it comes to the representation of gender variance and sexuality in dominant jazz scene history, the backstage of non-normative

gender performance and sexuality is as obvious as the stage set, but as spectators we are not supposed to see them. “What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact,” wrote Foucault, “is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*.”⁵⁶

An example of this exploiting the secret is clear in the work of Norman Pearson Jr. and Howard Litwak, who completed an oral history project on Kansas City’s jazz scene in the 1980s. According to the final report of Pearson and Litwak’s *Goin’ To Kansas City* project, the nationally-funded oral history project was a success. Citing their work with interviewees and the production of a traveling exhibition, Pearson and Litwak reported that their project captured “something of the lives and experiences implicit within the rubric of ‘jazz scene’.”⁵⁷ In the project, Pearson and Litwak listed among the goals a study of “homosexuality” in Kansas City’s jazz scene. In his subsequent book on the project, Pearson discussed an interview with female performer Edna Mintirn as one with primary evidence of homosexuality in Kansas City’s Jazz District. Why did Pearson and Litwak seek to include homosexuality in their project, unless it played a known and significant part in the city’s jazz scene? According to Pearson, the Mintirn interview was fully transcribed, but only excerpts from the interview were included in the book- those excerpts that seemed to suggest gender

⁵⁶ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *Introduction*, 35.

⁵⁷ Norman Pearson Jr. and Howard Litwak, “Final Narrative Report: Kansas City- The Oral History of a Jazz Scene, 1924-1942,” Folder #KC0012, Kansas City Jazz Oral History Collection, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri- Kansas City, 2.

variance, which Pearson and Litwak defined as homosexuality. The full interview was never donated to any of the archival repositories where the Pearson and Litwak tapes were archived, and the exact cause of the Mintirn interview tape's "disappearance" from the collections of the University of Missouri- Kansas City, the Institute for Jazz Studies at Rutgers and the Folklore Archives of the Smithsonian Institution will likely never be known. It is, however, interesting to note that the interviews with famous Kansas City performers from the dominant canon of jazz history, such as Count Basie and Jay McShann, were fully transcribed in 1987 and are available to researchers. Given the fact the Pearson and Litwak suggest the Mintirn interview as the primary evidence of "homosexuality," why is it not valued in the same way as the other interviews? When, and how, did Edna Mintirn's observations and memories become part of "the secret?" Though this example is one of many, it clearly demonstrated the role of written, dominant jazz history in the continued policing of "the secret" in Kansas City's jazz scene, both lived and historically represented.

Another important facet of the temporality of the jazz scene in this study is its reorientation and focus on performance, representation, and space. This includes not only the lived experience in jazz scene clubs and cabarets, but the spatialization of Kansas City itself. For instance, a major feature of the "Jazz Age" concept is its concentration in America's urban eastern cities. While it is understood that the changes of the "Jazz Age" spread across the country, the concept of the "Jazz Age" is centered in New York and Paris. The cultural and

social shifts of the jazz scene did not, however, simply radiate from New York City. The changing roles for women, for instance, were seen and felt by Americans in every corner of American through mass amusements such as jazz clubs and cabarets. Few studies of the American jazz scene have focused on the cities of rural America, which represented the front line in cultural clashes of the period. One such city was Kansas City, considered an urban center by the inhabitants of the trans-Mississippi west.

While the people of Kansas City experienced many of the same social changes as other city dwellers during the American jazz scene, there are aspects of the temporary Kansas City experience that make an excellent case for the geographies of desire. Unlike New York or Boston, Kansas City was on the edge of rural America. As a railroad hub, Kansas City served as the only urban center between Chicago to the east and burgeoning Houston to the south. The city was home to the nation's largest livestock market, which meant an annual influx of thousands of ranchers, farmers and cowboys, along with a consistent population of immigrant workers for slaughterhouses and packing plants. There was also a contentious relationship between the idea of material progress and the city's reputation as "wild and wooly." City fathers embraced the idea of material "eastern" progress, and championed the construction of public buildings, parks and boulevards. The need to satisfy the expectations of tourists and businessmen seeking entertainment in the Kansas City "frontier," however, also led to odd allegiances within the city. While progressive changes were encouraged in

middle and upper class sections of the city, the working-class districts near railroad tracks were purposefully separated from city planning. City fathers sought to identify these districts as immoral, a place for pleasure seeking visitors to see the “wild and wooly” west of Kansas City. The sex tourism and non-normative gender performance found in working-class districts were not only part of the city’s legend; they were clearly part of the appeal of Kansas City to its many visitors. As Edward Murrow wrote in the Omaha *World-Herald*: “If you want to see sin, forget about Paris and go to Kansas City.”⁵⁸ To what sins did Murrow alluded to is unknown. It was this reputation, however, created by capitalist investment and encouraged by dominant knowledge that created the myth of Kansas City’s jazz scene.

The Dispersion of Space

As postmodern critical geographer Derek Gregory explained, spatialization is the way social life actually takes place. These social patterns are then represented and constructed by a hegemonic system.⁵⁹ Rather than position space as secondary or background to performance and representation, geography of desires defines space as an area where identity and representation is contested, tested, and practiced. Other historians have discussed geography and space as centerpieces of an exploration of gender and racial identity formation. For instance, the term “moral geography” was coined by historian Perry Duis in his

⁵⁸ Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest*, 8.

⁵⁹ Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, 104.

1983 monograph *The Saloon*. Moral geography is the method used by members of dominant urban societies to identify “deviant” districts and neighborhoods. This meant not only the observation of neighborhoods, but the observation and discipline of people residing in those “deviant” spaces. George Chauncey used geographical and spatial concepts in his description of New York’s Bowery as a site of contested territory in *Gay New York*. According to historian Sherry Schirmer, spatialization gave Kansas City, Missouri, fathers the ability to keep unacceptable racial and gendered behavior geographically separate.⁶⁰ The question of space, however, is not simply one of contested territories and concrete maps, but one of *use*. How did those who used the spaces of Kansas City’s jazz scene, whether patrons, performers, workers or neighbors, see those spaces as sites of identity formation, representation, and performance? How can researchers use space to explain patrons who frequented “deviant” spaces, as well as those who considered such spaces their *place*?

In order to highlight the experience of space rather than place, the geography of desires approach depends on critical cultural geography. In recent years, spatial metaphors have gained prominence in cultural studies. The use of terms such as intersitital, borderlands, boundaries and locations are all reflections of the use of space as a metaphorical way of discussing power.⁶¹ These metaphors themselves, however, do not signify the workings of power in lived

⁶⁰ Sherry Schirmer, *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-1960* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 126.

⁶¹ Michael P. Brown, *Closet Space: Geographies of Metaphor From the Body to the Globe* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

experience on the ground. Space is a concept and term of material reality, and its use in cultural studies has too frequently been relegated to the use of metaphor alone.⁶² Critical cultural geographers, however, position space as a site of experience, not a metaphor. “To their minds,” wrote geographer Michael Brown, “performativity’s contexts are geographic locations or situations, rather than speech acts or audiences.”⁶³ Through the lens of human experience, critical cultural geographers work to examine the various contexts where social differences are “produced, understood, and negotiated.”⁶⁴ Critical cultural geographers, in addition, seek to understand the connections between space, identity and representation.⁶⁵ As geographer Michael Brown wrote:

In a rather different way, geographers have emphasized the power of spatial context by conversely discussing how certain performatives are spatially transgressive and thereby showing the very social constructedness of gender and sexuality while politically reflecting on a human agent’s performances as a means of resistance too.⁶⁶

An example of the ways in which space is the site of performance and power is Kansas City ordinance Number 291, enacted in the 1880s. While the ordinance dealt specifically with sexualized behaviors, the ordinance was written in specifically spatial terms.

No person shall be or appear in or upon any street, avenue, park, public place or place open to view, in any state of nudity, or any dress not belonging to his or her sex, or in any indecent or lewd dress, or shall make

⁶² Brown, *Closet Space*, 4.

⁶³ Brown, *Closet Space*, 32.

⁶⁴ Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher and Karen E. Till, “Place in Context: Rethinking Humanist Geographies,” in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xvii.

⁶⁵ Adams et. al., *Textures of Place*, xiv.

⁶⁶ Brown, *Closet Space*, 32.

any indecent exposure of his or her person, or be guilty of an unseemly obscene or filthy act, or any lewd, indecent, immoral or insulting conduct, language or behavior; or shall exhibit, circulate, contribute, sell, offer or expose for sale, or give or deliver to another, or cause the same to be done, any lewd, indecent or obscene book, picture, pamphlet, card, print, paper writing, mold, case, figure or any other thing, or shall exhibit or perform, or cause or allow to be exhibited or performed, in or upon any house, building, lot or premises owned or occupied by him, or under his management or control, any lewd, indecent, or immoral play or other representation.⁶⁷

Given the ordinance, one would suspect that the spaces where such performances, behaviors and exhibits appeared were tightly controlled in Kansas City's jazz scene. The jazz scene, however, allowed for flourishing work in sex shows and performances, drag clubs, and in the daily business of prostitution and burlesque dancing. In fact, male drag performances were recorded in Kansas City as early as 1880, when one Kansas City *Star* reporter wrote: "As a female impersonator he draws a large salary and is a most remarkable success, but as a man he is a gigantic failure and not worth the powder that would blow his effeminate soul to heaven."⁶⁸ The question that remains unaddressed in studies that rely on the metaphorical use of spaces is this: how did the gender impersonator with the "effeminate soul" see "his" identity? What evidence exists that would illuminate this? How did the clubs and cabarets where gender impersonation was welcomed and celebrated serve as sites of identity formation and representation, for performers and patrons? At the peak of the jazz scene, drag performers such as the one discussed in 1880 probably would have

⁶⁷ Board of Public Welfare, *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Public Welfare of Kansas City, Missouri, April 21, 1913-April 20, 1914* (Kansas City, MO: Cline Publishing Company, 1914), 53.

⁶⁸ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 87.

performed at the club Dante's Inferno, a Pendergast-controlled club in the City's Jazz District. As the home to Kansas City's drag performers, Dante's probably offered a certain level of safety and acceptance to performers and patrons. The club was also very popular, and packed every night with patrons waiting to see the next show. How did a club like Dante's serve as a space where the identities of drag performers and their patrons, whatever those identities were, were appreciated and recognized? Did Dante's in fact serve as the site of the production of normative subjects, who could enter and leave this zone of possibilities?

Though many academics have explored the relationship between space, representation and identity formation, one of the most applicable studies to the Kansas City jazz scene is Kevin Mumford's *Interzones*.⁶⁹ In his book, Mumford explored the racial and sexual connections in the black/white sex districts of New York and Chicago. Mumford's goal was to "excavate genealogy and map geography" of the experience of life within the interracial sex districts.⁷⁰ By placing urban sex districts as the center of American modernity, Mumford intended to show that the space between race and sexuality was a productive space in America. According to Mumford, the challenge was no longer social

⁶⁹ See also Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995); Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Cultural Front series, Michael Berube ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Krista Comer, *Landscapes of the New West: Gender and Geography in Contemporary Women's Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Brown, *Closet Space*.

⁷⁰ Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), xi.

construction, but understanding how social constructions were created. He therefore noted that race had three distinct characteristics: ideology, institutions, and human interactions.⁷¹ Using these three frameworks, Mumford sought to show “that modernization reconstituted the meaning and regulation of black/white sexuality in America.”⁷²

According to Mumford, interzones were spaces of contested racial and sexual meaning. Interzones, which were marked by dominant groups as vice districts, were marginal to the majority but central to racial and sexual minority groups. Mumford went on to demonstrate the deep connections between race, sexuality, and the concepts of modernity and power. In addition, Mumford explained that in arrests for homosexual acts, racial minority men were labeled as “perverts” while their white clients were not.⁷³ He also drew a difference between passing, which Mumford saw as upward movement in a racial system, and slumming that exploited already marginalized groups.⁷⁴ Mumford also commented on the dominant movements against vice districts, which he saw as failures that only strengthened the racial, sexual, classed and gendered subcultures of the cities. As Mumford wrote: “Racism and then sexual repression from without helped to forge cultural bonds between subordinated groups.”⁷⁵ Through Mumford’s work, one can see the usefulness of centering a study on spatiality as a function of worldmaking.

⁷¹ Mumford, *Interzones*, xvii.

⁷² Mumford, *Interzones*, xv.

⁷³ Mumford, *Interzones*, 89.

⁷⁴ Mumford, *Interzones*, 143.

⁷⁵ Mumford, *Interzones*, 178.

Though this study draws primarily from the theories of Michel Foucault, it has also necessarily drawn on the work of historians of the theater, studies of performance and the body, New Jazz Studies, oral history and ethnography, critical cultural geography, theories of representation and the work of social historians of the United States. Using those sources as maps of other historical and cultural spaces, I have sought to excavate the experience of so-called “abnormal” gendered and sexually subjectified subjects in Kansas City’s jazz scene. This study depends on concepts of identity formation, representation, performance, and space in order to explore a history that became a secret.

Queering the Inferno

This dissertation will be organized in the following five sections. The first section (Chapter 2) of the dissertation will address the research problems by analyzing the official memories of the jazz scene as preserved in written history. The lack of gender variance in Kansas City’s historical record of the jazz scene is a direct result of the reterritorializing spatialization of the city, as well as the city’s history. The concept of Kansas City’s “cocksure” past in essence silences any “othered” subjects in the written record. This is true of jazz scene history, as well as the history of gender, sexuality and race in Kansas City. Through a discussion of jazz historiography, I intend to show how the memories of difference in the Kansas City jazz scene continue to be spatially represented and subsumed in a dominant narrative. Though this section will explore the

development of recent jazz historiography, it will focus on the historiography of the jazz scene in Kansas City. While this body of literature is somewhat limited, it is on those few sources that the legend of Kansas City's jazz scene was based. In order to better understand the development of Kansas City's jazz scene historiography, this chapter will feature a discussion of the *Goin' To Kansas City* project, its publications and exhibitions, and the results of Pearson and Litwak's oral history project. How did Pearson and Litwak choose their questions, their focus, and their subjects? What did Pearson and Litwak produce from that information, and how did those representations continue to reify the discursive formation of gender variance as an obvious and public "secret?" For example, one of the most famous photographs of differently gendered jazz performers in Kansas City is a black and white photograph of "Mr. Half-And-Half." This photograph continues to appear in books, papers, and on the websites of historians of the Kansas City jazz scene. Today, authors and researchers borrow that photograph (in copied form) from the "Goin' To Kansas City" archives of the Kansas City Museum. The photograph, however, is seldom accompanied with any description other than the stage name of the performer. What is the inclusion of the photograph intended to represent? Why is this photograph, taken from the scrapbook of a Pearson and Litwak interviewee, so often included in such an ambivalent manner? The photograph is part of the Kansas City jazz scene grand narrative, but in a way that seems to deny the very thing it is supposed to represent. The second chapter addresses this problem: not just the spatial and

personal identity of research subjects and the researchers who studied them, but the ways in which those paired identities continue to be territorialized by history, memory, space and representation in the traditional jazz canon.

The second section (Chapter 3) will outline the facets of geography of desires through the story of the Pendergast political machine. The Pendergast machine was primarily responsible for the control of spaces in the City's Jazz District, as well as the working-class and racially-differentiated neighborhoods. The power of the Pendergast family was, however, predicated on their own performance and desire for acceptability by Kansas City's elite. Jim Pendergast arrived in Kansas City in the 1870s. With the winnings from a racetrack wager, Jim Pendergast opened saloons in the city's working-class Sixth District. When Jim died and his brother Tom took over the machine in 1911, the Pendergasts controlled and produced prostitution, gambling, jazz clubs, local police and city government. Other historians, however, have pointed out that Tom Pendergast's strict control of daytime activity in his districts was a result of his own desire for acceptability among Kansas City's wealthy upper class. A working-class immigrant, Tom Pendergast married a former saloon dancing girl, and was constantly portrayed in the press as a criminal with a "loose" wife. At the same time, government officials and local judges sought Pendergast approval and investment unabashedly, knowing that their control of the city depended on the support of Pendergast's working-class constituents and their public amusements. The first chapter, therefore, will position the Pendergast machine itself as a

primary example of the ways in which power, space and performance overlapped in the city. Due largely to Pendergast's segregation rules, the alignment of vice, interracial neighborhoods, and non-normative gender behavior followed codes of dominant morality in Kansas City. White city "movers and shakers," who found the thought of vice in their neighborhoods threatening, deemed it acceptable when segregated to unacceptable neighborhoods already defined as "deviant."⁷⁶

This spatial discipline led to a sharing of power between city fathers and the Pendergast machine: vice districts would be allowed to thrive as long as they did not spread beyond the neighborhood borders. First Ward constituents were perceived as deviant, although the patrons of vice districts in the city came from outside the ward. At the same time, white First Ward citizens positioned themselves as superior to African Americans in the First Ward. The result was a double-edged life for First Ward people. While vice brought money and employment to First Ward districts, it also brought violence, sexual subjectification, and an aura of exoticism to women living and working in the City's jazz scene neighborhoods. In a 1926 newspaper report, the African American newspaper *Kansas City Times* reported that the harassment of light-skinned black women residing in the Jazz District was one of the five major factors of racial tension in the city.⁷⁷ This subjectification also extended to white women working in the Jazz District. For instance, a famous Jazz District club was the Chesterfield, where waitresses dressed only in high heels and change

⁷⁶ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 126.

⁷⁷ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 127.

belts.⁷⁸ Four waitresses worked as “feature waitresses:” two white and two African American, with their public hair shaved in the shapes of a heart, diamond, spade and club. These waitresses were usually crib girls from local brothels escorted to the Chesterfield by the madams for daytime work. There is little doubt that Pendergast’s Chesterfield Club contributed to the conception of working class women as sexually exotic and available, as well as commodifying the titillation of race mixing. In fact, the Chesterfield Club was indicative of a moral geography that allowed a thin separation between prostitution and acceptable wage work for some jazz scene women.⁷⁹ This chapter will use the geography of desires approach to explain that the performance of race, class and gender in the Pendergast era was predicated on their spatial association with so-called “unacceptable” spaces such as saloons and dance halls. Through an exploration of moral geography and the discursive formations of the First Ward, this chapter will outline the theoretical and methodological implications of geography of desires through life in the Pendergast Machine.

The focus of the third section (Chapter 4) is an exploration of non-normative gender performance in the city. This chapter focuses on the early 20th century’s changing concepts of masculinity and femininity, as well as a burgeoning “homosexual” identity so well discussed in previous work by historians of gay and lesbian history. Through this discussion of the contested

⁷⁸ Lawrence Larsen and Nancy J. Hulston, *Pendergast!* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 102.

⁷⁹ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 169.

representations of “man” and “women,” I will excavate some of the history of gender impersonation in the Kansas City jazz scene. Gender impersonators, especially female impersonators, were far from unknown in Kansas City’s jazz scene. Self-identified homosexual performers, gender impersonators, and sex shows were understood as standard components of the jazz scene in Kansas City. In fact, drag performances were recorded by Kansas City reporters as early as 1880, two years before Oscar Wilde made his lecture stop in the city. Since such clubs and performances were represented and marked as an open secret by historians, however, their space in the jazz scene was forgotten and silenced. So-called “sexual attractions,” which included drag performances, were not directly associated with jazz according to some historians.⁸⁰ As one Kansas City historian of jazz explained to me, there were very common, and therefore seemed to him “unimportant.” Such performers, however, were part of the professional world of performance at the time, and frequently traveled along a circuit that stretched from Chicago to San Francisco. The question is the way that such performers represented themselves. Did audiences see in the performance something beyond what performers represented on, with, or through their bodies? How did space play a role in the representation of gender impersonators as something “other?” Why does Kansas City’s jazz scene history, not to mention much of jazz historiography, not reflect the role of these performers and their performances? Whose desires did they perform? This chapter will excavate the story of changing

⁸⁰ Norman Pearson Jr., *Goin’ To Kansas City*, Music in American Life Series (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 94.

gender representation in the city, beginning with Oscar Wilde's arrival in the city in 1882. By using the work of theater historians and their conceptualization of spectacle in Foucaultian theory, I will investigate how certain performers and performances were eventually represented as "marginal" and "abnormal."

The fourth section (Chapter 5) will focus on the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of space, and the ways in which desires were linked to representation, through a discussion of brothel madam Annie Chambers. Chambers came to Kansas City in the 1870s, just like Jim Pendergast. She opened the city's largest and most famous brothel. From 1880 until 1913, the Chambers brothel stayed open thanks to the Pendergast machine and patronage to city officials. Chambers was arrested in 1913 under Missouri's White Slavery Act after a daytime raid on the brothel. Chambers eventually sued the City of Kansas City in the Supreme Court of Missouri for violation of her Fourteenth Amendment rights. Though she won the case, she was forced to close the brothel. Chambers made it clear, in public appearances and in court records, that she considered the brothel a formative space in the formation of her identity as a working-class sex worker. At the same time, she saw the brothel space as an important site of the representation of other sex workers, most of whom she portrayed as child-like. In fact, when Chambers died she willed the former brothel to a local missionary for use as a shelter for transient male and female laborers. The brothel, however, was carefully dismantled and reterritorialized by Kansas City leaders and investors. During the jazz scene the house became the

City Union Mission- still the largest homeless shelter in the city, while architectural features such as the brothel's famous stained glass windows found a new home in the most expensive restaurant in Kansas City Plaza shopping district—America's first shopping "mall." The fact that the city's most famous brothel eventually became a Christian mission, and that its windows became a symbol of the victory of "progress" over "vice" in what is still Kansas City's most elite shopping district all illustrate the workings of territorialization in Kansas City's jazz scene.

Edna Mae Jacobs is the topic of the fifth and final section (Chapter 6) of my dissertation. While thousands of people lived and worked in Kansas City during the jazz scene, very little information exists about the everyday lives of working-class people in the city in archival records or written histories. Social historians have often commented on the difficulty of writing about those who kept no records, whose representation in written history is limited by lack of evidence. One woman who is an exception to that dearth of information is Edna Mae Jacobs. Edna Mae [Whithouse] Jacobs arrived in Kansas City as a child in 1905. She lived in the West Bottoms district of Kansas City, the center of Pendergast power and the largest working-class district in the city. She lived and worked in Kansas City as a female jazz cabaret performer and table waitress, and later a club owner, until her death in the 1980s. As a Kansas Citian of the jazz scene, Jacobs had first hand experience with the Pendergast machine, jazz clubs, working-class neighborhoods, and the life of women working in the jazz scene. Jacobs also

worked as a performer in Dante's Inferno, the city's most famous female impersonator cabaret: it was Jacobs who originally owned the infamous photograph of "Mr. Half-And-Half." All of these aspects of Jacobs' life position her as a case study of daily life in the jazz scene. What makes Jacobs so important, however, is the rare availability of primary sources about Jacobs and her life in the city. Jacobs left behind a series of scrapbooks now housed at the University of Kansas, as well as a 1980 interview with Pearson and Litwak for the *Goin' To Kansas City* project. The Jacobs material, therefore, provide a rare opportunity to understand the interplay of space, representation, identity and power in the actual lived experience and memory of a single individual. How did Jacobs see herself, her identity, and her work at Dante's Inferno? What aspects of the jazz scene, forgotten in the grand narrative, are memorialized in her scrapbooks? How did Pearson and Litwak find Jacobs, why did they interview her, and what did they use her words to represent? Jacobs was never famous, and her papers were donated to the University of Kansas only after other repositories turned them down because Jacobs "was not a jazz performer" or "was not important enough."⁸¹ Jacobs' story is representative not only of the problematic work of researching jazz scene lives in Kansas City's history. Her story also illustrates the importance of examining identity and performance as a discursive production of space as well as knowledge. Using Jacobs' scrapbooks and interview, I will explore what Foucault called "narratives of the self," and the

⁸¹ Donna Wilson, telephone interview with the author, 30 April 2004.

ways in which Jacobs came to inhabit the subject-position that the discourse of the Kansas City jazz scene produced.

CHAPTER 2:
THE GRAND NARRATIVE OF JAZZ HISTORY

The traditional, most widely accepted version of jazz history follows a well tread path. According to this jazz history, jazz began in New Orleans, traveled upriver to Kansas City and Chicago after Storyville was closed in 1917, and then moved from the Midwest to New York City, where so-called “real” jazz came to the American recording industry. This “jazz myth” also includes pivotal individuals in this story” Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis.⁸² How did this jazz myth, this canon of events, individuals, locations and recordings, come into existence?

The growing field of jazz studies has increasingly questioned the grand narrative of the history of jazz music. Traditional jazz historians, a group made up largely of music professionals and patrons, all but ignored the social and cultural history that enclosed jazz music. Writing what jazz historian Andrew Clark called “internalist musicology,” the traditional jazz historians were record producers and critics such as Nat Hentoff, or musicologists such as Smithsonian scholar Martin Williams, who were focused specifically on the sounds of jazz as America’s classical music.⁸³ Rather than continue to focus on the sound of jazz

⁸² Hennessey, *From Jazz To Swing*, iii-v.

⁸³ Andrew Clark, “‘Nothin’ Over There But Critics’: Jazz and History (Criticism, Canon, Historiography),” in *Riffs and Choruses: A New Jazz Anthology* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 57. See also Nat Hentoff and Albert J. McCarthy, *Jazz: New Perspectives on the History of Jazz By Twelve of the World’s Foremost Jazz Critics and Scholars* (New York:

emphasized by traditional jazz historians, scholars in new jazz studies have focused on the cultural moments and jazz artifacts that existed, with the sound of jazz as their backdrop. “The time has come for an approach [to jazz history] that is less invested in the ideology of jazz as an aesthetic object and more responsive to issues of historical particularity,” wrote Scott DeVeaux, a leader of jazz studies. “Only in this way can the study of jazz break free from its self-imposed isolation, and participate with other disciplines in the exploration of meaning in American culture.”⁸⁴ This focus on the “other history” disrupts the traditional history of jazz music, and relies on critical theory to understand the creation of jazz scenes.⁸⁵ The grand narrative history of jazz music is clearly evident in the written history of Kansas City’s jazz scene. How did this master narrative, with its focus on music as performed and recorded, become the only story to be told in Kansas City? Given the jazz scene in Kansas City, what role did the official history of jazz music have in ignoring and silencing the experience of Kansas City in the Pendergast era? This chapter will demonstrate the role of the master narrative of Kansas City jazz in marginalizing the cultural moments of the city’s jazz scene for an accepted canon. This canon positioned Kansas City as an isolated island of temporary importance. The official history of jazz, an official knowledge given authenticity by historians, ignored the extramusical events of

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1959); Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970; reprint, 1973).

⁸⁴ DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 552.

⁸⁵ Krin Gabbard, “Introduction: Writing the Other History,” chap. in *Representing Jazz* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 7.

Kansas City's jazz scene. Historians built, and continue to build, an official history that silences those events.

The canon of jazz history has a clear trajectory: a sequence of styles, their features and innovators, and a standardized list of "masterpiece" performances.⁸⁶ As Krin Gabbard explained, canon-building is a discourse of power that "reinforces the values of the canonizers."⁸⁷ Canonizers were primarily white men, label owners and reviewers, who saw the cultural disruptions around jazz music as an enemy of marketability.⁸⁸ Canonizers also had an interest in producing boundaries around jazz music. Positioning jazz as an African American sound stigmatized by popular culture gave canonizers economic control over jazz capital.⁸⁹ The canon was not, however, a simple reflection of label owners' interests. At its core, the canon of jazz music is based on the cultural disruptions of jazz scenes. As Scott DeVeaux explained, the construction of the jazz history canon is a continuing battle over the cultural possession of jazz. The canon positioned jazz as the American classical music, a high culture production with inherently African and black roots.⁹⁰ As American classical music, jazz gained legitimacy in the eyes of the academy and mainstream culture. Such legitimacy hinged on the silencing of the social and cultural moments of jazz that defied an emphasis on high culture. Official histories of jazz were designed to

⁸⁶ DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 525.

⁸⁷ Krin Gabbard, "Introduction: The Jazz Canon and Its Consequences," chap. in *Jazz Among The Discourses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 14.

⁸⁸ Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 14.

⁸⁹ DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 529.

⁹⁰ DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 526.

strengthen the canon by denying the *lived* experience of jazz scenes. “The struggle is over possession of that history,” wrote DeVeaux, “and the legitimacy that it confers.”⁹¹ Canon-building is a discourse of power, and once in place the jazz canon enforced a pattern of power over all the knowledges of jazz scenes. Knowledges of differences in terms of culture, society, race, gender, class and sexuality were buried under the constructed canon, essentially taking the landscape of jazz scenes and reterritorializing them as a single jazz experience. As jazz scholar Krin Gabbard wrote:

Once canonized, a work need not answer to all the demands of a newer culture because its guardians will find reasons why objectionable features ought to be overlooked in favor of other factors, usually those that accommodate themselves comfortably to humanist ideologies.⁹²

The official history of jazz has several unique components. Each of these constructed components creates an official knowledge of jazz by silencing aspects of the social milieu of jazz scene cities in America. The first of these is a focus on music as performed and recorded. Histories of jazz created a canon of great performers. This focus stems from an internal debate about jazz between patrons and performers of different periods. Debates over the meaning and importance of jazz music began in the 1920s, when white vendors of jazz began to align the sound to European roots.⁹³ At the same time, largely African American performers of jazz celebrated jazz music as a patently cultural sound. As different styles of jazz developed, the debate further splintered purveyors and performers of

⁹¹ DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 528.

⁹² Gabbard, “Introduction: The Jazz Canon and Its Consequences,” 15.

⁹³ Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 139.

jazz. For instance, the rise of swing in the 1930s led to a proposition that previous jazz sounds were “primitive” and lacking quality.⁹⁴ Still other jazz historians emphasized jazz as an African American folk music, and supposed that folk traditions were static. Perhaps the largest debate developed with the rise of be-bop in the 1940s. With be-bop, jazz historians began to position be-bop as art, and previous styles and places as rungs on the ladder of jazz’s unilineal evolution. Through this debate, jazz became identified with an essence that carried it through evolutionary periods. By giving jazz an inherent identity, historians effectively removed jazz from socio-cultural roots. As DeVeaux wrote:

This envisioning jazz as an organic entity that periodically revitalizes itself through the upheaval of stylistic change while retaining its essential identity resolved one of the fundamental problems in the writing of its history: the stigma of inferiority or incompleteness that the notion of progress inevitably attached to earlier styles.⁹⁵

In this continuing debate over the past (and future) of jazz, the key is the sound and skill of jazz performance. In an interesting reiteration of European musical history, jazz historians developed an evolutionary scale of musicians and sounds. Historians focused on jazz music as a seamless progression, rather than explore the cultural disruptions that led to the development of jazz. The result is an official history of jazz that is solely focused on styles and performers.

“Historical narrative plays a crucial role in the formation of a canon,” wrote

DeVeaux, “in the elevation of great musicians as objects of veneration, and in the

⁹⁴ Winthrop Sargeant, *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid* (New York: Dutton, 1946), 259; quoted in Scott DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 534.

⁹⁵ DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 540.

development of a sense of tradition that casts a long shadow over the present.”⁹⁶

The official history begins simply with New Orleans jazz, which is said to have ended with the closing of Storyville. This is followed by a temporary burst of energy in Kansas City, where Count Basie and Charlie Parker heard an isolated cacophony of styles, developed their own styles and took them to New York. In New York Basie led big band swing in a competition with white interlopers, while Parker became the musical genius of the be-bop avant-garde. Beginning with Parker, the inherent identity of jazz as an art form took over, leading from Parker through Miles Davis to fusion, the Marsalis brothers and the future. Peppered with a few women such as Billie Holiday and Lena Horne, and linked with key recordings and performances, this official history presents jazz as a clear, natural development from slave quarters to Harlem. The problem, however, is that the official narrative of jazz sound does nothing to explain the culture that created that sound. Jazz is a culture, not just a sound.⁹⁷

The second feature of the official history of jazz is an oversimplified view of race. In terms of race, traditional jazz historians have tended to draw a binary black/white divide that positioned jazz as an established African American folk music that was absorbed as American art form.⁹⁸ As DeVeaux demonstrated, the official history depends heavily on the belief that both race and jazz history in

⁹⁶ DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 552.

⁹⁷ Robert O’Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards and Farah Jasmine Griffin, “Introductory Notes,” chap. in *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.

⁹⁸ Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, 10.

America are histories of assimilation.⁹⁹ Historians in jazz studies, however, have proven that the understanding of race in official jazz history is oversimplified. Historian David Ake has, for instance, written on the role of jazz music in Creole culture in New Orleans. As Ake stated, binary constructions of race do not explain the role of jazz in New Orleans, where Creoles occupied a specific racial category in the city's culture. Musicians such as Jelly Roll Morton and Sidney Bechet were Creoles who did not consider themselves "black."¹⁰⁰ In fact, both men were ostracized by their Creole families for playing jazz. This leads to important questions about the position of race in the jazz canon. If early jazz players were musicians of black folk music, then how does the canon explain Bechet's privileged Creole identity? The answer is one of disruption. Exploring race in jazz history means uncovering a complex system of relationships and constructions, and that complex system puts whiteness in a precarious position. Renewing the "problem of whiteness" takes away the part of the jazz canon that posits white musicians as "outsiders."¹⁰¹ The canon depends on a clear binary, and without such a binary the canon does not work. Substitutions to the race binary in the jazz canon intentionally prevent exploration of any specific cultural moment. As Ake wrote:

The alternative [to disrupting the jazz canon] only reduces individuals and historical communities to impermeable if internally mutating constructs and hampers opportunities for increased understanding across and even within cultural boundaries.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 545.

¹⁰⁰ Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, 22 and 25.

¹⁰¹ Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, 10.

¹⁰² Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, 41.

Another aspect of race that the traditional history of jazz music ignores is the role that jazz music played in African American political and social movements. Ted Vincent, historian of African American culture, has proposed that jazz was directly interrelated with the political struggles of African Americans in the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, Marcus Garvey frequently included performance of jazz at his lectures.¹⁰³ Outside recognized political movements, jazz played a definite role in the construction of African American political identity in African American neighborhoods. Historian Kyle Julien explained that the mobility of jazz between jobs and audiences looking for music led to increased visibility for African Americans in Los Angeles. Patterns of movement that spread out from Central Avenue in Los Angeles increased the mobility of African Americans, and allowed their movement outside racially segregated neighborhoods.¹⁰⁴ Such mobility was directly linked, according to Julien, to two different types of jazz performance in Los Angeles. One mode of performance revolved around segregation, and required African American Angelinos to appear subservient at all times. The other side of this performance was Los Angeles nightlife, which required both African American performers and jazz club patrons to remain visible without subservience. Quoting Robin D.G. Kelley's "subversive refusal to be subservient," Julien demonstrated that the different gaze African American nightlife was under did not compel African

¹⁰³ Ted Vincent, *Keep Cool: The Black Activists Who Built the Jazz Age* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 114.

¹⁰⁴ Julien, *Sounding The City*, 103.

Americans to resume their daytime, workface mask.¹⁰⁵ The construction of jazz performance and nightlife in jazz scene Los Angeles, according to Julien, necessitated both the spatial segregation of African Americans along Central Avenue that resulted in both the resulted in the centralization of urban jazz culture and the complete denial of subordinate positioning by Central Avenue's inhabitants.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, nightlife became an African American phenomenon that crossed racial lines. The transgressive nature of Angelino nightlife, predicated on both mobility and jazz performance, therefore became a vehicle for African American agency and hegemonic spatialization. As Julien wrote: "African American nightlifers thus entered into a complicated semiotic system as they stepped out for the evening, and they participated in this system simultaneously as urban spectators and as elements of spectacle."¹⁰⁷ Clearly, the relationship between race and jazz was not as simple as the evolution of black folk music that is integral to traditional jazz history.

Oversimplified and hegemonic representations of sex and gender are another integral part of the grand narrative of jazz history. Traditional jazz history relies on the "great man theory."¹⁰⁸ According to the great man theory, jazz history is the history of individual male performers, their skill as musicians, and their contributions to the development of jazz music. While a few women are

¹⁰⁵ Julien, *Sounding The City*, 97.

¹⁰⁶ Julien, *Sounding The City*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Julien, *Sounding The City*, 171.

¹⁰⁸ Salim Washington, "'All The Things You Could Be Now': *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* and the Limits of Avant-Garde Jazz," in *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. Robert O'Meally, Brent Haynes Edwards and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 29.

included in traditional jazz history, these women are often represented as either skilled exceptions to the norm or stereotypical women admired more for their bodies than their musical abilities. Vocalists such as Bessie Smith were remembered for their lyrics, but the social and cultural realities that caused those lyrics were ignored.¹⁰⁹ In addition, race and gender cannot be separated in the history of jazz. Historian Ted Vincent explained that women in African American political movements often centered their political career in jazz. A case in point is the story of Amy Ashward Garvey, wife of UNIA leader Marcus Garvey. Amy Garvey performed and produced touring musical shows, and helped bring performers from the jazz circuits into UNIA meetings.¹¹⁰ The cultural moments of women in jazz scenes were left with no place in jazz history. For instance, as jazz scholar Sherrie Tucker wrote of the role of women in the history of swing:

There is no room in dominant swing discourse for women who participated in the complicated processes of crossing race and gender boundaries in the performance and production of the marginalized jazz product known as all-girl bands.¹¹¹

While women are central to the oversimplification of sex and gender in jazz history, the problem is not limited to women. Integral to the jazz scene were female impersonators, men whose performance of sex and gender did not fit the period's construction of the hypersexual "jazz man," performers who identified as gay and lesbian, and an untold number of patrons and city dwellers whose lives

¹⁰⁹ Vincent, *Keep Cool*, 14.

¹¹⁰ Vincent, *Keep Cool*, 14.

¹¹¹ Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 12.

defied mainstream conceptions of gender. For instance, historian Kevin Mumford studied the role of sex districts in the construction of jazz scene racial and gendered identities. This significant aspect of jazz history was also a significant aspect of its commodification, as it was a factor in the spatialization of jazz scene spaces as simultaneously “uplifting” and “slumming.”

The final important facet of jazz history’s grand narrative is the battle over authenticity. Authenticity in jazz is a key factor in the development of jazz’s master narrative. Jazz scholar Scott DeVeaux has explained that the battle over jazz authenticity is inherently connected to questions of music, race and gender. Authenticity in the master narrative of jazz history means that jazz is a sound, based in ethnic and racial minority cultures, developed organically by skilled great men. In essence, jazz historians defined authentic jazz *through exclusion*, rather than the cultural moments of the jazz scenes.¹¹² In his book *Creating Country Music*, Richard Peterson examined the creation of authenticity around American country music. Peterson explained that authenticity is not an inherent aspect, but rather a construction built around the “misremembering” of the past.¹¹³ In this scheme, authenticity is a discursive production that is institutionalized in the larger culture. The content of cultural forms such as jazz are influenced by those institutions, and at the same time it is those institutions that jazz would be created, distributed, and consumer.¹¹⁴ Jazz, for example, is represented as an

¹¹² DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 528.

¹¹³ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.

¹¹⁴ Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 10.

authentic American musical art form that developed naturally over time. Peterson demonstrated, however, that the definition of authentic jazz as an art form is a recent production with enormous “aesthetic mobility.”¹¹⁵ While authentic jazz once meant New Orleans bands, over time such authenticity was aligned with high art and culture. Traditional jazz historians repositioned the entire history of jazz as the history of an authentic, ethnic art form.¹¹⁶

Together, these factors of jazz’s grand narrative created a story that denied and ignored the cultural moments that served as the foreground of jazz music. The role of this grand narrative was not, however, simply a creation for the sake of art. It is, at its core, a debate about the cultural capital of jazz. By defining authentic jazz as an art form, traditional jazz history effectively disconnected jazz from its popular culture environment. High culture, with its concentration on the authenticity of its forms, has economic and cultural power supported by cultural institutions.¹¹⁷ It therefore has cultural capital, and can defend itself by canon-building. By denying the social and cultural scene of jazz, traditional scholars claimed their concept of jazz authenticity as truth.

Historiography of Kansas City Jazz

While relatively ignored compared to cities such as New Orleans or New York, the history of Kansas City jazz has served as a focus for traditional jazz

¹¹⁵ Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 9.

¹¹⁶ DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 544.

¹¹⁷ Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 12.

historians. In the jazz canon, Kansas City appears as little more than a geographical birthplace for certain styles and sounds of jazz music in canon of jazz history in America. The “jazz myth” represents Kansas City as a marginal stop between New Orleans and New York, a temporary flowering of vice and corruption that, through its jazz spaces, produced Charlie Parker and professionalized Count Basie. While one would expect this reductive positioning of Kansas City’s jazz scene to be revised with the advent of new jazz studies, it has continued. For instance, jazz studies scholar Kathy Ogren’s only discussion of Kansas City was a reference to the Pendergast machine and its patronage of vice through the Depression.¹¹⁸ Any discussion of the cultural and social milieu of Kansas City jazz was seemingly erased in the grand narrative history of jazz music. How did the jazz canon subsume the jazz scene in Kansas City?

The historiography of Kansas City’s jazz scene is a linear progression of four works. These works are the essay “Kansas City and the Southwest” (1959) by Franklin Driggs, and the books *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* (1971) by Ross Russell, *Goin’ To Kansas City* (1987) by Norman Pearson, and *Kansas City Jazz* (2006) by Franklin Driggs and Chuck Haddix. Taken together these four works on Kansas City jazz successfully defended Kansas City’s place in the jazz canon, and continue to serve as the main points of evidence about Kansas City’s jazz scene. Each of these works, however, also follows the four main points of jazz history’s grand narrative: a focus on music, an

¹¹⁸ Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution*, 62-63.

oversimplification of race, a reductive representation of gender and sexuality, and a concentration on proving the authenticity of Kansas City jazz as part of the art of jazz music. While each of these works builds on the ones before it, and each work makes different claims to disrupt the jazz canon, all four in fact reify the grand narrative of jazz in Kansas City.

As with other jazz historiography, an interesting facet of Kansas City's jazz scene historiography is its reliance on oral histories of jazz performers. Frank Driggs did a series of interviews for nearly forty years that included Kansas City jazz musicians, and Norman Pearson (with his colleague Howard Litwak) did over one hundred interviews of Kansas City performers and city dwellers for the Pearson book. In each case, interviewers sought to elicit "facts" from their subjects, with the belief that the resulting interview and/or transcript would serve as a text of jazz history. As jazz scholar Burton Peretti discussed, however, jazz history interviews are not a precise historical account of fact. Interviews do not fit within the traditional concept of a historiographical account, because the interviews themselves spring from the specific memories and recollections of the informant. The result is that jazz historians may have believed they were constructing a history of specific "facts," when they actually were creating a text that could only *interpret the context* of the interview subjects.¹¹⁹ This interpretation is as much a product of the interviewer's context as it is the

¹¹⁹ Burton W. Peretti, "Oral Histories of Jazz Musicians: The NEA Transcripts as Texts in Context," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 128.

memories of the subject. As Charlotte Aull Davies explained, if the researcher concludes that their informants express cultural knowledge, is it not equally important to admit that the resulting product/text of the interviewer/subject encounter carries messages about the researcher's cultural knowledge?¹²⁰ In her monograph *Reflexive Ethnography*, Charlotte Aull Davies investigated the ethnographic methods used in social sciences research. Though Davies focused on ethnographic fieldwork methods and ethnographic writing in anthropology, she continuously reiterated that ethnographic and/or oral history methods were integral to all research fields and disciplines, especially within the social sciences. Davies' main concern was reflexivity, and she worked to demonstrate the importance of reflexivity in ethnography and oral history. Davies explained that reflexivity was a system of self-reference, closely related to objectivity, which gave researchers an awareness of their research assumptions, and their effects on the research process.

The key to understanding reflexivity in oral histories of jazz performers is understanding their reliance on memory. Traditional historians see memory as especially dangerous because of its unchecked subjectivity. Instead, as demonstrated in many transcripts of interviews with jazz performers, researchers seek to gain and confirm facts from their subjects. Many scholars have discussed "memory work," and the problematic subject-position of both researchers and informants when working with memories. As Peter Friedlander pointed out in his

¹²⁰ Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 8.

essay “Theory, Method, and Oral History,” a traditional method used to address the problem of memory is cross-checking information.¹²¹ Through cross-checking informant’s memories, scholars can correlate their research to archival research and expand upon their account of their subject-informant. As Burton Peretti explained, such a cross-checking in jazz history interviews is inherently difficult, if not impossible. Jazz history is based much in jazz folklore, Peretti wrote, and therefore confirming the memories of informants is practically impossible.¹²² Another problem with cross-checking in jazz history interviews is that the informants’ interviews reflected the lived experience of elder informants, and are therefore as much a reflection of informant’s current lives as their past. “The transcripts capture the statements of jazz musicians at the end of their careers,” wrote Peretti, “telling us as much (if not more) about their recent experiences and perspective as they do about the past.”¹²³ Silences, lies, and recollections performed by the subject-informants are, therefore, as much a manifestation of their present as their past.

Traditional historians also worry over the personal exchange of information, and the willingness of oral historians to critically examine their subjects. According to Samuel Schrager’s essay “What is Social in Oral History,” the oral historian is recording a *retelling*, not the “original” story. Schrager’s informants filtered their memories through their own social reality, which made

¹²¹ Peter Friedlander, “Theory, Method, and Oral History,” in *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹²² Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 122.

¹²³ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 124.

them just as valuable as other sources.¹²⁴ In her essay “That’s Not What I Said,” oral historian Katherine Borland explained oral history interview as a performance with two levels: the relationship of the subject to narrated events, and the relationship of the subject to the narrative event.¹²⁵ The relationship of the subject to the narrated events is connected to memory, as well as the social and cultural constructs that shaped those memories. Borland’s second level of narrative performance, the relationship of the subject to the narrative event, is played out in the power dynamics between the subject and the interviewer. In the case of jazz interviews, this dynamic is especially difficult to navigate. Kathy Ogren, in her essay “Jazz Isn’t Just Me,” explained that the lack of truth-claim evidence in jazz autobiography created a performance of “self-aggrandizement on the part of the narrator, or the possibility of distortions created by editors.”¹²⁶

The concept of an interview as performance is especially interesting in the case of jazz history interviews. In these interviews, trained and experienced performers were “performing” the text, which requires a great deal of contextualization and corroboration on the part of jazz scholars.¹²⁷ According to jazz scholar Christopher Harlos, this is precisely why jazz oral histories are used only as support of the master narrative of jazz history. Interviewers ask questions

¹²⁴ Samuel Schrager, “What Is Social In Oral History,” in *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 285,

¹²⁵ Katharine Borland, “‘That’s Not What I Said:’ Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research,” in *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 320.

¹²⁶ Kathy J. Ogren, “‘Jazz Isn’t Just Me’: Jazz Autobiographies as Performance Personas,” in *Jazz In Mind: Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz*, Reginald Buckner and Steven Weiland eds. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 112.

¹²⁷ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 127.

about “fact” and interpret those facts as part of the grand narrative because the underlying context of the interview is so difficult to understand.¹²⁸ As Harlos explained, it is not difficult to comprehend the use of oral history in the grand narrative of jazz, given the reality that the grand narrative avoids anything problematic due to its threat to the power of the narrative itself.¹²⁹ This is the role that jazz history interviews have played in Kansas City’s jazz scene historiography- to support the grand narrative, and strengthen that narrative’s positioning of Kansas City.

“Kansas City and the Southwest”

While Kansas City was frequently mentioned in the works of the jazz canon as the birthplace of Parker and the Basie Orchestra, the first traditional jazz scholar to focus on Kansas City as an independent location for jazz was Franklin S. Driggs. Driggs began his career as a jazz scholar upon graduation from Princeton in 1952. At that time, Driggs started collecting oral histories and ephemera from jazz performers living in New York City. Driggs then traveled to Kansas City several times in the 1950s, collecting oral histories with funding from the Institute of Jazz Studies at the Smithsonian Institution.¹³⁰ Driggs then caught the attention of John Hammond, the record producer who led the movement of

¹²⁸ Christopher Harlos, “Jazz Autobiography: Theory, Practice, Politics,” in *Representing Jazz*, Krin Gabbard ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 132.

¹²⁹ Harlos, “Jazz Autobiography,” 132.

¹³⁰ Franklin S. Driggs, “Kansas City and the Southwest,” in *Jazz: New Perspectives on the History of Jazz By Twelve of the World’s Foremost Jazz Critics and Scholars*, Nat Hentoff and Albert J. McCarthy eds. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1959; reprint, New York: DaCapo Press, 1974), 196.

jazz music into the American mainstream. With Hammond's cooperation Driggs began to produce reissued recordings of jazz albums. He continued to work as a record producer through the 1980s, winning several awards including a 1991 Grammy. As a jazz historian, Driggs was best known through the hundreds of liner notes he wrote for albums. Driggs also wrote "Kansas City and the Southwest," a chapter in Nat Hentoff's *Jazz: New Perspectives on the History of Jazz by Twelve of the World's Foremost Jazz Critics and Scholars*. This chapter was the first major addition of Kansas City to the traditional jazz canon. "It may surprise a number of readers," wrote editors Hentoff and McCarthy in their introduction to Driggs' essay, "to find many names here who have never before been included in a jazz book."¹³¹ When the Driggs essay was published in Hentoff's *Jazz* in 1959, it literally became the benchmark explanation of Kansas City's jazz scene.

The fact that Driggs represented the stakeholders of the master narrative of jazz history is mixed. Driggs wrote what may be the first historical essay on female jazz musicians, published as "Women In Jazz: A Survey," in 1977, as liner notes for the Stash record "Jazzwomen, A Feminist Retrospective."¹³² As a record producer and reviewer, however, Driggs had a clear interest in maintaining the evolutionary framework of jazz history. He served as a producer for Columbia and Decca records, for many years the home recording studio for

¹³¹ Driggs, "Kansas City," 190.

¹³² Frank Driggs, "Women In Jazz: A Survey" (New York: Stash Records, 1977); from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, File No. 09220: Music- Blues and Jazz, accessed September 2006.

Charlie Parker. This was reflected in his essay on Kansas City entitled “Kansas City and the Southwest.” In this essay, Driggs made several important statements about Kansas City that seemingly sealed its position in the jazz canon. Some of these statements were a result of the first focus of the jazz canon: a focus on the performance and production of music. Driggs asserted that Kansas City’s major role in jazz history was as a center for territory and circuit performers, giving rise to a period of experimentation that led to the creation of jazz greats such as Parker. In his discussion of Kansas City musicians and bandleaders such as George Lee, Bennie Moten and Andy Kirk, Driggs positioned Kansas City’s jazz sound as one that led to the development of greater musicians. In addition, Driggs’ essay concentrates on an established trajectory for each musician discussed: the musician comes to Kansas City from the South or Southwest, develops their skills in Kansas City, and then moves to New York where they either succeed or fail. One example is Driggs’ summary of the career of Jay McShann. McShann was a pianist and bandleader who came to Kansas City from Oklahoma in 1935. McShann employed Charlie Parker sporadically until 1940, when Parker joined McShann’s orchestra.¹³³ According to Driggs, McShann took the orchestra to New York, where promoters noticed Parker. “Bird soon accepted Budd Johnson’s tenor chair in Earl Hines’ bop-oriented band of 1943,” wrote Driggs, “McShann came out of service in 1944 and reorganized his band.”¹³⁴ There is no further mention of McShann in the essay, who continued to play and

¹³³ Driggs, “Kansas City,” 228.

¹³⁴ Driggs, “Kansas City,” 228.

record until his death in 2006. For Driggs, however, McShann's story was over once the production of America's classical music moved on to New York.

Driggs' essay also replicates the oversimplification of race found in the grand narrative of jazz history. Throughout the essay, Driggs makes no discussion of race, the race and ethnicity of musicians discussed, or any racism they experienced in Kansas City or on the road. In fact, his only references to race are related to the concept of Kansas City as a temporary flowering, and to the practice of delineating jazz as music with African American roots. Driggs' first mention of race appears in a short discussion of the Pendergast machine in Kansas City:

Although no one I interviewed would admit it publicly, both whites and Negroes hankered for the return of what Pendergast stood for. Pendergast was the musician's friend, and in some quarters he is sorely missed.¹³⁵

Driggs then made no effort to explain what was "hankered for," or how Pendergast was a friend to jazz musicians regardless of race. The second reference to race is in Driggs' conclusion, where he admits that he has not discussed any white musicians:

Thus far the white musician's story has been ignored, although many fine white jazzmen were working in the Southwest before moving on, in some cases to greater fame. Theirs, apparently, is a separate story, which should be written.¹³⁶

In a clear reification of the jazz canon, Driggs positions race as something separate and simply divided into black and white. In addition, in this quotation is

¹³⁵ Driggs, "Kansas City," 198.

¹³⁶ Driggs, "Kansas City," 229-230.

further evidence of Driggs' dependence on the canon and its positioning of Kansas City as a temporary training ground for musicians on their way to more important places.

The reduction of gender and sexuality found in the grand narrative of jazz history is also found in Driggs' essay on Kansas City. In fact, in the entire essay on Kansas City and its jazz scene, only one woman is mentioned by Driggs: Mary Lou Williams. Williams and male musician Marion Jackson were each pianists for the Clouds of Joy, an orchestra led by Andy Kirk. In this excerpt, the only discussion of women in the essay, Driggs explained how Williams replaced Jackson:

On the afternoon of the Clouds' first session, pianist Marion Jackson failed to show up, so Andy made a call to Mary Lou Williams, piano-playing wife of his altoist John Williams, who was then in Kansas City but not playing music. Mary Lou came over and made the date, knocking out the musicians and recording people alike. Andy rewarded her for her fine work by giving her the privilege of making the balance of the Kansas City session, so she sat up with Andy and worked out some arrangements, which they used on the sessions. Some time later, when the band was scheduled for another session in Chicago, Marion Jackson was back at his piano chair. When Kapp [Jack Kapp, a record executive] heard them rehearsing, he didn't like what he heard, and told Andy it didn't sound like the same band, and that he had to have Mary Lou. She came up from Kansas City and continued to make all the recordings at Kapp's insistence, and not with Andy's reluctance. She finally joined the band in 1931, after they had come back from their first trip East.¹³⁷

In this lone discussion of female performers in Kansas City, Driggs' work as a historian of the jazz canon is clear. First, Williams is not referred to as a musician or pianist, but as a "piano-playing wife." Then, according to Driggs,

¹³⁷ Driggs, "Kansas City," 207-208.

Williams was “rewarded” with the “privilege” of playing with the band, though she clearly was not “privileged” enough to join the Clouds of Joy in Kansas City. Driggs positions female performers here as accidental exceptions to the rule, who are lucky to have male bandleaders and executives willing to include them. Through omission Driggs made a specific, canon-building point about gender and sex: the history of jazz is a history of great men.

Traditional jazz history also focuses on the authenticity of jazz as an American art form, and Driggs’ essay followed that focus as well. The key to authenticating Kansas City jazz, however, is to explain its temporality while positioning Kansas City neatly in the “jazz myth.” Traditional jazz historians were enamored with one question about Kansas City: why did such a strong jazz scene develop in Kansas City? In order to explain how Kansas City became so exceptional, Driggs positioned Kansas City as a site of temporary jazz production that revolved around the political machine of Tom Pendergast. It was Driggs who wrote about Kansas City as a “wide open town,” a city where a momentary period of criminality allowed jazz to flourish. By positioning the Kansas City scene in such limiting terms, Driggs was able to retain Kansas City’s position in the jazz myth as a stopover between New Orleans and New York. According to Driggs, the performance and influence of jazz in Kansas City was practically non-existent before Pendergast came to power. “At that time [after the closing of Storyville in 1917] there was neither a great demand for nor much knowledge of jazz in Kansas

City,” wrote Driggs.¹³⁸ Driggs explained, however, how quickly that changed after Pendergast came into power:

Tom Pendergast was boss of the Democratic party in Kansas City from 1927 to 1938, and the men he chose for office held all the key positions of power in Kansas City during those years. Pendergast himself held political office as early as 1902, and ran a wide-open hotel, the Jefferson, from 1907 until 1920, with police protection. He encouraged gambling and night life; clubs as such appeared during his years of power in vast proliferation, and all had music of one sort or another. Many could house full bands, and many of the owners had political connections. It is significant that nearly all the developments in Kansas City’s music took place during Pendergast’s reign. Since his conviction in 1938 for income-tax evasion, relatively little of importance has occurred, and only the 1942 Jay McShann band, with Charlie Parker and Walter Brown, has made any further impact on the jazz world at large.¹³⁹

With that paragraph, Driggs created a major component of the jazz canon of Kansas City’s jazz scene history. The component presents a reductive representation of the Pendergast machine as a producer of spaces where jazz took hold. Once Pendergast was gone, according to this representation, so was jazz. Representing Kansas City as a temporary site of jazz performance, and using the Pendergast machine to give that temporality both an explanation and a date, became the most well-known aspect of the jazz canon in Kansas City. While it is clear that the Pendergast machine played a major role in the development of Kansas City’s jazz scene, beginning with Driggs jazz historians gave little thought to Pendergast-era Kansas City beyond simple references to gambling, vice, and being “wide open.” Through this positioning of the Pendergast machine, the jazz myth was rendered safe because it clarified the role that Kansas City played in the

¹³⁸ Driggs, “Kansas City,” 191.

¹³⁹ Driggs, “Kansas City,” 195.

route from New Orleans to New York: a short-lived site of “wide-open” life, where jazz was played, experimented with, and from which only a handful of geniuses emerged. Driggs’ explanation of the authenticity of Kansas City jazz became the common denominator of Kansas City’s jazz historiography. In fact, Driggs is still considered by many jazz historians to be the authority on Kansas City’s jazz scene history, specifically because of Driggs’ positioning of Kansas City as a temporary, Pendergast-controlled stop en route to New York. “Thus, one of the great centers of jazz development—Kansas City in the 1920s and 1930s,” wrote jazz scholar Howard Becker in 2004, “drew its vitality from the political corruption which made nightlife possible.”¹⁴⁰ As the citation for the quotation above, Becker used Driggs’ 1959 essay.

Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest

Another traditional jazz history stakeholder wrote more extensively on the role of Kansas City in jazz music’s “organic” development. Ross Russell was the owner of Dial Records, a New York City music label that specialized in bebop recordings, especially those of Charlie Parker. Early in his career, Russell worked as Charlie Parker’s personal manager for two years.¹⁴¹ Russell also wrote for the magazine “The Record Changer,” a specialized publication for collectors of rare

¹⁴⁰ Howard S. Becker, “Jazz Places,” in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson eds. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 17.

¹⁴¹ Frank J. Gillis, “Review: *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* by Ross Russell and *Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker* by Ross Russell,” *Ethnomusicology* 19, no 2 (May 1975), 316.

jazz recordings.¹⁴² Russell, according to jazz scholar Scott DeVeaux, was one of the first traditional jazz historians to suggest that jazz had an inherent and organic developmental path from New Orleans through Kansas City to the art form known as bebop. “This envisioning jazz as an organic entity that periodically revitalizes itself through upheaval of stylistic change while retaining its essential identity revolved one of the fundamental problems in the writing of its history,” wrote DeVeaux, “the stigma of inferiority or incompleteness that the notion of progress inevitably attached to earlier styles.”¹⁴³ Russell’s study of Kansas City, entitled *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest*, was published in 1971. *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* was based largely on the uncredited collections of interviews completed by Frank Driggs.

Russell’s book depends entirely on the work of Driggs, both in terms of sources and organization. First and foremost, Russell is interested in discussing Kansas City as a site of jazz performance, where a handful of jazz “greats” gained skill and moved on to fame. In his book, Russell positioned Kansas City as an oasis in the Southwest circuit. Pointing to the factors already identified by Driggs—Pendergast, the territory and the Kansas City jazz sound—Russell discussed the jazz scene in Kansas City as a series of clubs and performers. Each of the performers identified by Russell played some part in the development of the “Kaycee” sound, leading eventually to Charlie Parker and the rise of bebop.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 539.

¹⁴³ DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” 540.

¹⁴⁴ Russell, *Jazz Style*.

Russell went on to use the same sources and conclusions in his later book *Bird Lives!*, a biography of Charlie Parker. Through his study, Russell continued the focus on great performers and the sound of jazz as a way on retaining ownership of jazz history for its stakeholders. As one reviewer explained, Russell wrote a “work consisting chiefly of sketches of the individual musicians and bands which set the style.”¹⁴⁵

Russell’s position as a jazz history stakeholder, and his reliance on Driggs’ material, is further evident in his discussions of race. In fact, in a nod to both Driggs and the jazz canon that emphasized the African American roots of jazz, the only mention of race or ethnicity in the Russell book are references to whiteness or simply drawn black/white binaries. Russell does not identify the race or ethnicity of jazz performers in Kansas City unless they were white, and even then they are mentioned sparingly and as a group. For example, Russell engaged in a discussion of selected club owners and managers, among them Papa Sol Epstein. Epstein was a white Pendergast crony who owned a black-and-tan club, along with other saloons in Kansas City’s First Ward. In his discussion of other club managers such as Piney Brown and Joe Turner, no mention of race was made by Russell.¹⁴⁶ Russell’s silencing of race as a facet of the jazz canon is further evident in his discussion of clubs in Kansas City. Russell took great care to identify white performance spaces such as the Muehlebach Hotel and the Pla-Mor Ballroom, and to reiterate their position as “whites only” spaces every time they

¹⁴⁵ Gillis, “Review: *Jazz Style*,” 316.

¹⁴⁶ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 15-16.

are mentioned. What Russell termed “black dance halls” was only identified as such when in the same paragraph as a “white dance hall.”¹⁴⁷

Russell’s dependence on Driggs, and therefore on the grand narrative of jazz history, is further evident in his lack of discussion about gender, sex and sexuality. Unlike Driggs, Russell did include some mention of spaces in Kansas City that could easily be considered spaces where the definitions of gender and sexuality were contested. While Driggs wrote nothing about sexualized and gendered spaces in the City’s jazz scene, Russell does include mention of prostitution and burlesque. For instance, Russell mentioned specifically about prostitution at the Reno, where “tricks” were taken up the back stairs behind the club for two dollars each.¹⁴⁸ Russell also referred to burlesque performances at the Century Theater.¹⁴⁹ Each of these references, however, are represented as a simple backdrop, as further evidence of the corruption of the Pendergast era and the “wide open” atmosphere that led to genius. For example, Russell’s discussion of prostitution at the Reno is only a backdrop for his lengthy discussion of Charlie Parker, who according to Russell got his nickname thanks to John Agnos, a lunchwagon owner who parked behind the Reno.¹⁵⁰ Russell’s reference to burlesque is intended as a glimpse of the “wide open” nightlife in Kansas City, portrayed by Russell in the pages before as “Pendergast prosperity.”¹⁵¹ Though Russell seems on the surface to develop a deeper understanding of the jazz scene

¹⁴⁷ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 17-22.

¹⁴⁸ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 23.

¹⁴⁹ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 24.

¹⁵¹ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 9.

in Kansas City, it is little more than Driggs' essay with the exciting backdrop of sexual license and marginal performance. In this manner, Russell further pushed female jazz performers into the backdrop, and advanced the canon-based concept that jazz was the production of great men. For Russell, what were important were not the prostitutes behind the Reno, or the female musicians who may have been performing inside, but the young male musicians watching them from the lunchwagon.

Finally, Russell depended on Driggs' positioning of Kansas City as a temporary, Pendergast-driven jazz scene in order to complete his work. According to Russell, Kansas City was a southwestern city that was "off the beaten track," and is positioned as an isolated city that lent itself to a temporary cultural explosion.¹⁵² Another example from Russell's book is his discussion of "Kaycee," previously discussed in this work. While more exciting sounding than Driggs' explanation, Russell's positioning of Kansas City as a "wide open town" is nonetheless clear. For Russell, the "Pendergast prosperity" lasted from 1927 until 1934, when jazz died in Kansas City.¹⁵³

Kansas City, as Russell explains, was the site of a style creation, the birthplace of Parker, and a fleeting moment of jazz production thanks to the excess of Pendergast. Though Russell expanded on Driggs' exploration of musicians and their careers, as well as the social and cultural scene in Kansas City, it did not deviate from the jazz canon. Ross Russell's *Jazz Style in Kansas*

¹⁵² Russell, *Jazz Style*, 3.

¹⁵³ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 9.

City and the Southwest was for many years considered the definitive book on jazz history in Kansas City. One reviewer wrote that the Russell book “reveals new insight for historians to ponder and consult for reference.”¹⁵⁴ “It will more than adequately serve as the standard reference work,” wrote reviewer Frank Gillis, “for jazz researchers and scholars for many years.”¹⁵⁵

Goin’ To Kansas City

Out of the work by Driggs and Russell grew the most formative study of Kansas City jazz, which appeared in book form in 1987. The book, entitled *Goin’ To Kansas City*, was written by scholar Norman Pearson based on the interviews he conducted with Howard Litwak in 1977. Pearson and Litwak were educated and trained folklorists who had studied jazz history in New York City as college students. Pearson, in fact, was a jazz patron.¹⁵⁶ The two relied heavily on previous work by Driggs and Russell, and carried the assumptions made by those stakeholders into their own work. Though not well known to jazz historians outside Kansas City, the work of Pearson and Litwak became the template for jazz history in Kansas City. In addition, the traditional scheme of jazz history presented by Pearson and Litwak continues to affect all other studies of Kansas City’s jazz scene.

¹⁵⁴ Ernest F. Dyson, “Review: *Pops Foster: The Autobiography of a New Orleans Jazzman* by Tom Stoddard and Brian Rust, and *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* by Ross Russell,” *The Journal of Negro History* 58, no. 2 (April 1973), 222.

¹⁵⁵ Gillis, “Review: *Jazz Style*,” 316.

¹⁵⁶ Nathan W. Pearson Jr., interview with Amber Clifford, 12 September 2006, Connecticut, digital recording.

In terms of oral history collections, *Goin' To Kansas City* was part of a national project. The “Goin’ To Kansas City” (GTKC) project was a subsection of the larger Jazz Oral History Project. Originally founded in 1968, the Jazz Oral History Project (JOHP) was designed to collect oral history interviews of jazz performers. National Endowment for the Arts funding was used to pay jazz “elders” for their interviews: as much as \$2,000.00 for a five hour interview.¹⁵⁷ From its beginnings, the JOHP migrated from institution to institution. It was operated by Jazz Interactions, an independent New York City clearinghouse for jazz history, from 1972-1974. The administration of the JOHP was then transferred to the Smithsonian Institutions American Folklife section for two years, before the JOHP made its final and permanent move to Rutgers University in 1979.¹⁵⁸ At the Smithsonian and Rutgers, the JOHP was under the direction of jazz history stakeholders Martin Williams and J.R. Taylor. After the National Endowment for the Humanities cut its funding of the JOHP in 1983, jazz scholar Ron Wellburn was hired to administrate the JOHP at Rutgers. Wellburn made specific changes to JOHP policies and procedures. The first change was about the criteria for selection of interview subjects. All interview subjects had to be at least sixty years old or in poor health, and they could not have memoirs completed or in progress at the time of the interview.¹⁵⁹ One hundred twenty three interviews were officially completed in the JOHP, and of those interviewees

¹⁵⁷ Burton W. Peretti, “Oral Histories” 119.

¹⁵⁸ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 119.

¹⁵⁹ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 119.

only half were still alive ten years after Wellburn took control.¹⁶⁰ Essentially, under Wellburn the JOHP researchers were supposed to “capture the reminiscences” of older jazz performers.¹⁶¹ Other than selection criteria, JOHP interviewers had little training, no specific targets, and no direct rules about conducting the interview.¹⁶²

The GTKC project had its impetus in the JOHP. While not officially part of the JOHP at its beginning, the GTKC project was completed in conjunction and with the assistance of JOHP officials at the Smithsonian and Rutgers.¹⁶³ The investigators were Howard Litwak and Norman Pearson, two college students who were awarded Youth Grant funds to complete the project. Both Pearson and Litwak had interests in jazz history, but neither had any interest or experience in Kansas City jazz. In fact, Pearson and Litwak originally intended to do oral histories of jazz performers in New York City, but were dissuaded from that by JOHP administrator Wellburn. Wellburn suggested that Kansas City was relatively unknown, and would benefit from their oral history work.¹⁶⁴ Originally entitled “Kansas City—The Oral History of a Jazz Scene, 1924-1942,” the GTKC project was funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant of \$8,568.00 in 1977. Upon its completion, Pearson and Litwak had “interviewed

¹⁶⁰ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 120.

¹⁶¹ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 120.

¹⁶² Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 120.

¹⁶³ Pearson, interview with Amber Clifford.

¹⁶⁴ Pearson, interview with Amber Clifford.

forty seven musicians, dancers, politicians, civic leaders, band managers, and night club owners significant to the Kansas City jazz scene.”¹⁶⁵

Since its completion in 1977, the GTKC project interviews have become major sources of information about the jazz scene in Kansas City. Like the other interviews completed under the auspices of the JOHP, the interviews did much to preserve the memories of early jazz performers and their patrons. Many researchers have, however, identified problems with the JOHP interviews. The first of these problems is the transcription of the interviews. In many cases, the transcriptions of interviews in the JOHP remain unfinished.¹⁶⁶ In addition, transcripts that were completed were done by volunteers, so the quality and detail of transcripts varies in terms of cancellations, mishearings, and what jazz scholar Burton Peretti called the “bowdlerization by typists.”¹⁶⁷

The GTKC project also suffered from the transcription problems at the JOHP. Of the forty seven interviews completed, only twenty five were transcribed.¹⁶⁸ JOHP administrators Martin Williams and J.R. Taylor originally agreed to transcribe the GTKC interviews, but after completing only ten transcripts the men backed out of their agreement with Pearson and Litwak.¹⁶⁹ Pearson and Litwak completed an additional fifteen transcripts in the grant period, and then deposited the full collection of twenty five interviews at the Smithsonian for the JOHP and at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Between 1977 and

¹⁶⁵ Pearson and Litwak, “Final Report,” 2.

¹⁶⁶ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 120.

¹⁶⁷ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 120.

¹⁶⁸ Pearson and Litwak, “Final Report,” 2.

¹⁶⁹ Pearson and Litwak, “Final Report,” 2.

1983 Pearson and Litwak completed the remaining transcripts for their own use—full transcripts were never placed at any archival repository.¹⁷⁰ As Pearson and Litwak wrote in their Final Report to the NEA in 1977: “Our only serious difficulty was that the Smithsonian did not completely live up to its promise to transcribe interviews with musicians. . . . We have compensated by continuing to transcribe interviews ourselves without remuneration.”¹⁷¹

The second problem often associated with the JOHP interviews is the quality of the interviews. Jazz scholar Burton Peretti has discussed the skills of JOHP interviewers, and the ways in which their varied skills altered the usefulness of the interviews. For instance, the interviewers were frequently trained as journalists. According to Peretti, jazz historiography itself suffers from a focus on journalistic inquiry, because jazz journalists tend to be reviewers or industry reporters who do little to explore the cultures of jazz.¹⁷² JOHP interviews tend to reflect the traditional jazz canon, with its focus on recordings, band personnel, and great performers. Even Peretti admits that the best of the JOHP interviews reflect the jazz canon: “The best oral histories are strongest empirically in straight biography, personnel information (of more use to discographers than anyone else), and anecdotes.”¹⁷³

While some of the concerns about interview quality in the JOHP are evident in the GTKC project, others are not. For instance, Pearson and Litwak

¹⁷⁰ Pearson, interview with Amber Clifford.

¹⁷¹ Pearson and Litwak, “Final Report,” 3.

¹⁷² Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 121.

¹⁷³ Peretti, “Oral Histories,” 121.

were not jazz journalists. Unlike Driggs and Russell they were trained academic scholars and musicologists, who conducted interviews that tried to focus as much on the social milieu of Kansas City as the music. From the beginning Pearson and Litwak planned to explore aspects of race, gender, sexuality and the socio-cultural scene in Kansas City at greater depth than Driggs or Russell. At the same time, and despite their plans, the Pearson and Litwak interviews have frequent references to aspects of Kansas City that was part of the jazz canon. For instance, nearly all the transcribed interviews contain questions by the interviewers about meeting Count Basie or Charlie Parker. Additionally, the outline used by Pearson and Litwak to guide their interviews belies an interest in cultural moments, but focuses on jazz music and its development in Kansas City.

An example of Pearson and Litwak's intention to disrupt the jazz canon around Kansas City is evident in their interview outlines. That same outline, however, belies the continued focus on music and authenticity passed down from Driggs, Russell, and other traditional jazz historians. For the project, a GTKC interview outline was broken into five categories: family background, early music, professional music, adult experiences, and Kansas City. Questions about family background included inquiries about childhood, family connections, class identifiers such as household type and income, and such topics as "goals in life as a youngster."¹⁷⁴ Early music questions focused on music teachers and education, the performer's first musical instrument, and family musicians. Interviewers were

¹⁷⁴ Pearson and Litwak, "Final Report," question outline.

then asked questions about the memories of professional musicianship: band personnel, repertoires and gigs played, road experiences and radio performances. According to Pearson and Litwak, adult life inquiries centered on marriages and children, as well as illegal activities (drug use, alcoholism) and the musician's "retrospective attitudes toward music as a profession."¹⁷⁵ Finally, Pearson and Litwak sought information about life in Kansas City during the jazz scene.

According to Pearson and Litwak, those queries were:

The Pendergast machine; voting experience; ward politics; segregation; streetcars; well-known figures such as Piney Brown, Felix Payne, and Ellis Burton; retrospective attitudes about black life in Kansas City, etc.¹⁷⁶

While it is clear from the transcripts that Pearson and Litwak tried to pursue interview subject's memories with further questions, the interviewers also appeared to go on what Peretti called "fishing expeditions" for information that followed their outlines. A good example of this interview concern occurs in the Pearson and Litwak interview with Ernest Williams. Williams (1904-1986) was a vocalist and drummer, best known as the director and lead vocalist for the Blue Devils and the Rockets. Pearson and Litwak interviewed Williams on May 18, 1977, in Kansas City. Throughout the interview, Williams discussed his experiences as a director and vocalist, and his knowledge of other musicians in the Kansas City scene. During the interview, however, Pearson and Litwak seem to ignore Williams' statements in an effort to follow their own outline.

Litwak: Peeny Johnson, where'd he get that nickname?

¹⁷⁵ Pearson and Litwak, "Final Report," question outline.

¹⁷⁶ Pearson and Litwak, "Final Report," question outline.

Williams: Made it up. I don't know where that name was from, Peeny, played trumpet.
 Litwak: Where did he come from?
 Williams: Kansas City.
 Litwak: You found him right here in town?
 Williams: Yeah, and he worked with the Dean's of Swing then.
 Litwak: The Dean's of Swing, oh sure, Charlie Parker's little band?
 Williams: Yep, well it wasn't Charlie Parker's. . .
 Pearson: Do you recall this session?
 Williams: Yeah.
 Pearson: This recording session?
 Williams: I was the one that directed the session.
 Pearson: Yeah, right. Do you think the sound of this does justice to the way the Rockets sounded? Is this a pretty fair representation?
 Williams: Yeah, it's fair.¹⁷⁷

As this short excerpt demonstrates, Pearson and Litwak were primarily interested in aspects of the master narrative of jazz- namely in this instance, Charlie Parker. Williams seems to refute the conclusion of the interviewer's, that Parker led the Deans of Swing. Those pauses and dropped thoughts were ignored by the interviewers. Rather than follow the lead of the subject, both Litwak and Pearson turned the interview to their own purposes.

Pearson and Litwak's interpretation of the interviews were organized into a single text: the Pearson book *Goin' To Kansas City*. For the interpretation of the GTKC interviews, Pearson relied on two sources: transcripts of the interviews, and their memories of the oral history encounter. The transcripts were different depending on their source. Interviews transcribed by the Smithsonian were available for the researchers, but additional transcription was done by Pearson and

¹⁷⁷ Ernest Williams, Interview by Norman W. Pearson Jr. and Howard Litwak, 18 May 1977, transcript, *Goin' To Kansas City Oral History Collection*, Western Historical Manuscripts, University of Missouri- Kansas City, Kansas City, Mo. Any typographical errors are original to the transcript.

Litwak themselves. In preparation for a book, Pearson and Litwak chose to focus only on those interviews that they felt yielded the most information about Kansas City jazz. As a result, only forty-one of the 123 interviews completed were described in the finished book. In addition, interviews used in the book were carefully edited and rearranged with no discussion of the interview itself. Subjects were introduced to the book with a short biographical statement, followed by fragmented quotes from their interviews. The arrangement of chapters was based on the researcher's outline of interview topics. As Pearson wrote in the Introduction to the 1987 book:

The oral histories that tell the Kansas City jazz story are taken, with very few and noted exceptions, from Howard's [Litwak] and my research. They are arranged by theme and content rather than by speaker. Supplementary words, phrases, and explanations are occasionally added by me for clarity and are marked by brackets.¹⁷⁸

The book then listed the interview subjects in two appendices: one that restated the short biographical statements, and one that listed their major recordings and the recordings of the jazz musicians mentioned in the book.

The role that performance played in the interviews is absent in the book. In fact, the only discussions of interview subjects in the book, aside from their edited recollections of Kansas City jazz, are in footnotes by Pearson. These footnotes contain clarifications, but more importantly they frequently discuss the performers at the interview, or correct their memories. This editing is an important facet of the traditional jazz canon, as it focused on positioning the

¹⁷⁸ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, xv.

informants in terms of their careers and performance history, followed by their role in the temporary flowering of Kansas City jazz. For instance, Pearson interviewed Jesse Stone, a well-known band-leader, arranger and composer of American jazz in the 1930s and 1940s. Pearson and Litwak asked Stone about Count Basie, and how Basie became a member of Bennie Moten's orchestra. While Stone explained that Basie joined the band because he was following them around "like a valet."¹⁷⁹ Pearson wrote this correction about Stone's memories:

Jesse Stone is probably incorrect in stating that Basie was just hanging around the Moten band before he was taken in. Most other accounts agree with Stone that Basie was well known to the other band members before he joined (due in part to his prior experience in Kansas City), but also assert that he was vigorously recruited by Moten. Stone is correct in implying that Moten recognized his own limitations as a pianist, and wished to devote more time to leading the orchestra. Basie was the perfect and much sought-after choice to take his place at the piano bench.¹⁸⁰

Clearly in this example, Pearson uses his (and other historians) "knowledge" of jazz history as a way of editing Stone's memories. It is unclear, however, how Stone's memories are somehow "incorrect." Instead, it appears that Pearson is working to protect Basie, and his position in the grand narrative of jazz history, from Stone's recollections. In addition, Pearson used this correction to reiterate the focus of the master narrative on skills, great men, and the sound of jazz. The end of the statement by Pearson has nothing to do with Stone's statement- it is instead a replication of the master narrative, and its insistence on the skills of "perfect" performers and their intended "place at the piano bench."

¹⁷⁹ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 127.

¹⁸⁰ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 134.

While some notes by Pearson corrected memories of interview subjects, still other notes presented a romanticized view of aging performers. These statements did not rely on the interviews themselves, but on the concept of loss of skill to age and morbidity. In one particular example, Pearson discussed an encounter with Joe Turner, a well-known blues singer from Kansas City. Though Pearson did not include any interview selections with Turner in the finished book, Pearson did discuss an interview encounter with Turner in a footnote attached to other informant's memories of Turner. Pearson wrote:

Joe was not only a brilliant blues singer, sensitive, swinging, and inventive; he was also the loudest singer I ever heard. My first personal encounter with Big Joe was in 1976 at Barney Josephson's Cookery in New York City. Joe was sixty-five years old and no longer the big, well-built lady-killer of his youth. He must have weighed at least three hundred pounds and could barely walk (later he was forced to use crutches and a wheelchair because of his weight), but he could still sing. He held the microphone down below his waist, and raised his voice to the crowd. People in the first few tables were deafened, but everybody was impressed. In his prime, at the Sunset Club, he must have been truly awesome.¹⁸¹

This quote illustrates Pearson's positioning of Kansas City as a temporary site of jazz production, while also positioning the performers of Kansas City jazz as relics of that scene. As Harlos discussed, the role of autobiography in the jazz canon is to defend its assumptions: if Kansas City's scene is dead, then its performers must be antiques, and both are "no longer the big, well-built lady-killer" of the past. Kansas City jazz, in both scene and performance, were past their prime.

¹⁸¹ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 112 n.6.

The interpretive decisions that Pearson and Litwak used for the interviews also became a cornerstone of Kansas City's jazz monument: The American Jazz Museum and Hall of Fame. The foundation of the museum was the traveling exhibition "Goin' To Kansas City," administrated by Pearson and Litwak. "Goin' To Kansas City" was comprised of thirty-seven exhibit panels featuring images Pearson and Litwak gathered during their research, along with music clips, a twenty-five minute documentary film on Kansas City jazz, and an interpretive program.¹⁸² The exhibit followed a clear, four-part narrative based on the periods of Kansas City jazz music: sources of the Kansas City sound from the 1890s, a section entitled "Jazz Emerges" that focused on the 1920s, the 1930s series "The Jumping Town," and the last series "End of an Era."¹⁸³ The interpretive program opened with a short narrative history of jazz in Kansas City, and an essay by Pearson and Litwak about the importance of the Midwest in jazz history. The rest of the program provided quotes from the GTKC interviews with no captions, biographical information or explanation. The program was also filled with images taken from the exhibition, images that Pearson and Litwak gathered from their informants during the GTKC project or borrowed from other local collections. Only three musicians are discussed at length in the program: Bennie Moten, Jay McShann and Charlie Parker.¹⁸⁴ Co-sponsored by the Mid-America Arts Alliance, the Kansas City Museum and the National Endowment for the

¹⁸² Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, xiii.

¹⁸³ Terry Teachout, "Goin' To Kansas City: In Search of Heroes," *Kansas City Star*, 4 May 1980, 8(A) and 18(A).

¹⁸⁴ Nathan W. Pearson and Howard Litwak, "Goin' To Kansas City: A Catalogue for the *Goin' To Kansas City Exhibit*" (Kansas City, MO: Mid-America Arts Alliance, 1980).

Humanities, the finished exhibit opened in Kansas City on May 24, 1980. In an article entitled “Goin’ To Kansas City: In Search of Heroes,” Kansas City reporter Terry Teachout interviewed Pearson and Litwak, and discussed their GTKC project. After discussing their project and their academic backgrounds, the two researchers discussed the goals of the exhibition, goals that clearly reified the jazz canon in Kansas City. When Teachout asked Litwak about his hopes for the exhibition, Litwak replied:

If I had to pick one thing as a goal for the exhibit, it would be to make the people in this region realize that it’s the style here that truly fed into the mainstream of jazz. People around here just don’t realize how influential the heritage of jazz in Kansas City is. . . even the influence of Charlie Parker himself—that all came right from Kansas City.¹⁸⁵

The “Goin’ To Kansas City” opened at the Kansas City Museum, and then toured the Midwest for three years. Upon completion of the tour, the Mid-American Arts Alliance placed the exhibit in storage at the Kansas City Museum. At that point, backers and historians in Kansas City began to create an interest in opening a museum about the history of jazz in Kansas City. Pearson and Litwak began to work separately in 1983: Pearson on the book *Goin’ To Kansas City*, and Litwak as an advisor for the committee working to build a jazz museum. Eventually, Litwak used the same interpretive scheme used in the GTKC project in the creation of exhibits at the American Jazz Museum and Hall of Fame. According to Norman Pearson, the exhibits at the American Jazz Museum were devised and created under the direction of Howard Litwak. While Litwak focused

¹⁸⁵ Teachout, “Goin’ To Kansas City,” 18(A).

on the creation of a jazz museum, Pearson began to write the long-awaited book *Goin' To Kansas City*. With its publication in 1987, Pearson and Litwak's GTKC project finally closed. There is no doubt that the GTKC project was the most important project in the historiography of Kansas City jazz, leaving behind images and interpretations that shape the official knowledge of Kansas City jazz to this day. It is important to note, however, that despite its lofty goals the GTKC project did only support the official jazz canon and the knowledge that the canon produced. Harold Brofsky, who reviewed the Pearson book for the journal *Ethnomusicology*, even wrote that the book was at its core "a reliance on Russell—or perhaps they both go back to Frank Driggs, the earliest historian of Kansas City jazz."¹⁸⁶

Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop- A History

Though the GTKC project closed in 1987, it was the beginning of a renaissance of traditional jazz history in Kansas City. This reiteration of the jazz canon in Kansas City also brought the written grand narrative of Kansas City back full circle to its founder, Franklin S. Driggs. Driggs, who first wrote about Kansas City in a canon-building 1959 essay based on his own interviews and research, continued to do interviews and study jazz in Kansas City from the 1950s through the 1980s. In 1977, Driggs was awarded a contract by Oxford University

¹⁸⁶ Howard Brofsky, "Review: *Goin' To Kansas City* by Nathan W. Pearson Jr.," *Ethnomusicology* 33 no 2 (Spring/Summer, 1989), 334.

Press for a book on Kansas City jazz.¹⁸⁷ At the same time, Chuck Haddix was “working in the record business” before becoming jazz and blues producer at radio station KCUR-FM in Kansas City.¹⁸⁸ The two men began to collaborate in 1987, when Haddix took over as Director of the Marr Sound Archives at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (and the same year the Pearson book was published).¹⁸⁹ Driggs then donated his collection of oral history interviews to the Marr Sound Archives in the 1980s, where the Driggs interviews came under the direction of Chuck Haddix.¹⁹⁰ As Chuck Haddix wrote of the Driggs work on Kansas City: “The oral histories, conducted from 1956 to 1986, capture the truths of the development of jazz as related by a host of musicians and band leaders who defined the tradition.”¹⁹¹ A longtime jazz patron and collector, Haddix began to add interviews to the Driggs Collection through his work as the Director of the Marr Sound Archives. Haddix also began to host his radio show “Fish Fry,” a public radio program dedicated to classic jazz recordings. Through his relationship with Frank Driggs, Haddix began to do research about Kansas City jazz. The result is the most recent addition to the historiography of Kansas City jazz: *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop, A History*, published by Oxford University Press in 2005 as completion of Driggs’ original 1977 contract.

¹⁸⁷ Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, ix.

¹⁸⁸ Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, x.

¹⁸⁹ Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, x.

¹⁹⁰ Chuck Haddix, *Special Collections: Frank Driggs Jazz Oral History Collection* (Kansas City, MO: University of Missouri-Kansas City Miller Nichols Library, on-line, available at <http://www.umkc.edu/lib/spec-col/driggs.htm>, 1996, accessed 6 June 2007.

¹⁹¹ Haddix, *Special Collections*.

Kansas City Jazz explores a little known-aspect of Kansas City jazz: the local musicians and musical styles that did not gain national and international fame. The Driggs and Haddix book is now frequently referred to as a major work in Kansas City jazz history, because it focuses so directly on the music and style of Kansas City jazz. It also reinforces the master narrative of the jazz canon. In fact, despite its efforts to deepen the history of Kansas City jazz, it only continues to reify the major aspects of the master narrative: written by white stakeholders, an emphasis on music over cultural contestation, and a reduction of the jazz scene in the city to the “Kaycee” of existing historical representation. This reiteration of the grand narrative is also largely based on evidence that reifies the jazz canon. *Kansas City Jazz* relies on four major sources of information: the Driggs oral history collections, further interviews done by Driggs and Haddix, Kansas City newspaper “coverage of the bands, musicians, and others who created the Kansas City Jazz style,” and articles about Kansas City’s jazz scene in stakeholder outlets such as *Metronome* and *Down Beat*.¹⁹² The result is a book that does two things. First, it challenges the jazz canon by focusing on local Kansas City musicians, including territory bands, who did not go on to gain fame in New York. Second, it reifies that same canon by representing Kansas City as a fleeting “wide open” time where contestations over race, gender, sexuality and jazz scene spaces were far less important than the music itself.

¹⁹² Driggs, and Haddix, xi.

Driggs and Haddix unmistakably focused on the first aspect of the jazz canon in *Kansas City Jazz*: the sound of jazz music as performed and recorded. This is most obvious in one simple move that the authors use: throughout the book the phrase “Kansas City Jazz” always appears with “Jazz” capitalized. Through this subtle piece of typography, Driggs and Haddix undoubtedly identified Kansas City as a musical style and a sound, not as a scene of socio-cultural contestation. For example, in their discussion of the development of “Kansas City Jazz” Driggs and Haddix wrote: “Rooted in the ragtime, blues, and concert band traditions, nurtured in the 18th and Vine area, Kansas City Jazz grew into a hearty hybrid.”¹⁹³ That analysis firmly locates Kansas City as the site of a musical production, and not much more. Much like the Driggs essay in 1959, *Kansas City Jazz* also discussed Kansas City bands, musicians and recordings in a chronological arrangement. This chronological discussion attempts to slightly jar the jazz canon by focusing on Kansas City’s local musicians. This attempt is not entirely successful, however, because in every instance Driggs and Haddix juxtapose local musicians who remained local with musicians who left Kansas City for fame in New York City. One such passage involves Mary Lou Williams and Marion Jackson, in a continuation of the story about Williams’ inclusion in *Clouds of Joy* that first appeared in the Driggs 1959 essay. “At first, she [Mary Lou Williams] played piano duets with Marion Jackson, similar to Moten and

¹⁹³ Driggs and Haddix, 39.

Basie in the Moten band,” wrote Driggs and Haddix.¹⁹⁴ This is the last time Jackson is mentioned in the book, and Moten’s death appears in the book only thirty pages later. Williams and Basie, however, appear in the epilogue as the major examples of “Kansas City Jazz” stars who found fame outside the city. Such juxtapositions continue throughout the book, most obviously with the continual juxtaposition of Kansas City musicians Jay McShann and Charlie Parker. In fact, the focus on Chapter 8 of the book is entirely on the roughly parallel careers of these two men, but with two eventually fatal diversions: McShann never left Kansas City and became a local hero, while Parker went to New York and died a young hero of jazz. While such juxtapositions surely insert many Kansas City musicians into the jazz canon, they still defend the canon by creating these juxtapositions between the local musicians of “Kansas City Jazz” and the musicians “who changed the course of American music.”¹⁹⁵

The second aspect of the jazz canon that appears in *Kansas City Jazz* is its oversimplification of race, ethnicity and racism in Kansas City, and in American jazz scenes in general. In a nod to the 1959 essay, Driggs and Haddix make little mention of race in Kansas City other than an admission of segregation and an identification of “whites only” versus “blacks only” spaces. One such example is in the discussion of the Moten band’s tour of New York, where Driggs and Haddix explained that “the band moved comfortably between white audiences in

¹⁹⁴ Driggs and Haddix, 101.

¹⁹⁵ Driggs and Haddix, 1.

upstate New York and African American audiences in Harlem.”¹⁹⁶ Even more telling about the silencing of race in the Driggs and Haddix book is their exploration of segregation. According to Driggs and Haddix, segregation in Kansas City was practically limited to the Jazz District around 18th and Vine, which the authors contend was “a self-contained community.”¹⁹⁷ In their short examination of the Jazz District, Driggs and Haddix seemingly represent the district as one where segregation was not only appreciated, but perhaps even preferred and enjoyed by Jazz District residents. “Born of necessity and reared by industry,” wrote Driggs and Haddix of the Jazz District, “the 18th and Vine area quickly grew from its humble beginnings into an urbane center for African American commerce, culture, and music.”¹⁹⁸ In the passages on the Jazz District, Driggs and Haddix suggest that race itself was bounded in the city. In addition, by representing race in the city as “self-contained” and “an urbane center,” the authors reterritorialized the Jazz District as a location where racially-segregated residents were happy in their enclosed and urbane enclave. This brief examination of Jazz District segregation is the only such discussion until the book’s Epilogue, where the same unexplained reterritorialization of race continued:

Segregation remained the rule in Kansas City, but the African American community grew steadily by establishing a strong foothold in the northernmost stretch of Troost Avenue and shouldering south past 27th Street. Eighteenth and Vine survived as an entertainment center, but the

¹⁹⁶ Driggs and Haddix, 57.

¹⁹⁷ Driggs and Haddix, 25.

¹⁹⁸ Driggs and Haddix, 26.

business district followed the migration of the community and gradually shifted south along Troost and Prospect Avenues.¹⁹⁹

Through the use of phrases such as “strong footholds” and “shouldering south,” Driggs and Haddix represent African Americans in Kansas City as a group retaining a burden of labor, and then continue to marginalize African American neighborhoods and sections of the city as growing in spite of inexplicable segregation.

In their discussion of sex, gender and sexuality, Driggs and Haddix did not depart from jazz canon practices. Women appear in *Kansas City Jazz* in one of three representations: performers who were exceptions to the grand narrative, band wives supporting their musician husbands, and sex workers in the Pendergast era. Very few women are mentioned specifically in *Kansas City Jazz*, and the ones that are included in this narrative were either mentioned in Driggs’ 1959 essay or were famous outside the Kansas City scene. Mary Lou Williams, the most frequent female subject of *Kansas City Jazz*, appears in the book first as a band wife, and then as an exception to the “great men of jazz” narrative. For instance, Driggs and Haddix wrote that when Williams arrived in Kansas City she was not allowed to join Clouds of Joy. “Instead, she found herself relegated to the role of band wife,” wrote Driggs and Haddix, “working odd jobs—at one point driving a hearse while playing music for her own pleasure.”²⁰⁰ Williams’s biographer Linda Dahl, however, wrote that Williams was uncomfortable in her

¹⁹⁹ Driggs and Haddix, 225.

²⁰⁰ Driggs and Haddix, 69.

role as a “band wife,” a position she dealt with by working as a table waitress in the Subway club, a hearse driver, and a piano teacher.²⁰¹ While Driggs and Haddix seem to be simply noting how Williams’ gender affected her career in *Clouds of Joy*, it is interesting to note that Driggs and Haddix did not discuss the work in the jazz scene that Williams engaged in that were not directly related to the well-known local band. Later in the Kansas City narrative, after Williams distinguished herself playing against Marion Jackson, the Driggs and Haddix explain that “Williams joined [*Clouds of Joy*] as a full-time member after Kirk finally put aside his reservations about having a woman in the band.”²⁰² What reservations did Kirk have about a female band member, especially given the fact that Williams was taking the place of longtime band member Marion Jackson? In this and other passages, Williams is represented as an exception to the rule, a woman who became a skilled musician despite her sex. Williams is often juxtaposed with Julia Lee, a local pianist who did not tour, and instead found fame and a following in Kansas City. Lee, injured in a tragic car accident in 1930, refused to travel and tour like Williams. The result is Lee’s representation as one of the “local girls,” damaged by an accident and unable to fulfill her potential.²⁰³

Even more oversimplified is the juxtaposition of band wives and sex workers. Several women are mentioned only once in the book, and are referred to

²⁰¹ Linda Dahl, *Morning Glory: A Biography of Mary Lou Williams* (New York: Pantheon, 1999), 66-67.

²⁰² Driggs and Haddix, 101.

²⁰³ Driggs and Haddix, 132.

as “band wives.” Along with Mary Lou Williams, other women called “band wives” include Vivian Winn Basie (wife of Count Basie), and Charlie Parker’s third wife Doris. These women are represented as little more than faithful wives, who seemingly played no part in the city’s jazz scene. One example is the book’s only mention of Count Basie’s wife by name, in a description of the departure of Moten’s band for a New York tour: “Vivian Winn Basie and other band wives joined nearly a hundred well-wishers jamming the sidewalk in front of the Moten-Hayes music shop.”²⁰⁴ Mentioned in even fewer instances are the sex workers, which included everyone from prostitutes to cabaret dancers that were such a fixture in the popular imagination of Kansas City’s “wide open” status. In fact, sex workers appear only twice in the Driggs and Haddix book, and in those passages the women are couched in terms that both titillate the reader and silence the evidence of sex workers in the jazz scene. There is a short discussion of madam Annie Chambers, taken entirely from a single newspaper report published in 1932 about her arrest.²⁰⁵ Another brief passage is a mention of the infamous Chesterfield Club, a Pendergast-owned diner and bar in downtown Kansas City.

Downtown, at the Chesterfield Club on 9th Street, waitresses clad only in shoes and see-through cellophane aprons served up a businessman’s lunch. For adornment, they shaved their pubic hair in the shape of playing card pips. Briskly circulating among the tables by cigar puffing politicians, businessmen, and shy high school boys on a lark, the waitresses skillfully picked up tips without using their hands.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Driggs and Haddix, 101.

²⁰⁵ Driggs and Haddix, 12.

²⁰⁶ Driggs and Haddix, 7.

The open secret of sexuality is again represented as a backdrop for the jazz scene in this passage. The stripped women of the Chesterfield, who “served up a businessman’s lunch” with their amusing genitalia for the delight of politicians and aroused boys alike, is portrayed as a site of commodity and amusement. The waitress, doing what we are left to imagine in order to make a day’s wage, is far removed from the steadfast band wife waving good-bye to her husband. Is it possible that some of these waitresses were also band wives? For Driggs and Haddix, the roles that women, gender and sexuality played in “Kansas City Jazz” are simple: women were a commodity, a faithful companion, or an exceptional “one of the boys.”

The final aspect of the master narrative of the jazz canon is a focus on the authenticity of jazz music. The method commonly used in Kansas City’s jazz scene historiography to authenticate Kansas City jazz is the Pendergast era. Through the use of the Pendergast era, Kansas City jazz historians can easily enclose the jazz scene in terms of spaces and dates, both of which fit easily into the “jazz myth” that positions Kansas City as a stop on the way to New York. Since Driggs was one of the innovators of this method for authenticating Kansas City jazz, it would seem obvious that such a reductive representation of the Pendergast era appears in *Kansas City Jazz*. In fact, Driggs and Haddix establish in the Introduction that their narrative does not stray from the well-worn path of the jazz canon.

Kansas City’s government, ruled from 1911 to 1939 by a Democratic political machine driven by Tom Pendergast, a burly Irishman with a

twinkle in his eye, fostered the wanton nightlife rife with gambling, prostitution, and bootlegging. Twelfth Street, a tawdry string of taxi dance joints, bars, and gambling dens, stretched a mile east of downtown. The red-light district on 14th Street thrived in the shadow of city hall. Kansas City Jazz, a hardy hybrid, flourished in this immoderate environment. This is the story of Kansas City Jazz.²⁰⁷

This portrayal echoes the writing of Pearson, Russell, and originally of Driggs in 1959. Portraying Kansas City as “wide open” provides an explanation for Kansas City’s temporary rise in the written history of jazz. The same explanation is used to explore the eventual decline of Kansas City’s jazz scene, an event represented in the jazz canon as an inevitable step to the success of jazz music. For Driggs and Haddix, Kansas City seems haunted by its jazz history, and by a past it can never hope to rival. Representing Kansas City as “a genteel elderly lady of former ill repute reluctant to discuss her notorious past,” Driggs and Haddix suggest that the music is the only point worth mention in Kansas City’s past.²⁰⁸ As Driggs and Haddix wrote:

Twelfth Street, a one-time neon riot of bars, gambling dens, and taxi dance halls, fell victim to urban renewal and the freeway that choked the life from the city core during the 1960s. The wise guys who lorded over the strip packed up and moved years ago to sunnier venues in Las Vegas. An untidy surface parking lot for the adjacent police department occupies the hallowed site of the Reno Club, where Charlie Parker witnessed Lester Young and Count Basie making jazz history. No plaque marks the spot. . . . The jazz museum, situated on the corner of 18th and Vine, showcases the legacies of Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Driggs and Haddix, 5.

²⁰⁸ Driggs and Haddix, 233.

²⁰⁹ Driggs and Haddix, 234-235.

Of all the musicians in “Kansas City Jazz,” only Parker seems to merit remembrance.

Reviews of *Kansas City Jazz* have criticized some omissions, but still suggest that the book is now the definitive work on Kansas City’s jazz scene. One review, written by historian Robert Rawlins, questions the continued representation of Kansas City’s jazz as a direct result of Pendergast’s machine politics. According to Rawlins:

There seems to be a historic connection between jazz and licentious behavior. Could it be that the real connection lies between jazz and freedom, and that where there is freedom there is bound to be behavior that many will not condone? The authors do not address such issues, or even comment on Pendergast politics. *Kansas City Jazz* sticks to the facts throughout, with little personal opinion from the authors, musical or otherwise.”²¹⁰

Despite this concern about the reductive representation of the Pendergast machine, Rawlins considered *Kansas City Jazz* a definitive work. “A serious history of Kansas City jazz has been lacking for some time,” wrote Rawlins, “and this book may become the standard reference for this subject.”²¹¹ In fact, the Driggs and Haddix book was considered such an important publication when it appeared that it was featured in the premiere issue of *Jazz Perspectives*, a new interdisciplinary journal of new jazz studies. After a short review of Kansas City jazz historiography that situates *Kansas City Jazz*, review author Brian Priestley wrote that the role of the Pendergast era in Kansas City’s jazz scene was “well-

²¹⁰ Robert Rawlins, “Review: *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop- A History*,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 39, no. 4 (August 2006), 695.

²¹¹ Rawlins, “Review: *Kansas City Jazz*,” 695.

rehearsed,” still underestimated. “While this aspect of the story is a constant background factor,” wrote Priestley, “what is in the foreground is an enormously detailed picture of the comings and goings of venues and musicians, their activities interlocking with the gradual development of an identifiable regional style.”²¹² Priestley concludes by agreeing with Rawlins, and portraying *Kansas City Jazz* as “the publication we have been waiting for from Driggs, and Haddix’s contribution has made it even more valuable than might have been expected.”²¹³ With that, the jazz canon written around Kansas City has come full circle, and continued to reify the master narrative of music and authenticity above all.

If the historians of the grand narrative of Kansas City jazz reduced Kansas City’s jazz scene, then what was it? The following chapters will attempt to excavate the jazz scene of Kansas City, a scene reduced to a backdrop by traditional historians of Kansas City Jazz. Rather than position the Pendergast machine as an “era” that served as a colorful background for the temporary flowering of Kansas City “style,” Kansas City was home to a Pendergast *world*: a site of contestations about race, gender, sexuality and class, and a spatialized social and cultural scene in Kansas City history poorly understood by jazz historians. It was this world that made “Kansas City jazz,” and the music was the background for an incredibly contentious American cultural scene. This

²¹² Brian Priestley, “Review: *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop- A History* by Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix; *One O’Clock Jump: The Unforgettable History of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils* by Douglas Henry Daniels,” *Jazz Perspectives* 1, no 1 (April 2007), 91.

²¹³ Priestley, “Review: *Kansas City Jazz*, 97.

dissertation will attempt, through an excavation of the Pendergast world and its spaces, to move Kansas City's scene into the center stage.

CHAPTER 3:
KANSAS CITY, PENDERGAST, AND THE “JAZZ AGE”

In one of the opening scenes of the musical *Oklahoma!*, cowboy Will Parker steps off the train in Claremore and greets his friends at the station. Will then piques the interest of the men and embarrasses the women with tales of his trip to Kansas City:

Ev'rythin's up to date in Kansas City
They've gone about as fur as they c'n go!
They got a big theayter they call a burleeque.
Fer fifty cents you c'n see a dandy show.

One of the gals was fat and pink and pretty,
As round above as she was round below.
I could swear that she was padded
From her shoulder to her heel,
But latter in the second act
When she began to peel
She proved that ev'rythin' she had was absolutely real!
She went about as fur as she could go.²¹⁴

Oklahoma! was set in 1906, in the early days of Kansas City's rise to fame as a “wide open town.” The music of the “wide open town” was jazz. Played in the “burleeque” of *Oklahoma!*, in cabarets memorialized in musicals and films such as Robert Altman's *Kansas City*, jazz as a sound was central to the jazz

²¹⁴ Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, “Kansas City Lyrics,” from the musical *Oklahoma!*, on-line at <http://www.lyricsondemand.com/soundtracks/o/oklahomalyrics/kansascitylyrics.html>, accessed 3 July 2007.

scene in Kansas City. While Kansas City was the site of gender, racial and class clash during its jazz scene, its written history focuses on this memorialization, and does not consistently reflect the contested territories of identity and power in the city. The history of jazz scene Kansas City is instead filled with stories of cowboys in the big city, with the excesses of crime and jazz more easily associated characters like Will Parker than with lived experience. These stories provide the foundation for the official and scholarly knowledge of Kansas City as a history of civilized roughness. For all its concentration on progress and civilized urban prosperity, Kansas City was (and still is) a city where inhabitants were unwilling to shed the city's "rough and ready" Western reputation. As one historian wrote: "machismo was marketable, and bawdiness meant big business. The city that limped out of the Civil War had become a cocksure, burgeoning town literally drunk with success."²¹⁵ Ross Russell, historian of Kansas City's jazz scene, depicted the city as a center of heterosexual male pleasure:

For the people of the Plains and the American Southwest "Kaycee" came to be known as a heavenly place. To its attraction as a prime market was added the allure of high good times as they were envisioned by the American male- a great plenty of everything, good food, good beer and liquor, dancing, exciting women, and dice rolling on green felt tables- all these pleasurable commodities served well-ladled with the sauce of lively music."²¹⁶

Such heteronormative examples reveal the grand narrative of Kansas City jazz scene history as the story of heterosexual male consumers and willing female

²¹⁵ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 85.

²¹⁶ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 4.

commodities. The city's masculine aura, however, depended on the strict control of gender, class and racial difference, a control since forgotten and silenced in the grand narrative. In fact, the very legend of Kansas City's "wide open" jazz scene continues to ignore the knowledge of the jazz scene by constantly defining and defending the dominant hierarchy. Anyone interested in the history of Kansas City's jazz scene can read the stories of Charlie Parker peering in cabaret windows, or hear about the all-night battles between the city's rival bands. While these famous events of the jazz scene remain in popular memory and written history, many important aspects of the complex jazz scene were forgotten and silenced. What about the lives of the "fat and pink and pretty" girls of the cabarets, burlesque shows, and brothels? What about the girls who were not "pink," or the girls who weren't "girls?" How were these areas of "pleasurable commodities" defined and zoned? How did spaces of the jazz scene retain their popularity despite their challenges to the dominant constructions of gender, race and class? Finally, how did all of those critical challenges to identity, space and power in Kansas City go forgotten in the city's grand narrative?

The key to these questions, and to understanding contestations over space and identity in the city, is the historiography of the 1920s. As historian Lynn Dumenil has explained, the so-called "Jazz Age" was an official knowledge of the modern created by revisionist historians.²¹⁷ The concept of the 1920s as a "Jazz

²¹⁷ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 10.

Age” was a cliché that jazz scene inhabitants distanced themselves from.²¹⁸ According to historian Chip Rhodes, the “most chronicled and caricatured” 1920s was, in fact, a decade of disputed terrain over popular culture, identity and modernism.²¹⁹ It was this very historiography that, according to Foucaultian theories, produced the “Jazz Age” as an provocation to discursively form sexuality in “modern” America. Through an insistence on the periodization of the 1920s, historians have portrayed the cracks in dominant culture that emerged at the turn-of-the-century as “roaring” or “wide open” cultural exceptions.²²⁰ Instead of discussing the rifts of gender, race, class, ethnicity and community that were present during the 1920s, historians have purposefully positioned the 1920s as a period of experimentation that ended in the bracketing of sexuality that positioned “otherness” as an exception to the rules.

The creation of the “Jazz Age” by historians also radically altered the way modernity was understood. In her study of Vernon Castle, historian Susan Cook demonstrated that the “freedoms” of the early twentieth century were far from experiments- they were threats to the social order.²²¹ Along with these freedoms came more direct challenges to the dominant social order: the rise of organized crime, for instance, is a major aspect of written “Jazz Age” history, along with

²¹⁸ Chip Rhodes, *Structures of the Jazz Age: Mass Culture, Progressive Education, and Racial Discourse in American Modernism*, The Haymarket Series, ed. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 5.

²¹⁹ Rhodes, *Structures*, 3 and 17.

²²⁰ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 7.

²²¹ Susan Cook, “Passionless Dancing and Passionate Reform: Respectability, Modernism, and the Social Dancing of Irene and Vernon Castle,” in *The Passion of Music and Dance: Body, Gender and Sexuality*, ed. William Washabaugh (New York: Berg, 1998), 133.

waves of immigration and the Great Migration. Together these threats were not veiled; they were overt and conscious innovations that revealed subjugated knowledge.²²² At the same time, however, the threats came from subjugated groups. Therefore, knowledge produced about the “Jazz Age” focused on the music and reframed social ruptures as decadence, bohemianism, or radicalism. Normalcy, wrote historian David Goldberg, was the goal of the “Jazz Age.”²²³ Challenges to the social order were appropriated as a temporary flowering of youth and culture, and threats were transformed by the grand narrative as bumps on the road to modernity. As historian Ann Douglas explained, the 1920s “patented the idea of history as instant irony.”²²⁴

In the grand narrative of the “Jazz Age,” Kansas City was positioned as one of the road bumps. In the “Jazz Age” goal of normalcy and its representation of modernity, Kansas City was identified as the fringe. For example, Ross Russell’s book *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* portrayed Kansas City as “off the beaten track.”²²⁵ According to Russell, the creation of a jazz scene in Kansas City was due to its relative isolation: essentially for Russell, Americans west of Chicago and New Orleans had nowhere else to go for their flirtation with the threats of jazz, vice and the underworld.²²⁶ Kansas City historian Nathan

²²² Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 3.

²²³ David J. Goldberg, *Disoriented America: The United States in the 1920s* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 40.

²²⁴ Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1996), 483.

²²⁵ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 3.

²²⁶ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 4.

Pearson portrayed the city's jazz scene as a simple result of circumstances. The city's railroad terminus meant that performers and musicians from the "big city" found themselves in Kansas City at the end of the line, with no choice but to export their opposition to the status quo.²²⁷ Meanwhile, in each of those schemes Kansas City appears as a country bumpkin coming of age, a brief exception in an age of exceptions, the city whose adolescence was felt in the jazz scene.

The problem with that grand narrative, as other historians of the "Jazz Age" such as Mumford and Ake have pointed out, is that it does little to excavate the lived experience of the jazz scene. Kansas City did not represent a flowering of experimentation, or a circumstantial dead end. The grand narrative reduces the Kansas City jazz scene to a tableau of events: the place where Count Basie met Charlie Parker, or where bands battled until dawn. Kansas City was, in fact, the frontier of the cultural wars fought during the jazz scene. Cutting edge, not country bumpkin. As historian Kevin Mumford wrote it is only by placing marginalized spaces and subjugated groups at the center of analysis can dominance truly be understood. The study of modernity in the jazz scene, according to Mumford, must be "premised on the proposition that the shift from rural to urban America, from southern agricultural economies to modern commercial infrastructures, from communal to modern anonymous social relations represented a historic watershed."²²⁸ Kansas City represents that historic watershed that was its *jazz scene*. Unfortunately, those disruptions were

²²⁷ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, xvii.

²²⁸ Mumford, *Interzones*, xv.

forgotten, silenced and lost in a fictional “Jazz Age” that emphasized the road to modernity in the 1920s. In his critique of history, Foucault wrote on the futility of an emphasis on tradition:

The problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of the lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations.²²⁹

In this chapter, I will excavate the Kansas City jazz scene, and critique its representation in the grand narrative of the history of the “Jazz Age.” A study of the Kansas City jazz scene reveals an important aspect of life in the city: the threats to the social order were all linked. The sounds of jazz music cannot be divorced from clashes over gender, growing debates about race and ethnicity, the crisis represented by class divides, and the evolving influence of a criminal underworld in the United States. In Kansas City, these interrelated subcultures were linked through the Pendergast machine: the Pendergast machine was the fuel for the jazz scene in Kansas City. In fact, the jazz scene in Kansas City is part of the Pendergast Machine, and vice-versa. The Pendergast machine, however, is reduced in the grand narrative of jazz in Kansas City to a backdrop, a criminal element that created the environment of the city’s jazz scene, but did not directly influence its events. Using the concepts of a moving margin, combined with a critique of “Jazz Age” historiography, this chapter will seek to explore the subsumed and reductive history of Kansas City’s jazz scene as one inextricably linked to Pendergast’s representations of class, race, and gender in the city. While

²²⁹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 5.

some of the sources in this section are primary accounts of the Pendergast machine from jazz scene performers and observers, many of the sources here are secondary sources that reflect the grand narrative of Kansas City's jazz scene. The goal is to better comprehend how the grand narrative of Kansas City's jazz scene was created, and what that grand narrative denies. The story of Kansas City's jazz scene is one of spatialization, discursive formation, and how the reductive representation of the Pendergast machine reflects the desires of historians.

Kansas City's Jazz Scene Roots

In his book *Paths of Resistance*, historian David Thelen examined the role that community resistance to change played in Missouri's Progressive reform movement. Though Thelen did not position the Pendergast world as a community of resistance to the changes of the reformer's "new order," he did discuss the important role that worldmaking played in creating community resistance in early twentieth century Missouri. Thelen wrote of early twentieth century Missourians:

Traditional Missourians expected to build their communities of resistance, whether of confrontation or escape, from the richly layered associations of their daily lives. Through lines of allegiance and communication among kinship, friendship, and craft groups they built deep and warm participatory worlds of support around their churches, fraternal lodges, saloons, workplaces, and political parties. Shared traditions predisposed them to analyze changes in similar ways and to participate with others in actions to defend or recover those traditions. Their communities turned questions of power into the basic issue of whom to trust and whom not to

trust, and they expected political relief to take the more distant form of pressure groups or governmental programs.²³⁰

The Pendergast world was a world based on Thelen's "lines of allegiance." This was not simply a political machine, or a criminal backdrop for the sound of Kansas City swing. The Pendergast world was a system of spaces and loyalties where the dominant "truths" about class, race, and gender were in question. In fact, belief in the Pendergast world and the powers it contained were direct challenges to the dictatorial and prevailing ideologies about morality, acceptability and oppression

The key to understanding the Pendergast world is framing Kansas City as a *jazz scene*, not part of a factional "Jazz Age." According to musicologists Richard Peterson and Andy Bennett, scenes are social and cultural contexts in which people "collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others."²³¹ While Peterson and Bennett located scenes primarily around the performance of music, such scenes also necessarily involved social and cultural formations. In order to understand the evolution of Kansas City's jazz scene, it is important to understand the historical development of the Pendergast machine. Jazz scene spaces began to appear in the city in the 1880s, and the jazz scene declined with the end World War II in 1945, dates that coincide with the rise of the Pendergast family. Beginning in the 1880s, the

²³⁰ David R. Thelen, *Paths of Resistance: Tradition and Dignity in Industrializing Missouri* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 270.

²³¹ Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennett, "Introducing Music Scenes," in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson eds. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 1.

immigrant Pendergast family slowly gained control over Kansas City by organizing working-class, immigrant and African American Kansas Citians. In order to gather their followers, the Pendergast family began a system of family-style patronage through working class saloons and clubs. At its height, the Pendergast machine controlled practically every club, cabaret, brothel and infrastructural business in the city through its network of marginalized subcultures in the city. With Pendergast's approval, Kansas City could be shut down. The Pendergast machine itself was seen as a threat to the social order of Kansas City, even while the Pendergast family exerted their influence over the very institutions they threatened. As Kathy Ogren wrote in her book *The Jazz Revolution*, it was the Pendergast machine that kept the jazz scene alive long after the closing of Storyville and through the Great Depression.²³² The jazz scene in Kansas City was literally a Pendergast scene, and all its intricate contestations over space and identity reflected the machinations of the Pendergast family.

Despite the importance of the Pendergast machine in the jazz scene of Kansas City, jazz history's grand narrative continues to reduce the Pendergast machine to a few, clichéd terms. These terms tend to illuminate the titillating, voyeuristic aspects of Pendergast-controlled spaces, and reify the myth of Kansas City as a "wide open" stop on the jazz road to New York. One example of this reduction appears in the writing of Dave Dexter, a music critic for jazz

²³² Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution*, 62-63.

publications such as *Down Beat*, and a source of information for Driggs and Haddix's book *Kansas City Jazz*. As Dexter wrote:

No other city in the world was quite like Kansas City. Musicians and singers came into the Jackson County town of 400,000 like cattle—in droves. For under the wide-open yet iron rule of Democratic political czar Thomas J. Pendergast there were no closing hours for saloons and nightclubs. Prostitution flourished day and night in the open. There were jobs available for entertainers of every type.²³³

Dexter represents Kansas City as a place where “every type” of entertainer might flourish in the background, in an atmosphere of prostitution and endless nights that suggests an atmosphere of sexual permissiveness. Another example originated in an essay by Martin Williams, a stakeholder of jazz history and author of the Smithsonian's guides to American jazz. In his essay on Kansas City, Williams wrote only one paragraph about the Pendergast machine that positioned it firmly as the backdrop for the development of a musical style.

Kansas City was an ‘open’ city under the control of the notorious political machine of Tom Pendergast [sp]. There were large ballrooms, and there were less pretentious dance halls, there were cabarets and clubs; there was gambling; there was prostitution. There also was a constant call for music, and like New Orleans before it, Kansas City offered welcoming gestures to the remarkable Afro-American improvisational music called jazz.²³⁴

Historian of the American West David Stowe, using the books by Pearson and Russell as his only sources, explained Kansas City's jazz scene in much the same way as Williams. “The notoriously freewheeling environment fostered by the administration of Major Tom Pendergast during the 1920s and 1930s,” wrote

²³³ Dahl, *Morning Glory*, 71.

²³⁴ Martin Williams, “Jazz: What Happened in Kansas City?” *American Music* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 171.

Stowe, “was conducive to the creation of jazz.”²³⁵ Musicologist Howard Becker recently continued the same reduction of the Kansas City jazz scene in his autoethnographical account of jazz scene spaces. “Thus, one of the greatest centers of jazz development—Kansas City in the 1920s and 1930s—drew its vitality from the political corruption which made nightlife possible,” wrote Becker.²³⁶ Even new jazz studies scholar Krin Gabbard, well-known for his writing against the jazz canon, reduced Kansas City to these diminished representations in her 1997 review of the Robert Altman film *Kansas City*. “Paradoxically, the corruption and violence of the city,” wrote Gabbard, “gave us the extraordinary music, the era’s one great monument.”²³⁷ Such reductive representations entered the jazz canon as a way to prove the authenticity of Kansas City’s jazz music. What such reductions deny, however, is the contestations over race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and power that were at work in Kansas City. These contestations are vital to understanding the development of Kansas City’s jazz scene, the role of Kansas City as an urbanized frontier town, and the influence of the Pendergast machine on the lives of Kansas City’s population.

²³⁵ David W. Stowe, “Jazz in the West: Cultural Frontier and Region During the Swing Era,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (February 1992), 56.

²³⁶ Becker, “Jazz Places,” 17.

²³⁷ Krin Gabbard, “Review: *Kansas City* produced by Robert Altman and Frank Barhydt,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 4 (October 1997), 1275.

A “Wide Open” Town

According to literature scholar Krista Comer, the term “open” to describe a town was coined in the American West to describe white and male spaces.²³⁸ Given the common sobriquet of “wide open” in descriptions of Kansas City’s jazz scene, it would seem that the city was expected to appeal to white, heterosexual male visitors, patrons, and jazz scholars. Much of this representation, no doubt, stems from the Pendergast family and their control of Kansas City in the first half of the twentieth century. Before the arrival of the Pendergast family, Kansas City was still a largely rural and typical Western town. An 1882 observer noted it remained a “city in stagnant water much of the year.”²³⁹ Founded on river bluffs, the city was still small by urban standards at the end of the Civil War. Most residents lived near the Missouri River, and took a dangerous trolley train along the bluffs from the river bottoms to the factories and shops on Main Street.²⁴⁰ Kansas City was relatively compact: bordered by the Missouri River on the north, the Kansas River bottoms on the west, 32nd street on the south and Cleveland Street on the east.²⁴¹ There were only wooden sidewalks with no paved streets

²³⁸ Comer, *Landscapes of the New West*, 27.

²³⁹ Lloyd Lewis and Henry Justin Smith, *Oscar Wilde Discovers America, 1882* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 327.

²⁴⁰ Jane Mobley and Nancy Whitehall Harris, *A City Within A Park: One Hundred Years of Parks and Boulevards in Kansas City, Missouri* (Kansas City, MO: American Society of Landscape Architects and Kansas City, Missouri, Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners, 1991), 3.

²⁴¹ Mobley and Harris, *A City Within A Park*, 3.

until 1879.²⁴² In his recollections of 1882, Lloyd Lewis described Kansas City's rough-hewn character:

Missouri hogs, not yet having fear of packing houses, patrolled the streets. At night, when the hogs were off duty, a billion frogs in the green ponds at the bottom of the choicest unoccupied city lots told their troubles to the stars, and saluted the morning sun with croaks of despair. In wet weather the town site was a sea of mud and in dry weather a desert of dust.²⁴³

But change was in the air. Between 1869 and 1900 major population increase, accompanied by booming urban growth, had begun to transform the city. The Hannibal Railroad Bridge across the Missouri River opened in 1869, and Jay Gould made Kansas City his western base of railroad operations in 1880.²⁴⁴ The city's establishment as a railroad terminus and the rise of meat packing factories brought thousands of workers and immigrants to Kansas City. A population of only four thousand in 1865 grew to 55, 785 people recorded in 1880.²⁴⁵

The growing "modernization" of Kansas City created an instant clash between the city's eastern modernization plans and its western typicality. This clash between "wide open" Western sensibilities and urbanization can be seen as the city's "coming of age." Such a coming of age in the West, according to Krista Comer, was inevitably linked to race, class, gender and sexuality. "Western spaces 'come of age' in the twentieth century," wrote Comer, "via an erotic emplotment that was simultaneously masculinist, heterocentric, nationalist and

²⁴² James Milford Crabb, "A History of Music in Kansas City," (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music, 1967), 51.

²⁴³ Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 327.

²⁴⁴ Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 328.

²⁴⁵ Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 4.

white supremacist.”²⁴⁶ This coming of age period in Kansas City began in the 1880s, when the city was gaining importance, but not losing its “wild west” character. The result was a clash between modernization and the rural West. The city had a reputation for “wide open” permissive behavior, and was frequented by cattlemen and farmers who visited it on weekends in search of entertainment.²⁴⁷ The city directory of 1878 listed eighty saloons—four times the number of city schools, libraries and hospitals combined.²⁴⁸ In this clash of rural and growing urbanization, Kansas City neighborhoods were clearly stratified. Wealthy city dwellers lived primarily on Quality Hill, a cliffside area on the east side of the city away from livestock barns and the railroad. Quality Hill overlooked the city’s working-class neighborhoods, known as the West Bottoms and the North End. The West Bottoms, located between Quality Hill and the Kansas state line along the southern edge of the Missouri River, became the center of industry in Kansas City.²⁴⁹ Home to meat packing houses, railroad yards and factories, the West Bottoms was also home to most working-class Kansas Citians who lived in overcrowded tenements.²⁵⁰ Disease and muddy streets in the flood-prone area compounded the poor living conditions.²⁵¹ Because the West Bottoms was the city’s industrial center, its tenements primarily housed newly arrived European immigrant packinghouse workers along with most of the city’s African American

²⁴⁶ Comer, *Landscapes*, 157.

²⁴⁷ Pearson, *Goin To Kansas City*, 78.

²⁴⁸ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 85.

²⁴⁹ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 4.

²⁵⁰ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 5.

²⁵¹ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 102.

population. The alleys in some parts of the West Bottoms were so narrow that residents had to walk single file.²⁵² The city's other principal working-class neighborhood, known as the North End, was located just north and east of the West Bottoms. Called the "dingy North End," the neighborhood was the center of Kansas City's red light district.²⁵³ What the North End lacked in industry, it made up for in gambling halls and brothels. Most red-light activity took place in the North End's Knob Hill section, where one-third of Kansas City's police force was concentrated from 1870 to 1875.²⁵⁴

While Kansas City grew as an industrial center and railroad terminus, its lack of infrastructure reflected its frontier origins. On the surface, Kansas City appeared to be a progressive city. Kansas City's police system was established in 1874 with the celebrated artist George Caleb Bingham as the first Chair of the Board of Police Commissioners. The state of Missouri, however, retained control over the Commissioners and the youthful chief Tom Speers until 1889.²⁵⁵ Though Kansas City's population depended on industry and the railroads, their operations were strictly concentrated in the West Bottoms away from residential and financial districts. Downtown and Quality Hill districts boasted a library, cable cars and telephone system by 1887.²⁵⁶ The Kansas City passenger railroad

²⁵² Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 130.

²⁵³ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 5.

²⁵⁴ A. Theodore Brown and Lyle W. Dorsett, *K.C.: A History of Kansas City, Missouri*, Western Urban History Series, vol. II (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1978), 45.

²⁵⁵ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 88.

²⁵⁶ Sally M. Miller, *From Prairie to Prison: The Life of Social Activist Kate Richards O'Hare*, Missouri Biography Series, ed. William E. Foley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 12.

depot, a 384 foot long terminus in the Kansas River Bottoms, opened in 1878 to annual ticket sales of \$1.5 million a year.²⁵⁷ These institutions, however, were largely facades that disguised the city's rural foundations.

While outwardly Kansas City appeared to be a major metropolis, it was a city in crisis. The city's rapid growth and expansion outpaced the ability of its officials to address the problems of a burgeoning urban area. For instance, in 1880 the city had only a primitive sewer system in Quality Hill and no provisions for garbage collection. Most city dwellers dumped their garbage into the Missouri River. Dead animals floated in the river or littered the streets.²⁵⁸ Only five hundred yards of Kansas City's eighty-nine miles of street were covered with sandstone paving blocks. Sixteen miles were covered in crushed limestone that caused clouds of dust and dissolved into mud during inclement weather. The few pine plank sidewalks remained constantly filthy.²⁵⁹ Conditions were so bad that members of the Kansas City Equal Suffrage Society voted in 1893 to raise their hemlines three inches. While the suffragists intended the decision to bring attention to their cause, they also used the occasion to reprimand Superintendent of Streets John May about city conditions.²⁶⁰ Their concern was not just the streets, but their own respectability and representation as progressive thinkers. As one suffragist told the *Kansas City Evening Star*:

²⁵⁷ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 118.

²⁵⁸ William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement in Kansas City*, University of Missouri Studies, vol. XL (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1964), 15.

²⁵⁹ Wilson, *The City Beautiful*, 15.

²⁶⁰ *Kansas City Evening Star*, 5 January 1893, 1(A).

Besides saving dresses and keeping mud out of the house the fulfillment of the new plan will be a badge of honor and will serve as an advertisement of the society. Any member walking the streets will irresistibly attract attention and be a monument of higher progression.²⁶¹

The Kansas City fathers' preoccupation with railroad development caused them to ignore the city's infrastructure. Railroads were the cornerstone of the city's economic system. As a railroad terminus Kansas City had national importance. The city's livestock and meatpacking industries attracted businessmen and investors as well as a large transient workforce.²⁶² Railroads brought seventy thousand people to Kansas City in 1869, the first year the Hannibal Bridge was open. Only San Francisco and Chicago exceeded Kansas City in miles of street railway track in the 1880s. City promoter Kersey Coates owned eleven rail lines in the West Bottoms, and died a millionaire.²⁶³ The number of livestock brokered yearly in Kansas City rose from approximately one hundred thousand in 1870 to almost one million by 1880.²⁶⁴ Cattle brokers and meat packers, who depended on the railroads, soon controlled Kansas City government and business. The Kansas City Livestock Exchange was founded in 1871 and governed by a group of local railroad tycoons.²⁶⁵ When the Plankinton and Armour meatpacking plants made Kansas City their base of operations in the late 1880s, the West Bottoms became the nation's leading packing district.²⁶⁶

²⁶¹ Kansas City *Evening Star*, 5 January 1893, 1(A).

²⁶² Miller, *From Prairie to Prison*, 14.

²⁶³ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 80.

²⁶⁴ Brown and Dorsett, *K.C.*, 50-51.

²⁶⁵ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 107.

²⁶⁶ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 111.

Despite all this prosperity, however, the city's working class and immigrant inhabitants saw little material improvement in their lives. Poverty and homelessness were rampant, and likely exacerbated by the transient nature of the city's population. Squatters on railroad tracks and abandoned families were common in the city. Forty homeless boys working as bootblacks were discovered clustered around a heater in the Board of Trade building in 1885. According to newspaper reports, the city was home to seven thousand prostitutes in 1887.²⁶⁷

The Rise of the Pendergast Family

It was in this confusing clash of rural and urban, wealth and poverty, that the Pendergast family began to build in the 1870s and 1880s, Jim Pendergast came to Kansas City in the 1870s, as a transient railroad worker from a Polish-Irish family. He moved into the West Bottoms and frequented the working class saloons and gambling halls there. A lucky racetrack wager brought Pendergast an unexpected windfall in 1881 that he used to buy a West Bottoms saloon on St. Louis Avenue he renamed Climax. Pendergast opened a second saloon in 1891 in the North End and quickly gained popularity in the city's working-class districts.²⁶⁸ He put up bonds for arrested neighbors, and cashed paychecks of railroad and packinghouse workers from the saloon safes.²⁶⁹ In 1884 Pendergast was chosen to represent the "Bloody Sixth" Ward in the West Bottoms on the

²⁶⁷ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 127.

²⁶⁸ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 4.

²⁶⁹ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 13.

City Council.²⁷⁰ At that time city fathers began to express concern about the number of inhabitants in the city's poorest districts- the West Bottoms and the North End. When ward lines were redrawn in 1886 putting the West Bottoms and the North End in a single district, Pendergast was chosen to represent the new First Ward.²⁷¹ From the First Ward Jim Pendergast built his political machine, and gained a reputation as a fighter for the working class.²⁷² Pendergast used his machine to protect his investments in gambling and prostitution, while building a coalition with the Kansas City police.²⁷³ He also gained a reputation as a defender of the city's working class and immigrant populations in the First Ward.

One of the keys to the early construction of the Pendergast machine was the saloon. Until the 1880s, the most important leisure space in American society was the saloon. Saloons offered working-class men shelter, a place to discuss politics and labor concerns, and a haven from the world of work.²⁷⁴ However, in an attempt to reorganize leisure space after 1880, saloon owners sought to limit the more objectionable aspects of saloon culture, such as smoking and the use of profanity. The owners of these establishments attempted to encourage heterosocial behavior by limiting the homosocial side of male culture. Saloon owners hoped to attract more business by opening the doors to women, and believed that the only way to attract "respectable" women was to limit the

²⁷⁰ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 7.

²⁷¹ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 7.

²⁷² Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 12.

²⁷³ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 26.

²⁷⁴ Richard Butsch, "Introduction: Leisure and Hegemony in America," in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure Into Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 12.

homosocial saloons hallmarks of gambling and prostitution. The key to this reorganization of culture was the reorganization of space.²⁷⁵ For instance, traditional saloons were spaces for men to congregate, and women were only allowed through back entrances.²⁷⁶ When women were allowed as patrons, saloon owners moved prostitutes upstairs and allowed women to enter the saloon from the street. To make leisure space more enticing to women, owners had to alter the space, and the men inhabiting that space. “In addressing women as a potential market,” wrote historian Kathy Peiss, “leisure entrepreneurs had to read the complexities and fluctuations of the cultural construction of gender.”²⁷⁷ Jim Pendergast’s early political machine was based in saloon business. While he continued to gain income from gambling, drinking and prostitution in the saloons, he also offered loans, meals and assistance to First Ward women who came to the saloon for his patronage. He also used his headquarters in the saloon as his place of business- anyone dealing in the North End, whether political or social, had to start at Climax, his West Bottoms saloon.

Jim Pendergast continued to gain power and prestige in the North End through the 1880s. Much of this concentration of his power coincided with the growth and urbanization of Kansas City. For instance, city fathers believed the adoption of an 1889 Kansas City charter would laud the beginning of a new wave

²⁷⁵ Kathy Peiss, “Commercial Leisure and the ‘Woman Question’,” in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure Into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 109.

²⁷⁶ Randy McBee, *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 45.

²⁷⁷ Peiss, “Commercial Leisure,” 106.

of city development in the 1890s. Business leaders led by William Rockhill Nelson initiated plans to create a city charter intended to limit corruption- a direct threat to the growing Pendergast machine. Pendergast and his supporters, including the city's saloon owners and railroad operators, repeatedly defeated charter propositions. When a city charter was finally approved in 1889, it was only after backers made concessions to Pendergast and his supporters. One of those concessions was the city police would remain under local control, which meant that Pendergast could retain his system of patronage for the local police. It seems, however, that with the rise of Pendergast in the First Ward came an increased move by upper-class Kansas Citians away from the West Bottoms. The finished charter led to a new movement of well-to-do Kansas Citians outside the city center. Charter propositions included the formation of a Parks and Boulevards Commission, as well as a Board of Public Works, both designed to formalize the map of the city. This new map included a clear partitioning of the First Ward district. As the working-class First Ward grew in both population and political power, upper-class Kansas Citians moved out of Quality Hill across Grand Avenue and away from First Ward tenements.²⁷⁸ The city's primary retail district remained within seven blocks of the Missouri River, while tenements from the First Ward began to expand. An area known as the Bowery, one of the city's primary African American neighborhoods, began to grow south along Troost and

²⁷⁸ Wilson, *The City Beautiful*, 32.

Woodland Avenues.²⁷⁹ Despite the work of Jim Pendergast and his supporters, the power of the Pendergast machine remained within the borders of the First Ward.

In this politically charged and increasingly contentious atmosphere of the 1890s, Tom Pendergast joined his brother Jim in Kansas City. Originally Tom arrived in Kansas City to help his older brother consolidate power in the First Ward, but he quickly rose through the ranks. Through Jim's patronage, Tom Pendergast served as Jackson County Deputy Marshall in 1896 and Superintendent of Streets in 1900. Meanwhile, Jim Pendergast groomed his brother Tom to take over as boss of the First Ward. It was Tom who would build the Pendergast machine as a city-wide institution, and bring the family and its supporters to the height of their power. Though the Pendergast family lost some of their control over city politics with the creation of the 1889 charter, the First Ward was still a Pendergast stronghold. With his political offices and his brother's patronage, Tom Pendergast continued to provide his constituents with work, food, and other necessities through Pendergast-owned saloons and businesses.²⁸⁰ From those beginnings, Tom Pendergast began to increase the machine's control of the city's leisure spaces. The Pendergast machine drew its sustenance from the types of business the city fathers hoped to control: liquor, prostitution, gambling and entertainment in clubs and cabarets. Tom Pendergast owned at least two hotels where prostitution was an open secret- he took a cut of

²⁷⁹ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 174.

²⁸⁰ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 68.

the income from prostitution to pay the local police.²⁸¹ Tom Pendergast then founded the Pendergast Wholesale Liquor Company, which supplied liquor to hotels, clubs, and the businesses in the Pendergast machine. For instance, Pendergast protected cabarets such as the El Torreon Ballroom and the Chesterfield Club in exchange for their continued purchase of Pendergast liquor.²⁸² With the support of the working-class patrons and employees, as well as the city police (many of whom were working-class as well), Pendergast's control of the First Ward went unchecked. Kansas City, a city known by the 1920s for its available entertainment and liquor, had zero felony convictions under prostitution laws for the entire period of Prohibition.²⁸³ When Jim Pendergast died in November 1911, he left his brother Tom in full control of the family businesses. Tom Pendergast subsequently expanded the machine's geographic and political influence. Tom's Pendergast machine went from a First Ward protection system to a massive political machine that controlled Kansas City's streets until the end of World War II.

Traditionally, historians of the "Jazz Age" of America have positioned the underworld in one of two ways: as a criminal backdrop for the permissiveness of the fictional "Jazz Age," or as a criminal, mob-dominated periphery to the sound

²⁸¹ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 58.

²⁸² Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 88-89.

²⁸³ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 85.

of jazz music.²⁸⁴ One such depiction of the underworld in Kansas City's "Jazz Age" was written by oral historian Norman Pearson:

The relationship between gangs and mobsters and musicians in those days was mostly complementary. Musicians minded their business: the gangsters minded theirs. . . The cancerous vice that infected the city rarely harmed the musician, and often helped him.²⁸⁵

Such historical hindsight depends on the practice of depicting the underworld as a backdrop of criminals and degenerates, stage dressing for the performance of music. In the written history of Kansas City, this grand narrative portrayal of the underworld is especially clear. For instance, one of the most frequently quoted statements about Kansas City in the Pendergast Era comes from Edward Murrow: "If you want to see sin, forget about Paris and go to Kansas City."²⁸⁶ Using this quote is an example of how the grand narrative focuses on vice and "wide open" aspects of the city. Murrow's recollections, like many others who recalled the jazz scene in Kansas City, associated his representation of vice and crime with jazz, and jazz meant Pendergast. That the Pendergast machine was an underworld of crime and vice may be a fact, but it was not the simplified, homogeneous system so easily portrayed in Jazz Age creation. In fact, the Pendergast jazz scene combined many of the contentious aspects of life that other historians have silenced. The Pendergast machine relied on four important yet contentious aspects: race and ethnicity, the intersection between gender and class, and jazz. Through the machine, Pendergast and his constituents made a

²⁸⁴ Ronald W. Morris, *Wait Until Dark: Jazz and the Underworld, 1880-1940* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 1-2.

²⁸⁵ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 93.

²⁸⁶ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 8.

world of their own, one that was lost in the written history of jazz and the history of the Pendergast machine.

Race, Ethnicity and the Pendergast World

One aspect of the Pendergast machine that disrupts the Jazz Age grand narrative is the interplay of race and ethnicity in jazz scene Kansas City. According to Pendergast historian Lawrence Larsen, Tom Pendergast ran the machine based on a “block system”- each city precinct had several “captains” who reported to a ward boss. Captains handled interpersonal conflicts in their precincts, and then reported larger problems directly to the ward boss. There were sixteen ward bosses in Kansas City, each of whom regularly reported to Pendergast himself. The captains and ward bosses were not, unlike their historical and popular portrayal, all white. In fact, Pendergast employed African Americans as both captains and ward bosses in African American neighborhoods.²⁸⁷ An important supporter of Pendergast was Casimir Welch, an African American and head of the Second Ward that included the Bowery and the 12th and Vine area that became known as the Jazz District. The Second Ward was the city’s poorest district, but under the 1890s control of Welch it became known as “Little Tammany.” Pendergast supported Welch’s debts at the Riverside race track, and eventually used those debts to gain Welch’s support.²⁸⁸ Eventually,

²⁸⁷ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 92.

²⁸⁸ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 104-105.

Pendergast financed an “American” paper for African Americans in Kansas City, much to the opposition of Chester Franklin, editor of the *Kansas City Call*.²⁸⁹

According to historian Lawrence Larsen, the Pendergast Machine of the jazz scene appeared to be “color blind.”²⁹⁰ This representation, however, denies the contestations over race and segregation in the city. In addition, it continues the denial of race in the grand narrative of Kansas City’s jazz scene. According to Sherry Schirmer, a cultural geographer of Kansas City, jazz scene Kansas City was enmeshed in a city-wide struggle over the expansion of blacks into predominately white neighborhoods.²⁹¹ Editor Chester Franklin, who rallied against Pendergast’s black newspaper, regularly features blacks engaged in “block busting” in white neighborhoods in the *Kansas City Call*.²⁹² At the same time, black neighborhoods were increasingly zoned by whites through moral geography. The most notorious cabarets in Kansas City, those that featured female impersonators and live sex shows, were in the predominately black districts such as the famous 18th and Vine Jazz District.²⁹³ Kansas City’s white mainstream saw this as a clear defense of moral geography—blacks were represented as deviant. For blacks, this representation led to the zoning of their neighborhoods as deviant, and the harassment of black citizens. The alignment of the Pendergast machine with vice meant that the machine had a great influence in black neighborhoods. According to the *Kansas City Times*, blacks voted for

²⁸⁹ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 93.

²⁹⁰ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 105.

²⁹¹ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 97.

²⁹² Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 100.

²⁹³ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 125.

Pendergast as a way to defend vice, since it was the spaces of “vice” that brought income into the homes of “deviant” citizens.²⁹⁴ The result of an alignment with Pendergast was a double-edged sword for blacks in the city’s jazz scene districts. Pendergast’s patronage brought those citizens income, protection from reformers, and work on public projects throughout the city. In fact, Sherry Schirmer wrote that blacks in Kansas City may have voted for Pendergast candidates because the “redneck” officers employed by the Pendergast machine were not as feared by black citizens as the police put in power by vice reformers.²⁹⁵ At the same time, it only supported the representation of blacks as “purveyors of deviance.”²⁹⁶ While the Pendergast machine may have *appeared* color blind, Tom Pendergast used the moral geography of racism in the city to both extend his sphere of power and encourage patronage in the jazz scene spaces that he controlled. The zoning of race in the city, inextricably tied to the Pendergast machine, was about the commodification of race, gender and sexuality in the “deviant” zones of the city.

Another part of this construction of race in the Pendergast world lays the fact that Pendergast himself was part of the wave of immigrant labor in Kansas City. Though Pendergast himself is often represented as a white man with an “iron clad” hold over Kansas City politics, the positioning of race in the city was not that clear cut. As historian Ronald Morris explored in his book *Wait Until Dark*, the Jewish, Italian, Irish and Polish immigrants that made up the massive

²⁹⁴ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 166.

²⁹⁵ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 131.

²⁹⁶ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 169.

waves of immigration to the United States were considered racially inferior.²⁹⁷ In the actual construction of neighborhoods in America, racially inferior European immigrants were inevitably neighbors with African Americans who left the south during the Great Migration period.²⁹⁸ Therefore, the Great Migration was perhaps not only African Americans moving north and west, but also Europeans moving across the Atlantic. As one Italian immigrant to Kansas City remembered of the 1920s: “When I was growing up in the Lower East Side, there were four kinds of people. Italians, colored people, Jews and Americans. Anybody who wasn’t one of us or colored or Jewish we always talked about as an American.”²⁹⁹ The result of racial and geographical exclusion for these groups of migrants was social exclusion. Racially and ethnically identified groups in Kansas City banded together through the Pendergast machine as a way of protecting their own livelihoods. As Kansas City, Missouri police commissioner Herman Davis remembered:

We probably ought to understand what we mean by organized crime. . . Many people believe that this confederation is the Mafia or the Cosa Nostra or something of that kind. It is not. It involves other ethnic groups, Jews, the blacks. They’re all involved, so it’s wrong to call it a mafia.³⁰⁰

Given the early rise to power of Pendergast, these disparate groups had to follow the lead of Tom Pendergast. By the time the Pendergast machine peaked in the 1920s, Italian and Jewish mobsters escaping investigation in Chicago and

²⁹⁷ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 12.

²⁹⁸ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 12.

²⁹⁹ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 105.

³⁰⁰ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 94.

New York had come to Kansas City as well. Pendergast's machine was so well organized and diverse that even those new migrants had to succumb to Pendergast's leadership.³⁰¹ Kansas City's position as a railroad terminus and all of its transient and immigrant laborers were something that Pendergast turned to his favor.

Finally, in the Pendergast world race was not simply a factor of segregating African Americans. Master narratives of Kansas City's jazz scene seem to suggest that African Americans were relegated to one neighborhood at 18th and Vine, a "self-contained community" suggested by Driggs and Haddix. For African Americans in the American West, however, such a clear segregation was not tenable. African Americans who migrated north and west in the Great Migration inevitably mixed with other immigrant populations, as well as white populations. Consequently, the "modern" conception of racial segregation as a way to prevent miscegenation was difficult to maintain.³⁰² According to jazz historian Thomas Hennessey, African American neighborhoods in jazz scene cities were different, depending on the cultural and economic sources of the population itself.³⁰³ In Kansas City, the mixture of African American migrants from the south, European immigrants and rural whites gave rise economically to the City's vice districts. For instance, Casimir Welch was in charge of the Second

³⁰¹ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 186.

³⁰² Kevin Mumford, "Homosex Changes: Race, Cultural Geography, and the Emergence of the Gay," in *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, ed. Lucy Maddox (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 389.

³⁰³ Thomas J. Hennessey, *From Jazz to Swing: African-American Jazz Musicians and Their Music, 1890-1935*, Jazz History, Culture and Criticism Series, ed. William J. Kennedy III (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 29.

Ward, which included the 18th and Vine Jazz District. This was Kansas City's poorest Ward, its most racially and ethnically diverse, and the Ward with the largest number of brothels and boarding houses.³⁰⁴ In an effort to enclose that space, Kansas City's reformers codified the segregation of the Second Ward, in the belief that such enclosure would render the district invisible. As historian Alecia Long wrote of the jazz scene in New Orleans, reformers believed that an enclosed space would be easier to control and limit.³⁰⁵ The result was that the Second Ward, the city's center of race, ethnicity, and sexuality, was territorialized and represented as a zone of deviance. Pendergast used this territorialization to his advantage by locating his most prurient entertainment spaces in the Second Ward, and then representing the Second Ward as a space for arousal, eroticism, and the race mixing that mainstream society marked as immoral. Using the enclosure of the Jazz District as a tool, Pendergast kept the African American community in Kansas City subordinate to his representation of African Americans as exoticized commodities and purveyors of deviance.³⁰⁶ Pendergast kept African American culture subsumed, a move that jazz historians continued in the master narrative of jazz history.

³⁰⁴ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 104.

³⁰⁵ Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 156.

³⁰⁶ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 172.

Gender and Class in the Pendergast World

Another major aspect of the Pendergast world was the intersection between gender and class in the lives of Kansas Citians. There is no doubt that major cultural shifts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affected American conceptions of class and gender. While written history has centered those shifts in cities, most Americans in that period still lived in rural areas where adherence to Victorian standards of home and family were expected.³⁰⁷

Therefore, people in cities on the border between rural and urban, like Kansas City, may have experienced the greatest change between 1880 and 1945. Kansas City was the front line of clashes between urban and rural society, and well as Victorian society versus working-class culture. The “spaces of femininity” that existed before 1880 were rapidly disappearing in the early twentieth century.³⁰⁸ Such spaces were increasingly challenged by working-class women who tested boundaries, challenged acceptability, and shifted the representation of the female in society. Working-women felt burdened by a social system that defined a world of work as a masculine space, because such definitions made it impossible for working-class women to support themselves and their families.³⁰⁹ For working-class women in Kansas City, the support of the neighborhood and the machine was far more important than concerns about the morality of women, whatever

³⁰⁷ Andrea Weiss and Greta Schiller, *Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community* (New York: Naiad Press, 1988), 12.

³⁰⁸ Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and ‘Femme’ Art, 1900 to the late 1920s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 11.

³⁰⁹ The History Project, *Improper Bostonians: Lesbian and Gay History from the Patriots to Playland* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 98.

their work. As one Kansas Citian born at the end of the Pendergast era explained: “Nobody cared what you did, as long as you took care of each other. Some ladies in my neighborhood did questionable things, but you just didn’t care as long as they didn’t.”³¹⁰

Working-class African American women in Kansas City were likely not as invested in Victorian standards as their white counterparts. In fact, it would appear that African American working-class women in the city were frequently part of the Pendergast world out of sheer necessity. According to historian Laurence deGraaf, African American women were more concentrated in urban towns in the American West than white working-class women. DeGraaf wrote that fifty percent of African American women in the urban west worked outside the home from 1890 to 1920, compared to only 12-25% of white women.³¹¹ Most of these working-class women were migrants to western towns such as Kansas City, where they worked as domestic workers or laundresses. For these women, however, the contact with sex work and sexual identifications was more immediate than it was for white working-class women. As historian Ruth Alexander concluded, African American migrant women exchanged the sexual terrorism of the American south for identification with eroticism in the north and west.³¹² The myth of black hypersexuality was placed on African American

³¹⁰ Sandra Wayne, interview with Amber Clifford, Warrensburg, Missouri, March 2007.

³¹¹ Laurence B. deGraaf, “Race, Sex, and Region: Black Women in the American West, 1850-1920,” in *The Gendered West*, Gordon Morris Bakken and Brenda Farrington eds., *The American West: Interactions, Intersections, and Injunctions* series (New York: Garland, 2000), 84.

³¹² Ruth M. Alexander, *The ‘Girl Problem’: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 20.

working-class women in the west, who were then perceived as erotic and sexually available. When coupled with the fact that American cities and towns often had vice districts enclosed in racially segregated neighborhoods, the resulting identification is obvious. Working-class African American women were, according to deGraaf, likely to be working in prostitution as a necessity. The proximity of prostitution in black neighborhoods made such work easy to find, and as a result prostitution became associated with African American working-class women.³¹³ African American women became one more commodity that Pendergast used to fuel the jazz scene.

In the Pendergast machine, the intersection of gender and class also meant a reliance on women as a commodity for the cabarets and brothels in Kansas City. It also meant, however, that Pendergast's own family was a subject of local debate. Carolyn Elizabeth Pendergast, the wife of Boss Tom, was a West Bottoms native who had worked her way from the streets to a job in one of the Pendergast saloons when she married Tom. While there is no clear proof, it was suspected that Carolyn Pendergast was a crib girl or an employee at one of the Pendergast brothels when the two met. The two constantly fought for some level of middle-class (if not upper-class) respectability.³¹⁴ Pendergast built the family home in Quality Hill, the premiere upper-class neighborhood of Kansas City. He and his wife attended performances at the respectable theaters and held parties where city leaders and their families were invited. Despite these attempts,

³¹³ DeGraaf, "Race, Sex, and Region," 93.

³¹⁴ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 96-97.

Pendergast and his wife were always outsiders in upper-class Kansas City circles. As one Kansas City historian wrote, “There was no way a former saloon owner and suspected bawdy-house owner and his West Bottoms woman were ever going to gain complete social acceptance in Kansas City.”³¹⁵ Ironically, the very people that Pendergast sought for approval were the ones who had to seek his assistance in operating the city.

Pendergast’s ironic position as the wealthy leader of a working-class conglomerate was not lost on him. While the Pendergast machine made money from liquor sales, it was famous for its influence in prostitution and men’s clubs. The Pendergast “sin palaces” were a system of 250 different brothels and cribs east of downtown Kansas City on 14th street. In addition to the sin palaces, Pendergast also controlled a series of “men only” cabarets and clubs that catered to the city’s middle and upper-class inhabitants who worked downtown. Only a few blocks from Pendergast’s downtown headquarters at the Jefferson Hotel, the sin palaces brought in nearly \$12 million each year in prostitution income for the machine.³¹⁶ While the brothels were located on 14th street, men’s clubs were located much closer to the city’s political center. The most famous of these clubs was the Chesterfield Club, located less than a block from the Jackson County Courthouse. At the Chesterfield patrons could gamble, drink, or meet with Pendergast for an “official” lunch. Each Friday Pendergast had a luncheon for his captains and bosses at the Chesterfield, sometimes with judges and city officials

³¹⁵ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 107.

³¹⁶ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 101.

eating in the main room. The featured attractions at the Chesterfield were the waitresses. Brought in each morning by the madams at Pendergast's brothels, the women who worked at the Chesterfield were always an even ratio of white to African American. The waitresses wore only high-heeled shoes and a change belt. Four feature waitresses were specially identified: the two African American waitresses had their pubic hair shaved in the shape of a spade or club, while the two white waitresses were hearts or diamonds.³¹⁷ The levels of representation in such a display are significant. First, this particular form of racial mixing flaunted Pendergast's refusal to follow miscegenation laws. At the same time, however, the feature waitresses clearly displayed the position of working-class women in the Pendergast world: both white and black women were on hypersexual, erotic display. Second, their display as playing cards points to their representation as a commodity, a game, and a site of amusement. By identifying the women with playing cards, perhaps specifically "poker," the feature waitresses were represented as nothing more than another exciting entertainment to lay on the felt tables of the Chesterfield. Finally, the waitresses at the Chesterfield clearly represented the territorialization of women in the Pendergast world as zones of sexual pleasure and erotic arousal. According to Kansas City historians Laurence Larsen and Nancy Hulston, the Chesterfield was a clear message to the city's officials and elected leaders. Whatever they desired in life- drinks, food, sex, working-class support, loans or political help- could only come from the very man

³¹⁷ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 102.

they shunned in society. In the Pendergast world, the intersection of gender, race and class that revealed itself in brothels and clubs was a more than just the titillation of a red-light district. Pendergast brought the representations of gender, sexuality and class from the jazz scene directly into the “respectable” neighborhoods of Kansas City’s leadership, thereby flaunting his ability to defy the city’s official zoning by creating interzones.

The Pendergast World and Musical Spaces

The final, and perhaps most important, aspect of the Pendergast underworld was jazz: its musicians, the spaces where jazz was performed, and the role that jazz played in changing the map of Kansas City. While the sounds of jazz were played and performed before the influence of the underworld in cities like Chicago and Kansas City, how did those sounds lead to fame, popularity and a position for jazz music as the American musical genre? Despite the representation by traditional jazz historians to the contrary, the bosses and cronies of the “underworld” in the period between the wars patronized jazz musicians and jazz clubs. It was the underworld, with its economic and spatial influence, that established jazz. “It [the success of jazz] had everything to do with the fact that a high value had been placed on the music they played by certain infamous admirers willing to pay handsomely for its performance,” wrote historian Ronald Morris, “and *who economically determined its sphere of influence* [emphasis

added].”³¹⁸ Eddie Durham, a pioneer guitarist and musician for such bands as the Bennie Moten and Count Basie Orchestras, remembered the link between musicians and the underworld this way: “Those guys paid you double for anything you ever done in Kansas City. They never owed a musician a nickel. The gangster always protected. . . Those gangsters would always treat everybody right.”³¹⁹

According to Ronald Morris, there were several reasons for the pivotal importance of the underworld to the success of jazz. First, Morris suggests that the leaders of the American “underworld” were themselves immigrants and migrants, who likely found in the sounds of jazz some similarities to the sounds of their cultural roots.³²⁰ Morris most often referred to Irish and Italian immigrants in this scheme, the two immigrant ethnicities most frequently seen in Kansas City’s jazz scene. While Morris does assume that all “migrant music” sounded alike, the representation of underworld leaders as jazz space patrons is important. Second, the atmosphere of clubs and cabarets where jazz was performed included its own sense of camaraderie among performers and patrons, and blurred the lines that traditional theaters placed between performance and audience. Given the “familiar” sounds and an atmosphere that allowed traditional social forms to be disrupted, Morris posits that gangsters in the underworld likely felt that the music later called jazz and the spaces where it was performed were an extension of their

³¹⁸ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 1.

³¹⁹ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 95.

³²⁰ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 93.

own cultural values, traditions that did not always reflect the “modernizing United States.” In this scheme, according to Morris, jazz spaces were not simply stages, they were an extension of the underworld lifestyle. By taking performance spaces and jazz music out of the hands of the wealthy, underworld leaders led the way in popularizing the sounds and spaces of jazz.³²¹

Even more essential than the cultural implications of underworld jazz spaces was the economic control that the underworld maintained over jazz. The 19th century saloons were slowly taken over by the underworld in the early 20th century. With their representation as color blind and their reliance on working-class neighborhoods, underworld organizations could not afford to ignore the growing popularity of jazz.³²² The underworld provided the protection, support, and spaces where jazz could be performed, and pulled jazz musicians out of the saloons and honky tonks where such risqué music had been marginalized. While musicians played an important role in creating jazz, their patrons in the underworld were the vital link between jazz musicians and social acceptance. The underworld made jazz a national phenomenon, and took the sound of jazz with them into the spaces of America’s jazz scenes. Ronald Morris explained:

Musical historians have tended to treat themselves to the easy way out, concentrating on the musician in his own milieu, uncritically suggesting that a limited network of associations—mainly other musicians— influences his development. Needless to say, the links with underworld characters, for better or worse, are invariably omitted.³²³

³²¹ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 93.

³²² Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 5.

³²³ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 15.

The inextricable link between the underworld and jazz is especially clear in the history of Kansas City. Pendergast's influence included the First and Second Wards- the two areas of Kansas City that served as home to the centers of jazz performance. Pendergast himself owned four cabarets in the First and Second Wards: the Blue Goose, the Bowery, the Oriental and Jubilesta.³²⁴ In addition, the Pendergast machine exerted its influence over the clubs and cabarets in the city's Jazz District. The more "deviant" the performance was represented by mainstream white Kansas Citians, the deeper in Pendergast territory it laid. While "black and tan" clubs were open to white patrons in the Jazz District along 18th and Vine, black only clubs were further in the Second Ward between Charlotte and Cleveland streets.³²⁵ Meanwhile, live sex shows, some featuring both humans and animals, took place deep in the West Bottoms at Smokers and the Antlers Club.³²⁶ Drag acts and female impersonators were featured along Independence Avenue, south of wealthy Cliff Drive, sandwiched between the Jazz District and the West Bottoms. Buildings where buffet flat parties were held were concentrated on what is now called Truman Road, linking Independence Avenue to the West Bottoms district. The Pendergast family controlled clubs included some of the most famous clubs, cabarets and performance halls in Kansas City: the Cherry Blossom club where Count Basie made his Kansas City premiere, and the Subway Club where a young Charlie Parker peered through the windows.

³²⁴ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 101.

³²⁵ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 103.

³²⁶ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 103.

Together, the Pendergast controlled clubs were known popularly as the “devils of the night.”³²⁷ Interestingly, it is the clubs that featured the “visible” performers, the men who eventually became a focus of dominant jazz histories that remain featured in Kansas City history. The Cherry Blossom and Subway clubs were in the 18th and Vine District, where white slumming among the “purveyors of deviance” was an everyday occurrence. Spaces of performance that contested the very concept of “deviance” were written out of history, despite the fact that they flourished and attracted the desires of Kansas City patrons throughout the jazz scene.

An examination of some of the “devils of the night” reveals much about the absolute dependency of jazz performance and the underworld in Kansas City. Due to the lack of written record, however, much of the evidence of the “devils of the night” are of clubs in the 18th and Vine district. For example, one of the most important club owners in Kansas City was Felix Payne. Payne was a saloon-keeper in the early days of the Pendergast machine, who became a Tom Pendergast precinct captain in the First Ward. Payne owned the famous Twin Cities Club, a large jazz club that straddled the Missouri-Kansas state line. After Prohibition ended, Payne helped Pendergast purchase clubs throughout the First and Second Wards. Two of these clubs were the Sunset Club on 12th and Vine and the Subway Club at 18th and Vine. The Sunset was managed by Piney Brown, a well-known African American drummer and fixture in Kansas City’s

³²⁷ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 103.

African American community. Pendergast purchased Kansas City's first PA system for the Sunset, and Brown used to amplify performances out into the street.³²⁸ The Subway Club was a basement club well-known by musicians as a welcome place to hold jam sessions after hours. The Subway became the most popular club with musicians, and lasted well into the Great Depression.³²⁹

Pendergast also had the support of Ellis Burton, a leader of the African American criminal establishment and owner of the Yellow Front club in the Jazz District. Burton had a criminal record in his own right, and was rumored to have robbed trains with the Mafia.³³⁰ Another club in the Pendergast sphere was the Reno Club. The Reno was owned by Papa Sol Epstein, a white immigrant and Pendergast supporter. Located on 12th street between Cherry and Locust, the Reno featured a low wall that segregated white patrons from black patrons. The Reno also featured four floor shows each night, featuring performers who traveled on the TOBA circuit and arrived in Kansas City on the railroad. Money from the Reno did not, however, come just from jazz patrons. Behind the Reno was a meeting place for Pendergast and his cronies, as well as a space for dealing in drugs and prostitution. Two dollar tricks with crib girls were sold behind the Reno, and after the deal was finalized there was a private stairway leading to the Reno's second floor cribs.³³¹ In addition to Pendergast owned clubs, there were many other clubs in Kansas City that catered to jazz performance and patrons.

³²⁸ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 16.

³²⁹ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 17.

³³⁰ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 94.

³³¹ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 22-23.

Even these clubs, however, had to deal with Pendergast to secure such things as liquor, day laborers, or protection. White dance halls such as the Pla-Mor Ballroom and the Century Room burlesque were dependent on Pendergast for protection from police raids, especially during Prohibition.³³²

In the grand narrative of Kansas City's "Jazz Age," many clubs are known more for their association with individual musicians for their connection to the Pendergast world. For instance, the Reno is always associated with a particular story about the legend of Charlie Parker. Parker often loitered behind the Reno to fraternize with musicians taking breaks between sets. Parker was underage and could not go into the Reno, and lunchwagon owner John Agnos took pity on Parker and offered him leftover chicken each night- chicken that was referred to by local musicians as "yardbird." In the jazz canon annals of Kansas City's written history, the Reno was the place where Parker earned his nickname "Bird."³³³ This kind of spatial representation, however, further reduces the influence of the Pendergast world on Kansas City's jazz scene. What role did the Pendergast world play in the performance of jazz, and therefore the creation of the jazz scene, inside clubs like the Reno?

The subsumation of the Pendergast world into an argument about Kansas City's jazz authenticity silences the important role that the underworld played in the production of jazz music and its spaces. One example of the grand narrative ignorance of the underworld lies in the story of Bennie Moten. Moten was one of

³³² Russell, *Jazz Style*, 19.

³³³ Russell, *Jazz Style*, 24; Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 203-204.

the most influential and important jazz musicians in Kansas City. Moten got his start as an occasional player at clubs and parks before forming his Bennie Moten Orchestra in the 1920s. Eventually, the Moten Orchestra became the most popular and famous band in the city, and featured such musicians as Eddie Barefield and the early appearance of Count Basie.³³⁴ In fact, in terms of the history of jazz music, the Moten Orchestra was a constellation of stars: Walter Page, Buster Smith, Oran “Lips” Page, Eddie Durham, Lester Young, Ben Webster, Dan Minor, Eddie Barefield, Jimmy Rushing and Count Basie.³³⁵ Moten was also the earliest of Kansas City bands to gain popularity outside the Kansas City area through his many recordings with RCA in the 1920s and early 1930s.³³⁶ Moten is best known as the originator of the “Kansas City sound,” also known as “Kansas City swing.”³³⁷ When Moten died as the result of a botched tonsillectomy in New York in 1935, a resulting split in the orchestra left Count Basie in charge of the group eventually known as the Count Basie Orchestra.³³⁸ Basie then took Moten’s “Kansas City swing” to New York and immortality. According to Kansas City’s grand narrative of the “Jazz Age,” it was Moten’s musical success, and his ability to gather such talents, that made him a success. With the inclusion of Pendergast machine in that story, however, the history of the Moten Orchestra is upset. Moten had clear ties to the Pendergast machine,

³³⁴ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 121.

³³⁵ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 133; Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 124-125.

³³⁶ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 121.

³³⁷ Asa E. Martin, *Our Negro Population: A Sociological Study of the Negroes of Kansas City, Missouri* (Kansas City, MO: Franklin Hudson Publishing, 1913), 3.

³³⁸ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 133.

and was well known as a good friend to Kansas City's underworld, including Felix Payne and Sol Epstein. "Through contacts of this kind," wrote Ronald Morris of Bennie Moten, "he was able to control all the good jobs and choice locations in and around Kansas City."³³⁹

Another illustration of the difference between the grand narrative of Kansas City's "Jazz Age" and life in the city's jazz scene is within the biography of Mary Lou Williams. Williams was a pianist and singer, who was discovered in Pittsburgh and joined the TOBA circuit in 1925 at fifteen years old.³⁴⁰ Two years later she married saxophonist John Williams and began a second career as an arranger and pianist for the TOBA circuit. Williams came to Kansas City in 1929, and was so enamored with the Kansas City scene that she quit the TOBA circuit and joined Twelve Clouds of Joy, an orchestra led by musician Andy Kirk.³⁴¹ Williams immersed herself in the sounds of Kansas City swing, as well as the protections and connections that night life offered in the Pendergast world. "If you were without funds, people would make you a loan without you asking for it," Williams told biographer Linda Dahl, "[they] would look at you and tell if you were hungry and put things right."³⁴² In her private notebooks, Williams recalled

³³⁹ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 140.

³⁴⁰ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 227.

³⁴¹ Personal Papers of Mary Lou Williams, Series 5, Box 1, Folder 1, Autobiographical Book #1 131, Mary Lou Williams Collection, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University-Newark Campus, Newark, New Jersey.

³⁴² Dahl, *Morning Glory*, 71.

Kansas City as “a place to be enjoyed even if starving.”³⁴³ Williams also wrote of the interactions she had with the Pendergast world. For instance, when one member of the Twelve Clouds of Joy was arrested for molestation and would not make a performance at Fairyland Park, one of Pendergast’s cronies intervened. Known to Mary Lou Williams only as “Stumpy,” this Pendergast agent freed the bandmember and paid the jail wardens.³⁴⁴ Williams continued to play regularly in Kansas City, both with the Kirk orchestra and as an individual pianist at the Sunset and Subway clubs. After Count Basie took over for Bennie Moten, Williams began to play piano for Basie at the Cherry Blossom Club in Kansas City- another Pendergast club.³⁴⁵ Despite the Depression and the problems of poverty, Williams was never unemployed in Kansas City. While she sometimes only worked for food, the Depression did not affect Kansas City during the Pendergast era as it did in other cities. Performers such as Mary Lou Williams continued to come to Kansas City throughout the 1930s and early 1940s.

Reforming the Pendergast World

It was the Pendergast world, this unique combination of racial and ethnic power, gender and class issues, and the performance of jazz that made Kansas City the jazz scene that it was. But how did Kansas City’s Pendergast world, a

³⁴³ Personal Papers of Mary Lou Williams, Series 5, Box 1, Folder 2, Autobiographical Notes 155, Mary Lou Williams Collection, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University- Newark Campus, Newark, New Jersey.

³⁴⁴ Personal Papers of Mary Lou Williams, Series 5, Box 1, Folder 2, Autobiographical Notes 180-182.

³⁴⁵ Personal Papers of Mary Lou Williams, Series 5, Box 1, Folder 2, Autobiographical Notes 203-205.

city machine so clearly important, get so reduced in the history of the “Jazz Age?” Ironically, the very thing that made Kansas City pivotal was what caused the grand narrative of the “Jazz Age” to treat the Pendergast machine in such a reductive manner. The Pendergast world of prostitution, jazz music, and interdependent neighborhoods of blacks, immigrants and working-class natives did not fit within the jazz canon image of Kansas City as a spontaneous source of jazz evolution. While other cities saw their jazz scenes decline in the 1930s, Kansas City’s jazz scene remained strong and popular until the end of World War II. The city’s reputation as a “wide-open” town, predicated on the very underworld that the canon reduced to a backdrop, is likely what saved Kansas City from the worst effects of the Great Depression. In the traditional history of Kansas City and of jazz, however, the jazz scene is portrayed as a backdrop for the evolution of jazz music, a temporary flowering before reformers brought law and order back to the city.

Kansas City reformers actually began their work with the city charter of 1889, the same charter that allowed Jim Pendergast to begin building his power base. In the 1889 charter was the creation of the Parks and Boulevards Commission and the Board of Pardons and Paroles. While originally intended to plan the city’s twentieth century road and park system, the Parks and Boulevards Commission eventually turned its attention to the “healthy” use of parks and other leisure spaces. At the same time, Pardons and Paroles officials became increasingly interested in how their clients lived once out of city institutions.

Reformers began to think of urban areas as sites for environmental reforms that went far beyond the building of parks: the focus was on policing leisure places around the city, and on a more careful observation of the behavior of Kansas City's citizens. The result was the creation of the Board of Public Welfare, an outgrowth of the Board of Pardons and Paroles and the Parks and Boulevards Commission in Kansas City. Kansas City was the first American city to create a welfare department, which opened in 1910.³⁴⁶ The first act of the Board of Public Welfare was to form a Recreation Department, whose officials were social workers or parole officers charged with controlling problems such as crime and poverty in Kansas City's leisure spaces: everything from clubs and cabarets to dance halls and movie houses.³⁴⁷

Kansas City's Recreation Department commissioned a recreation census and survey in 1912. Officials hoped to use the survey as a method of gathering data and suggesting solutions for the social and moral problems inherent in city leisure spaces. The Recreation Department hired Rowland Haynes, a New England schoolteacher and representative of the newly formed Playground Association of America to consult the survey. Along with Recreation Department Superintendent Fred F. McClure, Haynes visited and recorded every known leisure space in Kansas City, from roller rinks to cabarets.³⁴⁸ The results of the 1912 recreation survey affected almost all the reform attempts aimed at

³⁴⁶ Alan Havig, "Mass Commercial Amusements in Kansas City Before World War I," *Missouri Historical Review* 75 (April 1981), 319.

³⁴⁷ Havig, "Mass Commercial Amusements," 319.

³⁴⁸ Havig, "Mass Commercial Amusements," 319-320.

working-class leisure spaces in Kansas City. McClure's recommendations concerning amusement parks resulted in the regulation of dance halls. Rowland Haynes' observations about Kansas City movie houses and nickelodeons led to further film censorship at the movie houses. The recreation survey of 1912 did exactly what its authors intended—it identified for eradication the problem of working-class amusements and all offenses that violated middle-class morality and gender. Haynes and McClure sought to put health and morality back into urban amusements, and they did so by attempting to destroy or appropriate what they deemed to be unacceptable gender and sexual behavior throughout the city. The reformers discursively engaged, constantly, the “unacceptable” aspects of the city.

The clubs, cabarets, and brothels of the Pendergast world were inherently part of a working-class existence in the city. These aspects of working-class life, however, were not easily appropriated into the dominant concept of morality. While dance hall owners and movie house managers managed to strike deals with the Board of Public Welfare, the operations of the Pendergast world did not. For example, owners of white dance halls such as the Pla-Mor Ballroom made compromises with the Board of Public Welfare that allowed Board agents to periodically visit dances, as well as mandating minimum age requirements for entrance in dance halls. In Kansas City, as well as other cities such as Chicago,

those compromises did not extend to nightclubs and cabarets.³⁴⁹ Reformers in Kansas City, led by the Board of Public Welfare, continued to investigate every aspect of working-class leisure in the city. Using a 1927 federal law that mandated all clubs or cabarets allowing patrons to fill their own glasses were in violation of the Volstead Act, the Board began to investigate and close Pendergast clubs. Through the 1930s, the Board closed movie houses and nickelodeons, cabarets, clubs, and worked to enforce Missouri's 1913 White Slavery Act. At the same time, Tom Pendergast's activities were under investigation by the federal government in the blanket investigation of mob-related activities undertaken in the 1930s. Though Pendergast kept both vice and jazz running in Kansas City through the Depression, the Pendergast world was under increasing pressure to reterritorialize itself to fit dominant culture. The Reno Club was closed due to Board of Public Welfare violations in 1938, followed by other cabarets and clubs along Twelfth Street. Pendergast was finally found guilty of tax evasion in 1939, for not reporting a bribe he received for a gambling debt. Pendergast spent fifteen months in federal prison at Leavenworth before his release in 1941. He died in his home on Ward Parkway in 1945.

According to the accepted version of Kansas City history, the incarceration of Pendergast was a victory against vice, and the end of Kansas City's jazz scene. Norman Pearson refers to the "downfall" and "aftermath" of

³⁴⁹ William Hawland Kenney, "Historical Context and the Definition of Jazz: Putting More of the History in 'Jazz History,'" in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, Krin Gabbard ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 107.

Pendergast in musical terms: that musicians who came to Kansas City after the demise of the Pendergast era were “musically sophisticated, and used the swing-style as their jumping off point” in New York or Chicago.³⁵⁰ Still other jazz historians refer to Kansas City as a stopping point on the southwest circuit and the home to Basie and Parker, and not much else. None of this reflects the interplay of jazz spaces and the Pendergast machine in Kansas City’s jazz scene. Instead, this grand narrative of Kansas City’s jazz scene history positions the Pendergast world as one of crime and vice, a background to the spontaneous rise of Kansas City jazz, a world eliminated by the work of reformers and moral citizens. If the history of the “Jazz Age” 1920s is a history of the return of normalcy, as David Goldberg suggested, then the written history of Kansas City’s jazz scene is prototypical.

³⁵⁰ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 185.

CHAPTER 4:
GENDER TRANSGRESSION AND
KANSAS CITY'S JAZZ SCENE SPACES

Gender is inextricably linked to the jazz scene. In fact, the term “jazz” is a piece of coded language from African Americans, prostitutes and homosexuals in the early twentieth century, a slang term for sexual intercourse.³⁵¹ The term, however, was associated with music and the sexual attractiveness of male jazz musicians: its original meaning was lost. This is only one example of the reordering of gender and sexuality in American jazz scenes. The famous “Jazz Age” of written history and popular memory is marked by a redefinition and reduction of gender. This chapter will examine the changing definitions of gender and sexuality during the jazz scene, and examine the performance and representation of gender transgression in Kansas City’s jazz spaces. In addition, this chapter will explore the importance that this “other history” of gender played in the American jazz scene. While largely subsumed in the grand narrative of jazz history, gender transgression played a major role in the discursive formation of gender in the “Jazz Age” of the first half of the twentieth century. Gender transgression also created spaces of worldmaking for those who did not feel

³⁵¹ Mumford, “Homosex Changes,” 398.

represented by the changing discursive formations of gender in that period. People who identified with, or were represented as, members of a group seemingly outside “modernity” were an important part of the jazz scene. As jazz historian Lawrence Levine wrote: “It was this quality of course [being ‘out of phase with the period’s concept of culture’] that made jazz one of the houses of refuge in the 1920s for individuals who felt alienated from the central culture.”³⁵²

Victorian Restrictions and Gender in the Jazz Scene

While gender transgression was an important aspect of jazz scenes, it is not well represented or understood in the popular image of the “Jazz Age.” The pervasive image of flappers and “jazz babies” is more often positioned as the major shift in gender formations in American culture. This redefinition of women’s status and position in American society actually began in the 1880s as a resistance to the restrictions of Victorian society.³⁵³ American culture in the nineteenth century demanded discipline and conformity, especially with the advent of what historian E.P. Thompson termed a time-work discipline based on industrial work.³⁵⁴ Many such societal restrictions rested on the prevailing ideas about separation of gender into public and private spheres. Men lived in the

³⁵² Lawrence W. Levine, “Jazz and American Culture,” *Journal of American Folklore* 102, no. 403 (January-March 1989), 13.

³⁵³ John Higham, “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s,” in *The Origins of Modern Consciousness*, John Weiss ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 27.

³⁵⁴ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).

“public sphere” of work and saloon culture, while women were relegated to the “private sphere” of home and church.³⁵⁵ Victorian spheres divorced women from the dangerous worlds of work and pleasure, and excluded them from public contact with lower class males. Nineteenth century women viewed their homes as havens from the public world, and maintained a “cult of domesticity” as a defense against male society.³⁵⁶ The basic separation of sex in American culture enforced a strict cultural dichotomy that affected every area of society.

Sex segregation began to lose its power in the 1880s. Working and middle-class Americans began to react against time-work disciplines and Victorian social mores. In a reaction to such cultural oppression, people in the 1880s began to test the limits of societal sanctions and gender relationships.³⁵⁷ Industry at the end of the nineteenth century helped this cultural shift develop. Industry brought immigration, increased racial mixing in the cities, and the growth of urban centers. All of these factors were centered, in many cases, on women and members of the working class. While upper and middle-class Americans enjoyed financial stability and defended Victorian social norms as a protective system, most American working-class people found those strict social structures inapplicable to their situations. Working-class women especially felt burdened by a social system that defined the public world of work and pleasure as a series of male spaces. Feeling threatened by the incursion of laborers and

³⁵⁵ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 21.

³⁵⁶ Peiss, “Commercial Leisure and the ‘Woman Question’,” 107.

³⁵⁷ Higham, “The Reorientation,” 27.

immigrants into the cities, defenders of the Victorian norms increasingly accused the working class of destabilizing the home and threatening the social order.³⁵⁸

Women seeking pleasure or economic independence through work in American cities were forced to enter the public sphere. As they ventured further and further away from the control of the private sphere, women increasingly defined themselves as sexual and independent individuals.³⁵⁹ The ideology of Victorian society was based in the denial of heterosexual passion, and working-class women began to violate that ideology in the 1880s and 1890s.

While the Victorian social and moral codes sought to protect women and empower men, they had an important side effect: the creation of homosocial and homosexual American subcultures. Due to sex segregation, Victorian society encouraged the development of homosocial culture for both men and women.³⁶⁰ While the men's homosocial culture revolved around the concept of camaraderie and saloon culture, women's relationships were supposedly based on romantic companionship. According to historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, these homosocial networks provided women with emotional support and a place for gender-based emotional expression.³⁶¹ Homosocial culture went unchallenged and was tacitly accepted because it was not viewed as a violation of Victorian social mores. Even passionate relationships between women were permissible so

³⁵⁸ The History Project, *Improper Bostonians*, 98.

³⁵⁹ James R. McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals," *Journal of American History* 55, no 2 (September 1968), 320.

³⁶⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 60.

³⁶¹ Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 63.

long as the social rules of heterosexual marriage and family were followed.³⁶² Consequently, women had an outlet for self-expression and same-sex attachment that was considered acceptable in mainstream society.³⁶³

The clash between working-class women's denial of the spheres and the Victorian defense of the home resulted in a new gender expression: the "New Woman." The "New Woman" was symbolized by a short hairstyle and free attitude- the very images that became synonymous with the Jazz Age. The New Woman was not, however, a widely accepted identity in America's jazz scene, nor was the New Woman the flapper or "jazz baby" of historical imagination. Instead, the New Woman was represented as the "modern" woman, a woman who defended her home by entering the public sphere. Initially, the upholders of Victorian gentility defended the "New Woman" as a bridge between the private sphere and the world outside. Seen as an extension of household responsibility, the New Woman became the new vision of female involvement in defending the home through the reform of urban life. Victorian society saw New Women not as a challenge to the status quo, but a defense against the rising working-class social mores and class mixing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In short, Victorian women of American society hoped the New Woman would use their loosened restrictions to clean up the public sphere and bring wholesomeness

³⁶² Alan Sinfield, *Out On Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 39.

³⁶³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 266.

to male leisure time.³⁶⁴ New Women were those women who worked in favor of prohibition, sought to Americanize immigrant mothers, and created moral reform movements across the country.

Working-class women, however, did not use the New Woman concept as a road to moral and social reform. The New Woman was perceived in working-class and immigrant districts as an acceptance of women in work and leisure spaces. These women attended theaters and parades, sought admission in cabarets and nickelodeons, and called for the creation of heterosocial spaces instead of homosocial ones.³⁶⁵ Such changes in American public culture were a clear challenge to Victorian concepts of proper gender behavior. As historian Lewis Erenberg wrote:

Critics believed that too much expressive pleasure in a risqué environment endangered young women, for once they let go, and they were easily led to prostitution and away from the traditional role of home and mother. The pleasure-loving women would also destroy male identity. For those who adhered to the nineteenth-century conception of masculinity contained in the self-made man, passionate women would lead men away from self-control toward a life of sexual expressiveness. Men's concentration would be broken, their money lost, and their business affairs ruined.³⁶⁶

Kansas Citians adhering to the Victorian concept of spheres upheld a national concern about the dangers of women's sexuality. According to one reformer, working-class women seeking amusement were a source of social danger. In his investigation of working-class girls, the reformer wrote that he

³⁶⁴ Peiss, "Commercial Leisure," 112.

³⁶⁵ Peiss, "Commercial Leisure," 108.

³⁶⁶ Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 82.

feared the cultural effect of “girls who were idling along, seeking some diversion, some amusement, girls who were loitering on the edge of that precipice over which so many fall to destruction.”³⁶⁷ The reordering of leisure space also meant that previously masculine spaces, such as the saloon, were altered. American society was faced with a new “gender question:” how to overthrow the Victorian system that segregated the sexes without permanently damaging the masculine underpinning of American culture.³⁶⁸ The fear of damaging male culture in America quickly overshadowed any belief about the possibilities of the efforts by New Women to reform leisure spaces.

The result was the creation of masculinity as a category of identity that separated “real men” from “weak men.” As Susan Cook explained, masculinity was a category of identity “devoid of moral meanings,” that symbolized a new type of social and cultural freedom. Masculinity, beginning in the 1880s and 1890s, was seen as aggressive, sexually charged, and unabashedly physical.³⁶⁹ The result was that men who adhered to Victorian homosocial behavior were categorized as weak and effeminate. The connection that Americans made in this challenge to gender roles was that masculinity was not just physical and emotional, it was *spatial*. For instance, homosocial spaces such as saloons became associated with same-sex interaction- something avoided by the New

³⁶⁷ Recreation Department, *Annual Report of the Recreation Department of the Board of Public Welfare, April 18, 1911-April 15, 1912* (Kansas City, MO: Cline Printing, 1912), 242-243.

³⁶⁸ Peiss, “Commercial Leisure,” 106.

³⁶⁹ Cook, “Passionless Dancing,” 135.

Man.³⁷⁰ Consequently, homosocial venues such as theaters and cabarets were either transformed into clearly heterosocial spaces, or marked as homosocial, and therefore harmful and deviant. By identifying homosocial culture with deviance, American culture in the jazz scene reterritorialized the New Woman as a feminine, sexual partner for the New Man.

Victorian Restrictions and Sexuality

The other consequence of the reordering of the male/female gender binary in the 1880s and 1890s was the creation and development of homosexual as a category of identity. According to historian Lisa Duggan, a homosexual identity sprang from the “qualification and exclusion” of same-sex relationships that reproduced the new, discursive hegemony of white heterosexual men.³⁷¹ Duggan explained that this discursive production became a national identity in America during the late 19th and early 20th century, when the debates over the New Man and New Woman brought same-sex culture into public debate. As Duggan demonstrates, by the peak of the jazz scene masculinity and the concept of “masculine sameness” became the basis for American citizenship.³⁷² This concept was further explained by George Chauncey, who explained that the medical discourse around homosexuality became a social identity by the early 20th

³⁷⁰ Cook, “Passionless Dancing,” 137.

³⁷¹ Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 20.

³⁷² Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*, 19.

century. “The growing differentiation of sexual object choice from sexual roles and gender characteristics, and the growing importance of object choice in the classification of sexuality,” wrote Chauncey, “were reflected, albeit inconsistently, in the increasing frequency with which the term “homosexuality” was used.”³⁷³ In effect, the development of hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity in the early twentieth century created a homosexual identity, positioning one as “normal” and one as “deviant.” As historian Elizabeth Drorbaugh wrote:

Perversity, the dumping ground at the turn of the century for women who confounded norms of sex, gender, and sexuality, was a restive place from which proprietary norms continued to be disturbed, since labeling degenerates did not seem to make them go away. Degeneracy, relegated to the category of ‘wrong,’ became a necessary boundary: one could not otherwise fully comprehend ‘right.’³⁷⁴

That identity was, however, increasingly relegated to the homosocial spaces that New Man/New Woman constructions forbade. Some of this spatial identification was part of a homosexual subculture well before the rise of the New Man/New Woman binary. For instance, George Chauncey demonstrated that the term “invert” was used to describe homosexual men in the theater long before the

³⁷³ George Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 93.

³⁷⁴ Elizabeth Drorbaugh, “Sliding Scales: Notes On Storme DeLarverie and the Jewel Box Revue, the Cross-Dressed Woman on the Contemporary Stage, and the Invert,” in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, Lesley Ferris ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), 120.

term was used in medical discourse.³⁷⁵ It was in the 1880s and 1890s, however, that the concept of a “queer” community began to develop.³⁷⁶ Eventually, anyone who transgressed the New Man/New Woman “straight” heteronormativity were seen as “queer,” and territorialized into “queer” spaces. The sexual topography of jazz age cities facilitated the development of those identities.³⁷⁷ Cabarets, theaters, and red-light districts were marked as “queer” and deviant spaces, spaces that required both careful policing and eventual reform by “straight” culture. “Queer clubs and taverns,” wrote historian Nan Alamilla Boyd, “existed at the intersection of vice and reform.”³⁷⁸ While often portrayed as a development of the early twentieth century, this “crisis” over gender identity and sexual orientation actually began in the 1880s. In addition, the “crisis” had clear foundations in race. Beginning in the 1890s, white and of color gay men and lesbians increasingly frequented African American clubs and cabarets, since queer enclaves and black enclaves frequently overlapped in both geography and social marginalization.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ George Chauncey, “Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era,” *Journal of Social History* 19 (Winter 1985), 90.

³⁷⁶ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 11.

³⁷⁷ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 13.

³⁷⁸ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 26.

³⁷⁹ Mumford, “Homosex Changes,” 394.

Wilde Kansas City

The increased spatiality of gender that began in the 1880s is especially evident in Oscar Wilde's tour. Wilde himself made a tour of America in 1882, which resulted in a new code that equated "artistic" with "homosexual."³⁸⁰ Wilde's tour was based in the American and British theater. Theater became both a literal and a figurative stage for the representation of a more passionate and expressive man beginning in the 1880s. This emphasis created a new niche for women and homosexuals in the theater as both actors and audience members. "Changes in theater as an institution," wrote theater historian Alan Sinfield, "interact with shifts in ideologies of gender and sexuality."³⁸¹ The main movement in this search for expressive theater was aestheticism. Aestheticism was itself an art craze with foundations in the decorative arts movements of the 1870s. As an artistic movement, aestheticism emphasized living for the sake of beauty and art.³⁸² The focus on creating an environment of beauty and art became a popular craze through the 1880s. Aestheticism had its roots in England and France, where one accepted stereotype of an aesthete was Oscar Wilde. Called the "Apostle of Aestheticism," Oscar Wilde was a world famous poet and playwright by the 1880s. With the backing of D'Oyly Carte, the producer of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, Oscar Wilde toured the United States in 1882 giving lectures designed to promote Gilbert and Sullivan's new operetta *Patience*,

³⁸⁰ Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, 11.

³⁸¹ Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, 1.

³⁸² Mary W. Blanchard, "The Soldier and the Aesthete: Homosexuality and Popular Culture in Gilded Age America," *Journal of American Studies* 30 (1996), 26.

a spoof of aestheticism with a central character based on Wilde.³⁸³ Wilde's 1882 tour influenced an American aesthetic movement, and helped redefine the theater as a gendered space.

Wherever he spoke, local newspapers routinely characterized Wilde's lectures as "effeminate." Reporters described Wilde's clothing as effeminate, and identified him as typical of the so-called "dandies" found in upper-class theater circles.³⁸⁴ They reprinted his speeches in an effort to demonstrate his lack of masculinity.³⁸⁵ The reports were no different when Wilde arrived in Kansas City in April 1882. William Rockhill Nelson, owner of the *Kansas City Star* newspaper, was a leader among the Kansas City entrepreneurs crusading for public parks and a road system to encourage city expansion.³⁸⁶ He dispatched two reporters to cover the story for the *Star*, but their findings gave Nelson second thoughts about the Englishman whom he eventually called a bad influence.

Nelson's reporters arrived at Union Station to meet Oscar Wilde's train shortly after five o'clock in the evening. Boarding the Santa Fe Railroad train from Denver, one of them had the following conversation with a conductor named Smith:

Reporter: "Have you got Oscar Wilde on board?"

Conductor: "No. At least if I have I don't know it, and it's a good thing for him too."

Reporter: "Why?"

Conductor: "Because if I had him and knew it, I'd have drowned the

³⁸³ Blanchard, "The Soldier," 32.

³⁸⁴ Gayle V. Fischer, *Pantaloon and Power: Nineteenth Century Dress Reform in the United States* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 172.

³⁸⁵ Fischer, *Pantaloon and Power*, 33.

³⁸⁶ Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 329.

damn fool in the Kaw River before he got here.”³⁸⁷

According to the *Star* reporter, Wilde arrived a short time later accompanied by his private secretary and a black servant. The reporter described Wilde’s dress as normal for the day, except for a large cloak Wilde wore “to imitate Tennyson.”³⁸⁸ Wilde, who was reading a newspaper, was surrounded by newspaper clippings and scrapbooks. Wilde went by carriage to his room at Coates House, a hotel adjacent to the Coates Opera House at Tenth and Broadway. The Coates, Kansas City’s first true theater building and its first major hotel, had opened in 1871.³⁸⁹ William Nelson wrote of Wilde’s arrival in his Kansas City *Star* editorial that evening: “Oscar Wilde, the long-haired what-is-it, has finally reached Kansas City, and the aesthetic noodles and blue china nincompoops are in the seventh heaven of happiness.”³⁹⁰

In the days surrounding Wilde’s Kansas City debut, two poems about the aesthete appeared in the Kansas City *Times*. The first poem to appear was “Poetry of the Period: A Greeting to Oscar Wilde.”³⁹¹ The poem, written by city father and theater owner Colonel Warder, expressed his excitement about Wilde’s appearance:

If thou gatherest truths like flowers, kind and gladsome as a child
True in heart and brave in spirit, then I greet you Oscar Wilde

³⁸⁷ Kansas City *Star*, 17 April 1882, 1(A).

³⁸⁸ Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 330.

³⁸⁹ Dory DeAngelo, *What About Kansas City! A Historical Handbook* (Kansas City, MO: Two Lane Press, 1995), 113.

³⁹⁰ Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 330-331.

³⁹¹ George W. Warder, “Poetry of the Period: A Greeting to Oscar Wilde,” Kansas City *Times*, 16 April 1882, 11(A).

With a friendly hand and purpose, and Godspeed you on your way
 May Promethean fires attend you through life's bright empyrean day,
 May you see earth's heart expanding like a rosebud in the spring
 Blooming with a sweeter fragrance, soaring on a stronger wing.³⁹²

Upon his arrival in the city, Wilde looked for Warder. "I am looking for Colonel Warder, your poet," Wilde told *Star* reporters. "He is a very great poet."³⁹³ A poem printed on the evening of April 18 reflected the city's changed perception of Wilde and his aesthetic movement.

Behold in me a man perceptively intense aesthetical,
 In whom the lily and the sunflower beautifully blend;
 Remember when, although it may seem more of less emetical,
 I lapses into poetry I does it as a friend.³⁹⁴

Wilde's arrival in Kansas City coincided with a St. Joseph judge's decision to accept a guilty plea from Robert and Charles Ford for the murder of local folk hero Jesse James. The next day, as Wilde prepared to take the stage at the Coates Opera House, Missouri Governor Thomas Crittenden pardoned both men.³⁹⁵ While many Kansas Citians were enthralled with the proceedings in St. Joseph, others turned out for the circus that arrived in town on April 16 and set up in tents in eastern Kansas City.³⁹⁶ Though he spoke to a relatively small crowd, Wilde took the stage on April 18 and gave a lecture entitled "Art Decoration." Wilde altered his standard lecture in Kansas City, and focused his comments on

³⁹² Warder, "Poetry of the Period," 11(A).

³⁹³ *Kansas City Times*, 18 April 1882, 5(A).

³⁹⁴ *Kansas City Times*, 18 April 1882, 4(A).

³⁹⁵ Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 333.

³⁹⁶ Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 332.

decorative arts and architecture instead of literature and visual art.³⁹⁷ By the time the reviews of Wilde's speech appeared in the local newspapers, he was already on the train headed for Wichita, Kansas. A reporter for the *Kansas City Journal* said this of Wilde's lecture on aestheticism:

When not holding either his watch-charm or handkerchief, his hand played with his coattail. This he bobbed up and down like a frisky lamb does its caudal appendage when running in the field. . . Throughout the delivery, one was reminded of a college lad scanning the stanzas of Virgil.³⁹⁸

Wilde's tour brought aestheticism to mainstream America. With its focus on decorative arts and a beautiful environment, aestheticism also helped transform American culture from the Civil War-era military to the Gilded Age domestic sphere.³⁹⁹ Wilde's tour also exposed homosexual and bohemian aspects of the theater world to American audiences. Before Wilde's 1882 tour, "dandies" were wealthy heterosexual adulterers. After Wilde's tour, "dandies" were identified as idle, effeminate and immoral men.⁴⁰⁰ The dominant middle-class and upper-class Victorian Americans emphasized purity and industry, both of which were rejected by the dandies. In fact, calling men "artistic" became a hidden code to identify such men as Wilde-type effeminate homosexuals.⁴⁰¹

Kansas Citians reacted more to Wilde's clothing than to his lecture.

Aesthetes such as Wilde believed that clothing should be beautiful before

³⁹⁷ Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 332.

³⁹⁸ *Kansas City Journal*, 18 April 1882, 1(A), qtd. in Lewis and Smith, *Oscar Wilde*, 332.

³⁹⁹ Blanchard, "The Soldier and the Aesthete," 26.

⁴⁰⁰ Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, 32.

⁴⁰¹ Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, 51.

utilitarian.⁴⁰² Before arriving in America, Wilde carefully chose his lecture costume of velvet knee breeches, fur great cloak and flowing shirt.⁴⁰³ The *Kansas City Times* noted Wilde's "suit of very elegant dark velvet" and his "Byron collar and flossy white neck handkerchief."⁴⁰⁴ During his tour, Wilde's lecture audiences often included young men who copied his costume and mannerisms.⁴⁰⁵ Salt Lake City's Chief of Police arrested a group of brothel madams for parading in the streets in aesthetic costumes.⁴⁰⁶ As knee breeches gained popularity as a fashion statement in 1882, the fad caused Kansas Citians to mock effeminate characteristics in its citizens.

Knee breeches and their association with feminine words such as "beauty" convinced Kansas Citians that knee breeches were effeminate. Because the knee breeches were associated with Wilde, Kansas Citians also portrayed Wilde as the arbiter of effeminate dress. A city reporter portrayed the breeches fad as the work of a deviant:

Since the arrival of Wilde in the city and his lecture at the Opera house, the anatomists of THE EVENING STAR have prepared a bird's-eye view of Kansas City society as it may appear six months hence, when the work of the apostle of beauty shall have been accomplished. This view he was able to produce only by dent bribing Turkish bath attendants, and by peering at night into many closely curtained dressing rooms.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰² Fischer, *Pantaloons and Power*, 172.

⁴⁰³ Fischer, *Pantaloons and Power*, 7.

⁴⁰⁴ "The Only Oscar," *Kansas City Times*, 18 April 1882, 1(A).

⁴⁰⁵ Alicia Finkel, "A Tale of Lillies, Sunflowers, and Knee Breeches: Oscar Wilde's Wardrobe for His American Tour," *Dress* 15 (1989), 9.

⁴⁰⁶ Finkel, "A Tale of Lillies," 11.

⁴⁰⁷ "The New Craze," *Kansas City Times*, 18 April 1882, 1(A).

The Kansas City reporter then interviewed several city gentlemen about wearing knee breeches. Those who refused to wear breeches were portrayed as “burly” or “handsome,” while supporters of the fad were described as “fair” or “charming.” According to the reporter:

Mr. Jim Conway is of the opinion that the line of curve presented by his Achilles muscle is better than that of the apostle Oscar, at any rate. His friends are ready to swear to it since they have inspected Oscar once with opera glasses.⁴⁰⁸

While theater audiences in the early nineteenth century, mostly upper-class males, openly suspected that women in “breeches parts” may have been lesbians, the mixed-gender audiences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries said little about the gender confusion created by women who played “breeches parts” onstage.⁴⁰⁹ Great female actors such as Sarah Bernhardt and Charlotte Cushman, who gained worldwide fame playing male roles in the theater, saw no damage to their careers.⁴¹⁰ In fact, the theater created a space of agency for women and homosexuals in the theater. Until recently, studies of the role of women and gender in the theater largely concentrated on the representation of women, and the use of female symbolism in male-dominated fields. In recent years scholars have begun to examine the agency of women in performance, and the ways in which gender itself was performed in the theater. Susan Glenn’s *Female Spectacle* introduced a new concept: that feminism had its roots in the performance of gender and the rise of pre-World War I public spaces like theaters,

⁴⁰⁸ “The New Craze,” 1(A).

⁴⁰⁹ Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, 11.

⁴¹⁰ Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, 11.

cabarets and clubs. According to Glenn, female stage performers helped define “modern” sexual and social territory by testing their boundaries on stage. In addition, female performers maintained the tension between heteronormative hegemony and homosexual subculture by creating the spectacle *of* women, and spectacle *by* women.⁴¹¹ Consequently, theater became a proving ground of changing gender definitions, and the site of public discourse about women, gender, and power. Sarah Bernhardt and Charlotte Cushman saw no damage to their careers because they redrew the boundaries of gender tension through performance. “The key question involved the ‘space’ available to artists,” wrote historian Charles Ponce de Leon, “within certain fields and the particular opportunities and constraints that producers and performers confront at specific historical moments.”⁴¹²

Gender, Sexuality, and Professional Performance

While upper-class theater audiences accepted the representation of different gender roles on stage as an illusion of the theater experience, they were not so accepting of gender difference in daily life. For instance, many sensational accounts of working women “passing” as men to gain more economic advantages

⁴¹¹ Susan Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3.

⁴¹² Charles Ponce DeLeon, “Spectacular Women: A Review of *Female Spectacle*,” *Reviews in American History* 30 (2002), 296.

appeared in the American press.⁴¹³ The influence of gender transgression in the theater did, however, create a subculture of homosexuality in the American working class despite hegemonic discourse. While legitimate theaters catered to the Victorian sense of gendered entertainment and working-class reality, working-class theaters featured both vaudeville and burlesque performances that attracted large audiences in Kansas City.⁴¹⁴ According to a 1912 recreation census of Kansas City, 31,000 city dwellers attended a vaudeville performance each week.⁴¹⁵ An increase in theater openings in working-class areas paralleled the boom in legitimate theater building in Kansas City's more prosperous area. When the Coates Opera House opened in 1871, so did the Free and Easy Theater on Fourth Street. By the 1890s there were several theaters that catered strictly to working-class patrons: vaudeville at the Orpheum, burlesque at the Century and Gayety theaters in the red-light district.⁴¹⁶

The increased interest in leisure and its growing acceptance as a vehicle for experimentation with gender roles made theaters, in Kansas City and across the country, especially important. Theaters promised to provide realism or escapism in a safe setting. Increasingly, theater owners found themselves questioning how to meet female audience demands without turning away their male patron base. The result was the creation of two types of working-class

⁴¹³ The History Project, *Improper Bostonians*, 104.

⁴¹⁴ Michael G. Luce, "A History of the Standard Theatre, Kansas City, Missouri, 1900-1929" (Master of Arts thesis, Central Missouri State University, 1981), 4.

⁴¹⁵ Havig, "Mass Commercial Amusements," 327.

⁴¹⁶ Crabb, "A History of Music in Kansas City," 49.

theater experiences, the “hot shows” and the “cold shows.”⁴¹⁷ So-called hot shows attracted a predominately white, male audience of mixed-class patrons who attended primarily saloons, vaudeville shows, and burlesque productions. They usually included sexual innuendo, sexually explicit performances, or strip-tease acts that appealed to the New Man masculinity. While hot shows attracted larger audiences and generated more ticket sales, theater owners that booked them were subject to more police attention and greater social pressures than other owners of working-class theaters. “Clean shows,” featuring vaudeville variety shows and cabaret entertainers, attracted a broader audience of both men and women across racial lines.⁴¹⁸ In many ways, the clean shows of vaudeville and cabaret bridged the gap between legitimate theater and burlesque, and brought aspects of working-class neighborhoods into the world of legitimate theater. Kansas City’s working-class neighborhoods were home to both vaudeville and more sexual “hot show” clubs.

Vaudeville and cabarets had their foundations in the male saloon culture of the post-Civil War era. Saloons were a male space whose only females were prostitutes and entertainers. The space was marked as one reserved for men, and a prominent part of the male public sphere.⁴¹⁹ With the creation of a new market for female patrons in the 1880s, saloon keepers began to transform their spaces to accommodate female patrons. Drinking was moved to barrooms in the saloon,

⁴¹⁷ Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1991), 221.

⁴¹⁸ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 221.

⁴¹⁹ Peiss, “Commercial Leisure,” 109.

while back rooms were redesigned to accommodate vaudeville performances for working-class audiences.⁴²⁰ Though the vaudeville stages in saloons remained primarily male spaces, vaudeville soon spread to larger theaters and theater circuits. However, many vaudevilles and burlesque theaters kept their connection with saloons. In Kansas City, a few vaudevilles even retained a connecting door to a neighboring saloon into the early twentieth century.⁴²¹

Vaudeville was one of the most popular working-class amusements in Kansas City. Kansas City's thirty-six week vaudeville season extended from September to June. The vaudeville theaters were concentrated in the city's central business district near the tenements and cable car lines.⁴²² The vaudeville theaters with the largest audiences were the Orpheum at Ninth Street and the Globe Theater on Walnut at Thirteenth- only eight blocks from the red-light district.⁴²³ The Orpheum Vaudeville Circuit, a vaudeville company that toured the United States, leased the Orpheum Theater beginning in 1898.⁴²⁴ Patrons at the Orpheum paid twenty-five cents for a balcony seat, and fifty cents for a floor seat at the show. Eventually, the Orpheum was relocated to Baltimore Street to cater to visitors staying at the Muehlebach and Baltimore hotels.⁴²⁵ Performers were quartered at the Centropolis Hotel at Fifth and Walnut inside the red-light district,

⁴²⁰ Peiss, "Commercial Leisure," 110.

⁴²¹ Board of Public Welfare, *The Kansas City Child: A Handbook of the Child Welfare Exhibit* (Kansas City, MO: Board of Public Welfare, 1911), 48.

⁴²² Havig, "Mass Commercial Amusements," 327.

⁴²³ Recreation Department, *Annual Report*, 205.

⁴²⁴ Recreation Department, *Annual Report*, 205.

⁴²⁵ DeAngelo, *What About Kansas City*, 115.

where there were “special rates for show people and bands.”⁴²⁶ Another vaudeville company was the Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA), which booked African-American performers. The western base and terminus of operations for TOBA was Kansas City, and many of the jazz scene performers who made their home in Kansas City did so by spending the off-season in the city.⁴²⁷ According to Kansas City jazz musician Ernest Williams, vaudeville shows (which included TOBA shows) were variety shows:

You got the show where them skits, have to do so much in so many acts and then get the, dance, girls dance, actors dance, got a dancing act, like you’d have the jugglers or something out there, you know. You see, he’d juggle that. And then they’d have a scene, or a comedy, have a whole lot a comedy. See, like Strawberry Rush and them used to box that, have a boxcar scene, where the guys like to ride the freight train, got it, got the electricity fixed up so you see, the guy, you get the guy say I’m from Oklahoma, I’m getting off the spit,’ and it would fire up and do all this kind of stuff. Then after that, the other acts, go on with the show, change the clothes.⁴²⁸

Vaudeville theaters in Kansas City also hosted cabarets and minstrel shows. Minstrelsy had its foundations in the Jacksonian period, when four white performers developed a caricature of the freed, urban ex-slave.⁴²⁹ Minstrelsy gained popularity in Kansas City through the early decades of the twentieth century, probably due to the continuing importance of TOBA, which featured minstrel singers for many years. Its popularity in Kansas City was a reflection of

⁴²⁶ Ken Weyand, “Electric Park: Kansas City’s glowing attraction of 1899-1925,” p. 11, Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Missouri.

⁴²⁷ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 12.

⁴²⁸ Nathan W. Pearson Jr. and Howard Litwak, Interview with Ernest Williams, 18 May 1977, transcript, private collection of Nathan W. Pearson Jr., Greenwich, Connecticut, 40.

⁴²⁹ Alexander Sexton, “Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology,” *American Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (March 1975), 5-8.

the national popularity of minstrelsy in post Civil War America. By the early twentieth century, however, minstrelsy had taken on a new meaning. With the rise of modern masculinity, black men were increasingly portrayed as libidinous creatures drawn to white women.⁴³⁰ Minstrelsy featured black men cross-dressing and wearing exaggerated makeup, so the minstrel shows of the early twentieth century distorted gender and racial stereotypes.⁴³¹ Minstrel shows included men in blackface as the primary characters and choruses, and their performances were mostly song-and-dance shows.⁴³² The result was that minstrelsy stripped away the image of the libidinous black male, and put in its place an effeminate and weakened “song and dance man.” Evidently, the most popular minstrel show in Kansas City was U.S. Epperson’s Megaphone Mastodon Minstrels, featuring stage costumes and comedians.⁴³³ A special city-wide minstrelsy performance by U.S. Epperson’s minstrels was held in Kansas City’s first Convention Hall on April 3, 1899. This show was produced by William Rockhill Nelson, an upper-class city leader and owner of the Kansas City *Star* newspaper. A benefit for Nelson’s planned public bath, the 1899 show attracted 15,000 people and ended with a parade of local citizens and minstrels in silk costumes and blackface. The

⁴³⁰ Stanley O. Gaines Jr., “Sexuality and Race,” in *The African American Experience: An Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide*, Arvarh E. Strickland and Robert E. Weems Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 319.

⁴³¹ The History Project, *Improper Bostonians*, 111.

⁴³² Crabb, “A History of Music,” 55.

⁴³³ Crabb, “A History of Music,” 55.

day-long performance raised nearly twelve thousand dollars for Nelson's project.⁴³⁴

Cabarets also experimented with gender roles and stereotypes, but in a very different method than contemporary minstrel shows. While minstrel performers were seen as race illusionists, cabaret performers challenged dominant gender constructs in the early twentieth century.⁴³⁵ Cabarets featured floor shows and singers, as well as a public dance floor. The mixed-gender contact in the cabaret positioned the cabaret as a heteronormative space, while challenging that position by placing women in a position of power. Cabaret performers were often women who were portrayed by critics as asexual beings. That portrayal resulted in the identification of cabarets with homosexuality, since the discursive formation of the New Man and New Woman represented asexual women as something outside the interests of modern men. Cabarets were open to diverse populations, but their environment of sexual expressiveness and experimentation attracted a working-class crowd. Quickly, critics of the cabaret derided such establishments as lower-class spaces that were "influencing and infecting good women of better classes."⁴³⁶ Cabaret was essentially a sensual space for mixed-gender crowds. Unlike vaudeville and minstrel shows, children were not allowed in cabarets. Performance in cabarets took place on the same floor level as the audience.⁴³⁷ These conditions in the cabaret removed barriers between genders,

⁴³⁴ Crabb, "A History of Music," 55.

⁴³⁵ The History Project, *Improper Bostonians*, 11.

⁴³⁶ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 81.

⁴³⁷ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 113.

and destroyed the illusory barrier between performance and reality that legitimate theater institutionalized. Victorian critics saw the cabaret as a much bigger threat to gender separation than vaudeville or minstrel shows. “The ultimate fear was that once off the pedestal,” wrote historian Lewis Erenberg, “respectable married and single women would find lower-class men in the cabaret better able to satisfy their cravings for pleasure.”⁴³⁸ Cabarets were financially and morally marginalized, and tended to occupy small spaces that could quickly empty in cases of a police raid.⁴³⁹ Vaudeville performers in that period worked sexual language and homosexual references into their acts as well.⁴⁴⁰ According to jazz historian Ronald Morris, Kansas City likely had more cabarets than other jazz scene cities. Kansas City’s geography and association with Western America meant that there were several clubs with few amenities, and that cabarets opened and closed quickly.⁴⁴¹

Even more transgressive than cabarets were working-class burlesques. Beginning in the 1880s, plays and burlesque acts increasingly portrayed sexual behavior.⁴⁴² While most vaudeville theaters in Kansas City were built near Market Square area, burlesque theaters were deeper in the working-class districts, usually near the brothels of the railroad district. According to the Board of

⁴³⁸ Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 83.

⁴³⁹ Kenney, “Historical Context,” 107-108.

⁴⁴⁰ Kathy Peiss, “‘Charity Girls and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working-Class Sexuality, 1880-1920,” in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 59.

⁴⁴¹ Morris, *Wait Until Dark*, 187.

⁴⁴² Andrea Friedman, *Prurient Interests: Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909-1945*, Columbia Studies in Contemporary American History, eds. William E. Leuchtenberg and Alan Brinkley (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 8.

Welfare statistics, 22,000 Kansas Citians attended burlesque performances weekly.⁴⁴³ The two leading Kansas City burlesques were the Free and Easy Theater at Fourth Street and Main, and the Theater Comique located next-door to the Jackson County Railroad Stables at Fourth Street and Walnut.⁴⁴⁴ The Theater Comique mixed burlesque with bawdy plays such as “Forbidden Pleasures” and “Mountain Meadow Massacre.”⁴⁴⁵ Another Kansas City burlesque was Standard Theater, which opened in 1900 with the Fulton and Miaco’s Jolly Windows Grass troupe. The performance featured blue humor comedians and female “leg art.”⁴⁴⁶ One Board of Welfare inspector discussed the Standard and Century theaters as morally dangerous:

Every report from the two burlesque theaters was similar in one respect. They tell of the exhibition teaming with salacious lines and situations suggestive of immorality in song and act appealing to the sensual. Scenes carefully worked out by skilled directors convey clearly the lewd story without giving evidence that would stand in court. The entire moral trend of burlesque is downward.⁴⁴⁷

While minstrel shows exaggerated gender stereotypes, and cabarets challenged gender roles, the burlesque theaters solidified them.

The leading discourse about gender roles in the burlesque was not only from Victorian morality, but from working-class masculinity. According to working-class male patrons, upper-class white men fell prey to the feminine wiles of female burlesque performers, while working-class men retained power at

⁴⁴³ Recreation Department, *Annual Report*, 205.

⁴⁴⁴ DeAngelo, *What About Kansas City*, 114.

⁴⁴⁵ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 86.

⁴⁴⁶ Luce, “A History of the Standard Theatre,” 51.

⁴⁴⁷ Recreation Department, *Annual Report*, 271.

home. This reification of masculinity positioned upper-class men as effeminate, giving working-class men across racial lines subcultural power that they lacked outside the spaces and homes of the working class. The phrase “gold-digger,” which suggested a working-class woman seeking financial gain through liaisons with a wealthy man, was coined in the burlesque theater of the 1890s and 1900s.⁴⁴⁸ Burlesque was increasingly seen by upper-class reformers as something to “clean-up,” and burlesque performers were portrayed by the bourgeoisie as prostitutes, not performers.⁴⁴⁹ Burlesque posters, produced by working-class burlesque owners showing upper-class white men as overweight fools unable to control themselves in the presence of wily burlesque girls intensified the criticism. As burlesque historian Robert Allen wrote:

It [the burlesque performer’s sexual appeal] can be used to obtain the trappings of the high life through an inversion of ‘normal’ sexual power relations: the woman is clearly in control of the situation; the wealthy admirer is clearly taken advantage of.⁴⁵⁰

According to jazz musician Ernest Williams, cabaret and burlesque was not simply a source of entertainment in the jazz scene: it was a source of employment for the wives and sisters of African American male jazz performers. Williams told interviewers that his wife, along with the wife and sister of musician Virgil Hall, performed as dancers in Kansas City burlesques and cabarets such as the Gaiety and the Midland.⁴⁵¹ In fact, Williams suggested that Kansas City women who worked in burlesque frequently worked as prostitutes as

⁴⁴⁸ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 201.

⁴⁴⁹ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 219..

⁴⁵⁰ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 214.

⁴⁵¹ Pearson and Litwak, interview with Ernest Williams, 41.

well. “Some of ‘em used to do it, I know some of ‘em used to do it right here, down here,” Williams told interviewers.⁴⁵²

Gender Impersonation in the Jazz Scene

Of all the performance spaces represented as “unacceptable” by traditional historians the jazz scene, the most historically marginalized and forgotten spaces are the gender impersonator clubs. Found in a variety of cabarets, vaudevilles, taverns and theaters, gender impersonation was of major importance in the jazz scene. In the dominant discourse of jazz history, the sexualized performances in cabarets and burlesques seldom appear, or appear only as an implied colorful backdrop to the dominant narrative. Minstrelsy is portrayed as a precursor to jazz music, but not connected to either performance or to the dominant concepts of masculinity in the jazz scene.⁴⁵³ In fact, the grand narrative of jazz scene history portrays the subculture of working-class sexualized performances, as well as same-sex city dwellers and their spaces, in a totalizing manner. Sexuality is most often totalized into a single image: the buffet flat or the rent party. A space of both sexuality and a challenge of social convention, buffet flats or rent parties were indeed a part of the jazz scene. The analysis of sexuality in the jazz scene, however, is more often than not symbolized by a poorly understood single phenomenon. Buffet flats are positioned as the single space where alternative

⁴⁵² Pearson and Litwak, interview with Ernest Williams, 41.

⁴⁵³ Annemarie Bean, “Transgressing the Gender Divide: The Female Impersonator in Nineteenth Century Blackface Minstrelsy,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in 19th Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara eds. (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 255.

sexuality, sexuality that did not embrace the New Man/New Woman dichotomy, was welcome. At the same time, buffet flats are frequently portrayed with titillation and a proverbial “wink,” as though they need not be taken seriously as an aspect of the jazz scene. As jazz scholar David Levering Lewis wrote: “Social analysis, whenever it ventured beyond the Cotton Club, pretty much contented itself with the fabled Dark Tower and the rent party as sufficient paradigms.”⁴⁵⁴ A good example is from an article by Ellen McBreen about Harlem artist Richard Bruce Nugent: “Nugent’s openness was more like those Harlemites ‘in the life,’ who were indeed publicly shouting ‘I love prick’ in the cellar clubs, buffet flats, and rent parties of Harlem’s thriving entertainment scene.”⁴⁵⁵ This totalizing effect is evident in the written history of Kansas City’s jazz scene as well. Scholar Norman Pearson wrote that prostitution, drag acts, and sex shows were not directly related to jazz.⁴⁵⁶ Kansas City jazz historian Chuck Haddix told the author that shows that included female impersonators were very common, but not very important to the “Jazz Age.”⁴⁵⁷

If female impersonation was common, then how did it become unimportant? What was “in the life?” Does gender impersonation represent the public appearance of a queer subculture in jazz scene cities?⁴⁵⁸ Historians of gay

⁴⁵⁴ David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was En Vogue* (New York: Penguin, 1997), xxvii.

⁴⁵⁵ Ellen McBreen, “Biblical Gender Bending in Harlem: The Queer Performance of Nugent’s Salome,” *Art Journal* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 1998), 23.

⁴⁵⁶ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 100.

⁴⁵⁷ Clifford, discussion with Chuck Haddix, April 2004. The author would like to thank Chuck Haddix for copies of newspaper clippings about gender impersonators in Kansas City.

⁴⁵⁸ The word “queer” has multiple meanings, both historical and political, that make it a highly problematic term. Its use here is not meant as an ahistorical referent, but rather as a way of

and lesbian history have uncovered what they have termed strong “queer” subcultures in many cities during the jazz scene, and much of their evidence has relied on accounts of gender impersonation. According to historian Sharon Ullman, gender impersonation likely marked a “private practice” of homosexuality in the early years of the twentieth century.⁴⁵⁹ David Hurewitz, in his book *Bohemian New York*, suggested that female impersonator was “emblematic” of early homosexual subcultures. “That Eltinge was both homosexually active and a female impersonator,” wrote Hurewitz, “does not make him a ‘fairy,’ though.”⁴⁶⁰ The best known of these works is *Gay New York* by George Chauncey, who clearly located a world of homosexual people “in the life” in New York before World War II in spaces such as Harlem drag balls. What jazz historians have often silenced is the important role that these subcultures played in the jazz scenes of America. Even clearer is the fact that the homosexual subculture of the jazz scene was centered on cabarets, taverns and

discussing non-heteronormative behavior and performance in the jazz scene period. The term queer was not unknown in the jazz scenes of America. Biographer David Hadju suggested that queer meant “unusual” or “eccentric” in the 1920s, but that its use to describe same-sex sexuality was not unheard of. According to David Hurewitz, historian Sharon Ullman found archival records indicating that queer was a common subcultural, insider term for homosexual men in Los Angeles in the 1920s and 1930s. In this study, the definition of queer follows historian Nan Alamilla Boyd in positioning “queer” as a signifier of any behavior marked by sexual and gender transgression of the dominant norms, and therefore anyone resisting heteronormativity in the jazz scene. See also David Hadju, *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1996); David Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁴⁵⁹ Sharon Ullman, “‘The Twentieth Century Way’:” Female Impersonation and Sexual Practice in Turn-of-the-Century America,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 5, no. 4 (April 1995), 547.

⁴⁶⁰ David Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 37. Hurewitz’s use of the term “fairy” is from George Chauncey’s *Gay New York*, where Chauncey wrote that the identification as a “fairy” was for early 20th century men in New York City who performed feminine gender characteristics as a way to signal their sexual desire for men. See also George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

neighborhood enclaves. Historian Barbara Kukla explained the entertainment spaces were a means of social survival for African Americans and sexual minorities in jazz scene Newark.⁴⁶¹ In her study of early San Francisco, Nan Alamilla Boyd explained that queer communities created their own social world in San Francisco, and then fought to secure that space by preventing “outsiders” from entering.⁴⁶² According to Boyd, the queer community of the jazz scene in San Francisco developed as early as 1905, and was centered on gender impersonation clubs and bars that “offered practical and ideological responses to policing” that members of the queer community dealt with in daily life.⁴⁶³ Such worldmaking was not limited to San Francisco. Art historian Ellen McBreen explained that the queer community was central to the jazz scene in Harlem. While African Americans in Harlem used the jazz scene as both a community creation and a vehicle for political agency, homosexuality in Harlem was as tightly policed as any other city. As McBreen wrote:

Harlem society had, in fact, both embraces and rejected its thriving gay community. The same papers that ran front-page, celebratory stories on drag ball winners also ran articles in support of the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell’s much publicized efforts to out and banish homosexual ministers from Harlem pulpits during the early 1930s. Other [Harlem] Renaissance critics campaigned vigorously for the projection of an image of the New Negro that would combat stereotypes of the lascivious and primitive sexual Other. *Collier’s* magazine labeled Harlem a ‘synonym for naughtiness’ in 1933, reflecting the idea that Harlem itself was an escapist sexual commodity for downtown whites, many of them gay men, wishing to indulge in a rebel and exotic sexuality without fear of censure by their own social group. Not surprisingly, Harlem’s cultural leaders

⁴⁶¹ Barbara Kukla, *Swing City: Newark Nightlife, 1925-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 1.

⁴⁶² Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 14.

⁴⁶³ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 26.

sought to counter this racist and touristic characterization. Homosexuals and gender impersonators were afforded a good deal of tolerance in Harlem, then, so long as their antics were confined to the space of performance. For many prominent critics, however, decadence, perversity, and blatant homosexuality were unacceptable themes in the higher forms of art and literature that they hoped could advance the race.⁴⁶⁴

As that quotation demonstrates, gender impersonation was seen as an indicator of queerness, even though the performers themselves were not necessarily homosexual. In addition, much of this identity building seemed to hinge on queer sex tourism in jazz scene spaces. “Slumming” in jazz scene spaces represented both a deterioration of moral and economic hegemony, and an adventure in the borderlands of acceptability. Some whites engaged in queer sex tourism may, indeed, have gone slumming in search of sexual encounters with other queer city dwellers. Many others, however, were interested only in the exoticism represented by slumming. By engaging in queer sex tourism in the jazz scene, whites “slumming” in search of the exotic equated queer sex with racial segregation and miscegenation, since queer enclaves were usually in racially mixed vice districts. “Slumming turned on the asymmetry between the slummer and the object,” wrote Kevin Mumford, “but remember that some slummers were sympathetic outsiders with a genuine sense of affinity whereas others were more concerned with exploitation than appreciation.”⁴⁶⁵

The silencing of homosexual subcultures in the jazz scene was, therefore, directly linked to twentieth century masculinity, African American rejection of

⁴⁶⁴ McBreen, “Biblical Gender Bending,” 24.

⁴⁶⁵ Mumford, *Interzones*, 143.

primitivist representation, and the representation of jazz as art. As Scott DeVeaux explained, the debate over the history of jazz resulted in its representation as an American art form. Homosexuality and gender impersonation were portrayed and positioned in the jazz scene as anything except art. At the same time, jazz history's attachment to the "great man" theory relied on the masculinity of its heroes. While scholars of post-Stonewall gay and lesbian history have discussed the worldmaking role of bars and clubs, jazz historians have continued to marginalize the role of the possibility of queer community in the jazz scene.⁴⁶⁶

Given the work of other historians, it seems that the key to excavating the history of possibly queer communities in the jazz scene is gender impersonators, most commonly female impersonators. Whether gender impersonators had on-stage representations identical to their off-stage identities is unknown, but their representation of gender transgression in jazz scene spaces served as a signpost, an indicator on the city's jazz scene map for members of the city's queer individuals to locate and interact. Homosexual city dwellers saw in gender impersonation a representation of their own desires, and identified spaces that hosted impersonators as "queer spaces."⁴⁶⁷ The result was the policing of gender impersonation and the clubs that hosted such performances, from the jazz scene through its historical representation. Gender impersonators "walked a line

⁴⁶⁶ Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin, 1994).

⁴⁶⁷ Ullman, " 'The Twentieth Century Way' ," 591-596. Ullman also explains that this spatialization of queerness caused problems for police, who were troubled when the "deviants" they were sent to arrest (specifically performance patrons) were not dressed in drag.

between respectability and deviance.”⁴⁶⁸ They embodied the increased scrutiny of homosexual behavior that accompanied the rise of masculinity, but, at the same time female impersonators were imitators of the counterpart to that masculinity: hyper-femininity. Last but certainly not least, these performers’ stage personas were not literal translations of their off-stage personas. The audience was left without any real knowledge of the queerness as a possible identity, faced with only a ambiguous representation of what *they* saw. In this way, female impersonators represented the development of a possible queer community and changing discourses about gender, even if they did not identify with the gender identity they represented. They secured spaces for displays of queerness such as cabarets and bars by presenting an illusion, one that fed into both the popular conception of heterosexuality and the subjugated knowledge of queers “in the life.” This was indeed worldmaking, but in a way that used space as both offense and defense. For female impersonators and their peers in the queer jazz scene, the social geography of queers “in the life” was one where being *onstage* was just as political and subcultural as life *offstage*. Since gender impersonation represented queerness in mainstream heteronormative culture, historians took gender impersonation as an indicator of homosexuality. By placing primary importance on the masculine performance of the “art that was jazz,” jazz scholars continued to silence the subjugated knowledge of the queerness in the jazz scene by subsuming the history of gender impersonation. In order to excavate the

⁴⁶⁸ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 33.

importance of gender impersonation, scholars must understand the role of worldmaking *within* the systems of power/knowledge during the jazz scene. As critical geographer Donald Moore wrote:

If critical analysis dispenses with the notion of an authentic insurrectionary space ‘outside’ of power—nurturing either an originary and insubordinate individual consciousness ‘offstage’ or sustaining the ‘autonomy’ of insurgent collectivities—then how does one begin to conceptualize sites of resistance; and from what cultural ground? What, in turn, do such theoretical moves imply for understanding the polyvalent politics of place?⁴⁶⁹

Along with the role of female impersonation onstage came jazz music. As Bernard Gendron demonstrated in his book *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, popular music is sometimes a vehicle of cultural empowerment. At the same time, Gendron explained that as some music is appropriated as “high culture” or “art,” more popular manifestations of music are portrayed as “vulgar” due to their popularity, and their role as vehicles of empowerment are subsumed.⁴⁷⁰ According to historian Marybeth Hamilton, female impersonation was incredibly popular in the “Jazz Age.”⁴⁷¹ In fact, 1900-1930 is considered the “golden age of female impersonation” by theater historians.⁴⁷² There can be little doubt that gender impersonation involved the music later called “jazz” by historians, as it was played in cabarets and clubs. With the codification of jazz history, however, the popularity of gender impersonation was marked as offensive

⁴⁶⁹ Moore, “Remapping Resistance,” 93.

⁴⁷⁰ Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, 9.

⁴⁷¹ Marybeth Hamilton, “‘I’m the Queen of the Bitches’: Female Impersonation and Mae West’s *Pleasure Man*,” in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, Lesley Ferris ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), 115.

⁴⁷² Drorbaugh, “Sliding Scales,” 124.

and marginalized. Since those performances, that *world*, was centered in specific jazz scene spaces, those spaces were ignored and silenced as well. This is the case in Kansas City's jazz scene history. As Haddix admitted, female impersonation was a popular component of the jazz scene in Kansas City, but its position in the city is completely subsumed in the city's jazz canon. At the same time, the possibility of queerness practically erased from Kansas City's written history. Instead, Kansas City "jazz music" has been positioned as a precursor to bebop and therefore high art, while the more "vulgar" performance of gender impersonation is denied.

What made female impersonation so important to worldmaking was the fact that impersonators created more questions than they answered. While impersonators supposedly symbolized the transgression of heteronormativity, they in fact destabilized the very boundaries of "inversion."⁴⁷³ In this sense, gender impersonation was internally contradictory- and had its biggest implications onstage.⁴⁷⁴ As scholar Elizabeth Drorbaugh wrote:

Mimesis in gender impersonation positions spectators to recognize and verify the 'truth' of the sex-gender system's reproduction while it also elides the system, since the truth of gender is produced by as well as on the inappropriate body. The fascination with the illusion begins to supersede the real even as it depends on it.⁴⁷⁵

First, gender impersonators occupied an intermediate identity, somewhere in the spectrum between heterosexual and homosexual. While audiences (and

⁴⁷³ Drorbaugh, "Sliding Scales," 126.

⁴⁷⁴ Laurence Senelick, "Introduction," in *Gender In Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts* (London: University Press of New England, 1992), ix.

⁴⁷⁵ Drorbaugh, "Sliding Scales," 138.

future historians) assumed that impersonators were homosexual, such was not the case. One example is Julian Eltinge, a famous female impersonator at the turn of the twentieth century. Eltinge was an extremely popular impersonator, but offstage he loudly proclaimed his masculinity and heterosexuality. As such, Eltinge occupied a middle territory between Victorian womanhood “and the newer ideal of ‘masculinized’ femininity” inherent in the New Woman.⁴⁷⁶ Perry Hammond, a theater critic who wrote about Eltinge’s performances, coined a new term to describe his persona: *ambisextrous*.⁴⁷⁷ Female impersonators who did not reify masculinity offstage were, however, portrayed not as impersonators but as degenerate “fairies.”⁴⁷⁸ Historian Robert Toll, a scholar of late Victorian female impersonation, further explained the transgressive zone that impersonators occupied between heterosexual and homosexual. According to Toll, the popularity of female impersonation was specifically based on the fact that the actual *performance* was not transgressive at all until the 1930s.⁴⁷⁹ While the offstage life of the impersonator was seen as degenerate and dangerous, the onstage persona displayed a hyper-feminine understanding of dominant culture. “Billing themselves as ‘female illusionists,’ impersonators were lauded as skilled magicians,” wrote historian Marybeth Hamilton, “able to conjure themselves

⁴⁷⁶ Laurence Senelick, “Lady and the Tramp: Drag Differentials in the Progressive Era,” in *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1992), 29.

⁴⁷⁷ Senelick, “Lady and the Tramp,” 29.

⁴⁷⁸ Senelick, “Lady and the Tramp,” 37.

⁴⁷⁹ Hamilton, “‘I’m the Queen,” 108.

across gender boundaries that all observers believed to be fixed and immutable.”⁴⁸⁰

Did gender impersonation signal a queer subculture, as other historians suggest, or did it exist in a more transgressive, marginal zone of commodification than that simple binary suggests? According to theater historian Kristina Straub, gender impersonation and its popularity must be understood as a function of what Foucault termed *scopophilia*. Scopophilia, or the obsessive pleasure of looking that relates directly to the subject-position of the spectator.⁴⁸¹ Through this desire to look, to be a voyeur, spectators form a discourse between the performance and themselves. According to Foucault, such scopophilia was compelled by “an unacknowledged search for illicit pleasure and a desire which cannot be fulfilled.”⁴⁸² It was this search for pleasures, this commodification of desires, that spectators to gender impersonation in Kansas City sought. According to Straub, in this field of desires and pleasures, discourse about the sexuality of performers became a site of hegemonic struggle about definitions of sexuality and gender.⁴⁸³ At the same time, however, the marketing of gender impersonation depended upon the concept that such performances were contained in the space of the theater.⁴⁸⁴ It was in the jazz scene spaces of gender impersonation, therefore, that sexuality was both contained and displayed, both discussed and silenced.

“Theatrical cross-dressing,” wrote Straub, “constitutes a site of cultural resistance

⁴⁸⁰ Hamilton, “‘I’m the Queen,” 111.

⁴⁸¹ Hall, *Representation*, 268.

⁴⁸² Hall, *Representation*, 268.

⁴⁸³ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 20.

⁴⁸⁴ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 129.

to this narrowing of masculine and feminine down to certain opposite, prescribed roles, even as it serves as one of the grounds of its construction.”⁴⁸⁵

As a site of resistance, spaces where gender impersonation was performed may have developed into what Deleuze and Guattari termed “uncertain desire-zones.”⁴⁸⁶ These zones contained subordinate groups who sought to defend their territory by representing an alternative to hegemonic social systems.⁴⁸⁷ Consequently, gender impersonation may have served as a symbol of an alternative, queer subcultural zone that was just beginning to develop. As a subculture nurtured and created by the working-class, queer communities existed in inner city enclaves of clubs and homes that heterosexual knew little about.⁴⁸⁸ In what theorist Jared Sexton proposed as “fantasy support of the public face,” gender impersonators exhibited the possibility of a queer community’s prepolitical struggle in a way that defended heteronormativity.⁴⁸⁹ As such, gender impersonation did not exist outside the mainstream, or solely inside a queer enclave. Instead, it occupied a space (both literally and figuratively) of desire-zone. Gender impersonators were represented as the public face of queerness, and in doing so corrupted the very gender system their personas represented. Queer spectators sought, in the spaces of gender impersonation performance, the

⁴⁸⁵ Straub. *Sexual Suspects*, 143.

⁴⁸⁶ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 99-100.

⁴⁸⁷ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 114.

⁴⁸⁸ Jay Hatheway, *The Gilded Age Construction of Modern American Homophobia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 59.

⁴⁸⁹ Jared Sexton, “There Is No Interracial Sexual Relationship: Race, Love, and Sexuality in the Multiracial Movement,” in *The Problems of Resistance: Studies in Alternate Political Cultures*, Radical Philosophy Today, vol. 2, eds. Bat-Ami Bar On and Andrew Light (New York: Humanity Books, 2001), 145.

representation of their own desires. “Seeing the other is a social form of self-reproduction,” wrote scholar of performance Peggy Phelan, “For in looking at/for the other, we seek to re-present ourselves.”⁴⁹⁰

As Foucault explained, once it was identified as a domain to control “sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals to place themselves under surveillance.”⁴⁹¹ Gender impersonators were under constant surveillance onstage, by the audiences and fellow performers. The theater, however, was a space of illusion. Whether that theater was on a cabaret floor, a tavern table, or a legitimate stage, the illusion of theater meant that surveillance itself could be corrupted. This is why the concept of gender impersonation as a function the liminal desire-zone is so vital. Anthropologist Victor Turner first coined the term “liminality” to describe marginalized subcultures in non-Western tribal societies. Turner identified two types of liminality: the liminal and the liminoid. According to Turner, *liminal* behavior conforms to cultural norms and creates a temporary, ritualized space for cultural alternatives.⁴⁹² Turner identified cultural definitions of witchcraft as an example of the liminal. *Liminoid*, on the other hand, are those behaviors that satirize the liminal outside of a temporary ritual. In the liminal, any movement into a transgressive zone is entirely temporary, while liminoid transformations are reflections of desires that do not revert back to a mainstream knowledge of

⁴⁹⁰ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 21.

⁴⁹¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I, *Introduction*, 116.

⁴⁹² Victor Turner, *From Ritual To Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).

acceptability. According to theater historian Lawrence Senelick, the theater was a liminoid space.⁴⁹³ Gender impersonation, framed by Senelick as drag, reflected the desires of the queer community and was far from temporary. In fact, gender impersonation may have been the first political movement of a growing queer subculture. As Senelick wrote: “the various denials and sublimations of self required by the dominant culture could be discarded under the aegis of this licensed disguise.”⁴⁹⁴

While gender impersonation remained popular in the jazz scene, it was increasingly policed and attacked by mainstream reformers. Part of this attack on gender impersonation was because Americans began to link impersonation to prostitution. In terms of social geography, this was not a difficult connection to make. Cabarets and clubs that featured gender impersonation were often in or along the borders of a city’s red-light district, “at the intersection between vice and reform.”⁴⁹⁵ Queer communities were often located in red-light districts as well, because such districts were predicated on the concept of silence placed there on behalf of sexual tourists. Beginning in the 1930s, however, gender impersonation was increasingly seen as dangerous outside its connections to prostitution. As vice investigations occurred across America in the jazz scene, investigators began to connect impersonation with the subculture it represented. According to Marybeth Hamilton, the inherently working-class location of queer

⁴⁹³ Senelick, “Introduction,” xii.

⁴⁹⁴ Senelick, “Lady and the Tramp,” 41.

⁴⁹⁵ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 26.

communities added to the vehement insistence on impersonators as dangerous.⁴⁹⁶ No longer seen as an illusion, gender impersonators became identified as an attack on the masculine underpinnings of American culture. Impersonators were marked as degenerate, and their performance was positioned as a clear indicator of their sexual orientation. As anthropologist Esther Newton explained in her 1970s study of drag performers in New York: “The work [female impersonation] is defined as ‘queer’ in itself. The assumption upon which both performers and audiences operate is that no one but a ‘queer’ would want to perform as a woman.”⁴⁹⁷ Once impersonation was stigmatized as a homosexual practice, it lost both its popularity and its position in the jazz scene. The resulting stigma of impersonation as “popular” and “gay” meant its marginalization in the written history of jazz. Gender impersonation was banned by municipal and state authorities as part of a larger crackdown on homosexual culture that occurred nationwide during the Depression.⁴⁹⁸ “Impersonators were no longer seen as performers—they were performing homosexuals,” wrote Marybeth Hamilton. “In a culture that demonized homosexuality, that was enough to exclude them all from the mainstream, to put them out of business once and for all.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Hamilton, “‘I’m the Queen,” 116.

⁴⁹⁷ Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 7.

⁴⁹⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 331-354.

⁴⁹⁹ Marybeth Hamilton, *When I’m Bad I’m Better: Mae West, Sex, and American Entertainment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 149.

Female Impersonation in Kansas City's Jazz Scene

Kansas City audiences were not new to gender-bending theater performance since the city hosted Oscar Wilde along with myriad other “breeches” actors. Outside the legitimate theater, however, the first appearance of female impersonation in Kansas City is impossible to pinpoint. Gender impersonators were doubtless part of vaudeville, cabaret and burlesque performances in the city, and they were certainly part of minstrel shows in the city. What makes the case in Kansas City so interesting is that a municipal statute barring cross-dressing and gender impersonation was on the books as early as the 1880s- not the 1920s and 1930s like other urban jazz scenes. This early policing of gender crossing is inextricably linked to Kansas City's location in the American west. According to Lawrence Senelick, the American west was a “breeding ground” for gender crossing, because the limited female population in western towns created a general acceptance of female impersonation.⁵⁰⁰ At the same time, the women on the western frontier often engaged in transvestism as a way to gain upward mobility.⁵⁰¹ The municipal statute that policed gender crossing in Kansas City was City Ordinance No. 291, codified in the 1880s.

No person shall be or appear in or upon any street, avenue, alley, park, public place of place open to public view, in a state of nudity, or any dress not belonging to his or her sex, or in any indecent or lewd dress, or shall make any indecent exposure of his or her person, or be guilty of an unseemly obscene or filthy act, or any lewd, indecent, immoral or insulting conduct, language or behavior; or shall exhibit, circulate,

⁵⁰⁰ Senelick, “Lady and the Tramp,” 33.

⁵⁰¹ Laurence Senelick, “Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural Origins of Glamour Drag and Male Impersonation on the Nineteenth-Century Stage,” in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, Lesley Ferris ed. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 89.

contribute, sell, offer or expose for sale, or give or deliver to another, or cause the same to be done, any lewd, indecent or obscene book, picture, pamphlet, card, print, paper writing, mold, cast, figure or any other thing, or shall exhibit or perform, or cause or allow to be exhibited or performed, in or upon any house, building, lot or premise owned or occupied by him, or under his management or control, any lewd, indecent, or immoral play or other representation.⁵⁰²

Perhaps the first recorded female impersonator performance in Kansas City, however, was reported in the *Kansas City Star* in 1880. “As a female impersonator he draws a large salary and is a most remarkable success,” wrote the reporter in his article “Strange Men,” “but as a man he is a gigantic failure and not worth the powder he would blow his effeminate soul to heaven.”⁵⁰³ As Kristina Straub demonstrated, the representation of female impersonators as “failed men” was clearly connected to the discursive formation of masculinity. The very concept that these biological males were “failed men” acted as a mirror on masculinity, that both spatially and discursively identified such performers as feminine in appearance, and therefore perhaps in desire.⁵⁰⁴ Indeed, this mirror was also part of the marketability of gender impersonation. According to city ordinance No. 291 cross-dressing was illegal, but no attempt was made to halt the performance recorded in 1880. In fact, Kansas City’s reputation as a “wide open town” was predicated on the fact that any of the performances listed in Code 291 were perfectly allowed in *certain spaces* and as *nighttime entertainment*.

⁵⁰² Board of Public Welfare, *Fifth Annual Report*, 53.

⁵⁰³ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 87.

⁵⁰⁴ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 134.

The representation of female impersonators as failed men, indeed as failed *women*, appears again in a report in the *Kansas City Star* in 1927. In the anonymous report entitled “‘Sissies’ Brought In By Rude Police; Fined \$500 Each by Judge,” the representation of impersonators as feminine harkens back to Wilde’s identification as “too-too much.”

‘It was just too terrible, my dear!’ ‘The rude police have no sense of propriety,’ let the ‘sissies’ of the city tell it. When officers of the law raided a cabaret at 1520 East Twelfth street early yesterday morning, terror and consternation spread from manly breast to manly breast underneath the frilly garments of the feminine sex, worn for the evening’s pleasure.

When the last screams and squeals had coyly come forth from throats originally designed for some he-occupation like calling hogs, the police had seven men- six were all clad in dainty chiffon things, cute little pumps, silk hose and other frills.

Yesterday morning the sight of six men in flimsy clothing evidently had a bad effect on Judge Carlin P. Smith because he fined each of the frequenters \$500 each and also fined Ben Payne, the proprietor of the place, \$500. They are the heaviest fines ever assessed against frequenters of a cabaret.⁵⁰⁵

While it is unclear what the “sissies” and cabaret proprietor was fined for, it is clear that the men arrested did not follow the reporter’s definition of “men.” These men were a spectacle of coy squeals and dainty chiffon, hiding their manly breasts under layers of pleasure.

With the jazz scene in Kansas City came increased visibility of gender impersonators, especially female impersonators. Among the few sources of information about female impersonators in the Pearson and Litwak interview with musician Booker Washington. Washington played with the Bennie Moten

⁵⁰⁵ *Kansas City Star*, 21 January 1927.

Orchestra and the Kansas City Rockets, and frequently played at Kansas City clubs and cabarets. Washington remembered female impersonators in performance at the Spinning Wheel:

Washington: . . . we'd have different acts but really the place consist more of uh female impersonators.

Interviewer: Uh huh. Really?

Washington: They didn't publicize that, female impersonators.

Interviewer: That was kind of a featured act?

Washington: That was featured. Each one of them would do something different. They had a special to do, each one of them, see, but uh you never heard.

Interviewer: Would they do impersonations of people like Mae West or Greta Garbo?

Washington: Oh no! This is, they dressed like women. They stayed dressed like women. They went around throughout the crowd as women. They were "women." You know and they didn't, wasn't nothing uh, uh, funny or faking with them, they were genuine, see.

Interviewer: Would you only have them as performers or in other words would a lot of female impersonators just come to the Spinning Wheel as their favorite club?

Washington: No, these were hired. They were hired. This is uh, they had about oh there was between six and eight of them and they worked every night, see. In fact, uh, the most of them, that's where most of our money came from, the impersonators. They'd go out and do their numbers. And they would get tips and what tips they'd get, they'd throw in the "kitty."⁵⁰⁶

Washington's memories underscore the popularity of female impersonators in the Kansas City jazz scene. Not only were such performers "genuine," they were beneficial to the economic success of bands who depended on the money impersonators threw "in the kitty." Another jazz musician who recalled female impersonators was Herman Walder. Walder was one of the most

⁵⁰⁶ Booker Washington, interview with Norman Pearson Jr. and Howard Litwak, recorded 8 July 1977 (Goin' To Kansas City Collection, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri- Kansas City), 141-142.

famous saxophonists in Kansas City, and was considered by many a be a major influence on the bebop sound. In Walder's interview, he recalled an interest in a particular female impersonator.

Walder: Well, they had female impersonators, mostly.

Interviewer: Really?

Walder: And a – yeah, they was sharp, too, man. One cat like to got in a fight with one of them man—

Interviewer: Oh—yeah.

Walder: Yeah.

Interviewer: Who were the female impersonators, do you remember their names?

Walder: I don't remember none of their names. One of them was named Billy—that's one I'd like to have a fight over.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Walder: And they would come from out of town, not here.

Interviewer: Would they sing songs or would they dance?

Walder: Songs and dance. All kinds of artist and with these marionettes—

Interviewer: Marionettes?

Walder: Marionettes, yeah, man they had all kinds, man.

Interviewer: Was that a popular thing here in town, female impersonators?

Walder: Oh, yes. Still.⁵⁰⁷

According to Walder, female impersonator performances were advertised in newspapers. In what Walder referred to as a cabaret show, female impersonators performed 2-3 nights per week at the Spinning Wheel, with other floor shows the rest of the week.⁵⁰⁸ At one point Walder began to discuss Elmer Orrie, the leader of a four-member dance team that appeared weekly at the Spinning Wheel. Walder remembered that Orrie “got in a little bit of trouble at times because his features are kind of effeminate. He's a very delicate looking

⁵⁰⁷ Nathan W. Pearson Jr. and Howard Litwak, interview with Herman L. Walder, 8 June 1977, Going to Kansas City Collection, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri- Kansas City, 81-82.

⁵⁰⁸ Pearson and Litwak, interview with Herman Walder, 199.

man.”⁵⁰⁹ When interviewers asked Walder to elaborate, he explained the rotating schedule at the Spinning Wheel, and its connection to queer culture.

Walder: In other words, on Monday—so and so’s night—Tuesday—so and so’s—next was Men’s night—next is—is sissy night—they come on out then, you know. Yeah. . . Female impersonators, they come on out, man.

Interviewer: And that’s when a lot of homosexuals would come?

Walder: Yes, um huh—yeah. And everybody else—they’d come to see ‘em dance.

Interviewer: They’d come to see the act?

Walder: See the—what’s going on. . . Well, hell, mean, they was—look here, ah, people—we judge people by what they want to be themselves, you dig what I mean? And those people were good—they’re always good to you, dig what I mean, huh? They’d fill up the kitty man—if they make some money man, they’d come and fill up the kitty.⁵¹⁰

For Walder, impersonators were part of the jazz scene, and also perhaps a developing subculture. Walder’s recollections of “sissy night” and judging “people by what they want to be themselves” serve as interesting glimpses of queerness in the jazz scene.

As each of these interviews reveal, female impersonation was an important and popular part of Kansas City’s jazz scene. Perhaps most importantly, however, is the fact that female impersonation may have represented a possibly burgeoning subculture in the city. The jazz scene in Kansas City is not as simple as male performers and female performers, or the even more simplified jazz babies and virile musicians. Instead, the jazz scene was a mixture of gender identity and sexual orientation that written history has ignored. According to

⁵⁰⁹ Pearson and Litwak, interview with Herman Walder, 201.

⁵¹⁰ Pearson and Litwak, interview with Herman Walder, 202-203.

scholar Judith Butler drag performance such as those by female impersonators reflected the primary ways in which gender is/was *performance*: beyond the stage itself, gender combined “anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance.”⁵¹¹ Gender is an inherently repetitive ritual, which only becomes truth through the discursive production of subjects. “In imitating gender,” wrote Butler, “drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency.”⁵¹² In Kansas City, the female impersonators that were likely seen as a necessity in the pre-1880s frontier were increasingly a homosexual subject in the jazz scene. This subjectification not only defined “the homosexual” in Kansas City’s jazz scene, it defined and marked “the heterosexual” as well. While the development of queerness was part of the jazz scene, the increased backlash against female impersonation in the 1930s and 1940s drove that symbol of queerness further into its own spaces. For the master narrative of jazz, the influence of female impersonation and queerness on the jazz scene was ignored. In his book on Kansas city jazz, the only reference made to homosexuality by Ross Russell is a sentence about buffet flats on Truman Road. In Pearson’s *Goin’ To Kansas City*, female impersonation and homosexuality are included in the chapter “Wide Open Town,” a chapter that featured “a remarkable body of exotic, sensual, and lurid tales.”⁵¹³ Pearson wrote in his introduction to the chapter:

This chapter is split into four sections, covering each of the major vices that were prevalent in K.C. during those years: gangsters; gambling and

⁵¹¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.

⁵¹² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175.

⁵¹³ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 92.

gamblers; prostitution and other open sexuality; prohibition, bootlegging, and narcotics. Each was common in K.C. then and each had positive (or at least relatively benign) and negative aspects.⁵¹⁴

By positioning homosexuality and female impersonation as “other open sexuality,” and part of a list of jazz scene events that were clearly illegal, jazz historians such as Pearson made a clear statement. Gender transgression, in whatever form it appeared, was ancillary, illegal and immoral, and not an important piece of the jazz scene. Such representations of the historical jazz scene, however, do not reflect the contested spaces of gender and sexuality in the jazz scene. The popularity of gender impersonation, along with the changing discursive formations of gender and sexuality in the jazz scene, demonstrate that this particular “other” needs to be excavated and included in the narrative of jazz history. As jazz historian Krin Gabbard wrote: “Isn’t there some value in writing this other history of jazz?”⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁴ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 92.

⁵¹⁵ Gabbard, “Introduction,” 2.

CHAPTER 5:
PROSTITUTION IN KANSAS CITY'S JAZZ SCENE

As home to native farmers and immigrant meat packers, cowboys and congressmen, future presidents and prostitutes, Kansas City combined rural sensibility and urban modernity. In contrast to many eastern cities, Kansas City was an “eastern” city within a rural “western” world. Consequently, Kansas City became a city of titillation and adventure for rural and urban citizens alike during the jazz scene. The key ingredient in this adventure was sex tourism, which involved not only the burlesques of the city, but its red-light district. Integral to the sex tourism of Kansas City at the turn of the century was a growing number of working-class women, white, African American, and immigrant, whose contributions to the development of Kansas City’s jazz scene have been silenced and forgotten. Kansas City’s elite saw these women, who lived in a class where sexuality and labor were as much public as private, as immoral and unacceptable. Consequently, just like the official histories of other American cities, the stories of working class white, immigrant and African American Kansas City women were discarded in favor of histories of city bosses and cowboy culture. This chapter discusses Kansas City’s jazz scene red-light district, a subject previously treated by traditional jazz historians as an unimportant backdrop of the jazz scene.

It will also explore the influence of sex tourism in Kansas City's jazz scene, and the ways in which the district of sex tourism and sex work in the city was a site of worldmaking.

Sex Tourism and the Jazz Scene

While prostitution was an integral part of American jazz scenes, the role of sex tourism as an economic and social factor in the development of jazz scenes has attracted little attention from traditional jazz historians. More often than not, prostitution is relegated to the backdrop of the jazz scene by the authors of the jazz canon, and sex tourism is represented as an exotic factor of jazz scene life that was simply indicative of the vice of "wide open" towns. While the best known example of this marginalization of sex tourism is Storyville in New Orleans, such marginalization is a factor in the master narrative of Kansas City's jazz scene as well. In his book *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest*, Russell mentions sex tourism only as a part of the Pendergast backdrop with its "all hours gambling and prostitution."⁵¹⁶ According to Pearson, vice was inherent in Kansas City during the height of the jazz scene, but he did not discuss how, or where, vice intersected with the jazz scene.⁵¹⁷ In the recent work by Driggs and Haddix, the representation of sex tourism and sex workers as background is especially clear. Driggs and Haddix discuss the red-light district of Kansas City's jazz scene sparingly, and discuss it as a "brazen display of flesh in the large

⁵¹⁶ Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City*, 7.

⁵¹⁷ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 79.

windows of the ‘dreary flats’ lining 14th Street.’⁵¹⁸ These examples illustrate the subsumation of sex tourism, and its role in the economic and social production of jazz scenes, in the jazz canon.

The key to understanding the role of sex tourism in the jazz scene is space. Geographically, the spaces where the jazz scene was most prevalent were the spaces delineated by prostitution. As jazz scene historian Kevin Mumford has demonstrated, vice districts were inherently interwoven with the racialized map of American cities, and by the workings of society and politics in the jazz scene. In his study of black/white sexuality in Chicago and New York, Mumford, discussed the rise of prostitution from the 1880s through the end of World War I, and then examined its so-called “reform” during the Progressive Era. According to Mumford, the growth and control of prostitution during the jazz scene was marked by a clear geography. Mumford posits that prostitution and vice districts operated in concentric circles, with the most stigmatized sexual behaviors at the center, and the more accepted practices further on the geographic margins of red-light districts. Mumford also suggested that as reformers worked to end prostitution, these circles grew in response to both the legal and moral marginalization of women sex workers in American cities.⁵¹⁹ The result was not that prostitution was eradicated, but that it was concentrated in primarily African American and poor white neighborhoods. As Mumford wrote: “The effect of

⁵¹⁸ Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 8.

⁵¹⁹ Mumford, *Interzones*, 20.

reform was opposite of its intention.”⁵²⁰ Consequently, sex tourism and sex workers were spatially enclosed in working-class white, immigrant, and African American sections of jazz scene cities. In Kansas City, that meant that sex tourism was enclosed in the First and Second Wards, the center of the Pendergast world and the city’s jazz scene. As seen in previous chapters, the contested territories of gender, sexuality, race and class were the spaces of the Pendergast world. Sex tourism was not the backdrop to this world; it was an integral part of it. As Ryan and Hall wrote:

The marginal spaces of sex tourism are therefore consistently shifting according to different social, cultural, economic and political factors. Indeed, the contested, multi-layered, nature of sex tourism implicitly suggests that this, at times, transitory space of inversion, provides the capacity for new understandings, perceptions, relationships and representations of sexuality, travel and the sex industry.⁵²¹

In the case of sex tourism and jazz scene sex districts, it is important to note that jazz scene cities often developed, encouraged and exploited their sex districts as a way to draw in sex tourists. As Alecia Long demonstrated in her study of Storyville, New Orleans’ reputation as a decadent city in the last 19th century was exploited by city leaders for its economic advantages.⁵²² New Orleans, according to Long, became a site of “pleasure pilgrimage” where sex tourists traveled to trade in the commodities of sex districts: prostitution, racial mixing, and desire. In a move that signaled “modernity,” prostitution became the

⁵²⁰ Mumford, *Interzones*, 33.

⁵²¹ Chris Ryan and C. Michael Hall, *Sex Tourism: Marginal People and Liminalities* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 135.

⁵²² Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 1.

backbone of commercial sexuality.⁵²³ Enclosure was central to the success of sex tourism in jazz scene cities such as New Orleans. For instance, according to Long, Storyville's reputation and attraction grew with every further enclosure by reform movements of the early 20th century.⁵²⁴ As the railroad's western terminus and the temporary home to hundreds of migrant, immigrant, and native workers of all classes, there is little doubt that Kansas City attracted plenty of tourists. Sex tourism, however, was a major draw. As Pearson mentioned but failed to analyze in *Goin' To Kansas City*, the city fathers took pride in the city's reputation as a "wide open" town, and used that reputation to encourage sex tourism.⁵²⁵ In the city where Pearson positioned prostitution as unimportant, sex tourism was big business. As part of the Pendergast world, sex tourism was a constant source of income, business, and patronage for Pendergast, his machine, and the city of Kansas City.

Enclosure and the creation of boundaries around sex work were a key factor in sex tourism in the jazz scene. This was not enclosure simply as a way of keeping "fallen women" policed: it was a method of enclosing sex tourism and therefore enacting a space for socially sanctioned sex trade. According to scholars Chris Ryan and C. Michael Hall, sex tourism is enclosed in an effort to mark both sex tourists and sex workers as marginal.⁵²⁶ Ryan and Hall, however, also state that such enclosure has political and economic foundations, not simply

⁵²³ Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 7.

⁵²⁴ Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 229.

⁵²⁵ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 92.

⁵²⁶ Ryan and Hall, *Sex Tourism*, 101.

the enclosure of the “deviant” sex workers. “In some jurisdictions sex tourism has been implicitly or even overtly encouraged,” wrote Ryan and Hall, “in order to attract foreign exchange and encourage economic development.”⁵²⁷ Therefore, according to Ryan and Hall, the creation, segregation and enclosure of sex tourism is based in economic concepts: by locating sex work in a single district, its tourists and their economic power can be defined, valued and policed. As an economic and social space, sex tourism districts in American jazz scenes were more than the backdrop represented by the jazz canon; they were contested spaces of meaning and economic power, as well as gender, race, and sexuality, which had a direct influence on the success of Kansas City’s jazz scene.

Sex tourism and sex workers played an important role in the development of Kansas City’s jazz scene. The best known prostitute of Kansas City in the jazz scene was Annie Chambers, a brothel madam and famous city dweller. As the chapter will discuss, Chambers was linked with the Pendergast machine and worked for decades as the “mother” to hundreds of rural and immigrant young women who found themselves at Kansas City’s Union Station. Despite her position in the jazz scene, traditional jazz historians even represent Chambers in romanticized and background terms, as a “colorful figure of the red light” and a “woman once widely known.” Jazz historians often frame prostitution in that way: as a facet of the jazz scene separate from the music, liveliness and “all that jazz.” Prostitution is positioned, in the jazz canon, as a frequently mentioned but

⁵²⁷ Ryan and Hall, *Sex Tourism*, 135.

little discussed thread in the fabric of the “Jazz Age” backdrop. The common belief is that prostitution was important, but not a direct influence on jazz scene life or the sounds later categorized as jazz music. The influential role of sex work and sex tourism in the jazz scenes of America, therefore, is not included in the official history of jazz. As jazz history stakeholder Norman Pearson wrote of prostitution in Kansas City: “Although not directly associated with the jazz world, prostitution, drag acts, live sex shows, and other forms of open sexuality were important aspects of Kansas City’s nightclub milieu.”⁵²⁸ As this chapter will show, such representations of sex tourism and in Kansas City’s jazz scene deny the important role that sex work played in the development, growth, and social formations of the jazz scene.

The Master Narratives of the History of Prostitution

Though this chapter is intended to fill a gap in traditional jazz history, this chapter is also aimed at addressing a few of the debates and breaches in the written history of prostitution. The written history of prostitution has largely ignored the role of jazz scenes in the development of sex tourism before World War II. This exclusion is based on several key debates in the history of prostitution. One of these debates is the choice of subject- are prostitutes the subject of oppression, or the object of legal protections for mainstream

⁵²⁸ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 100.

Americans? Perhaps the best-known work on the history of American prostitution, and central to this debate, is Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*.⁵²⁹ Rosen's feminist work concentrated on the Progressive crackdown on prostitution, and the ways in which prostitutes formed a "sisterhood" to fight Victorian sexuality. Rosen's work positioned the women who worked as prostitutes in the early twentieth century as important historical subjects, and provided an important critique of the effect of Victorian social and moral standards on working-class female prostitutes. Other historians of prostitution, however, have critiqued Rosen's work (and the work of other feminist scholars) as lacking an analysis of the sociological and criminological aspects of prostitution. Thomas Mackey's *Red Lights Out* is an example of the rancor in this debate. Mackey's work focused specifically on the legal definition and prosecution of American prostitution from 1870 to 1917. "No adequate, convincing, conceptual framework of prostitution exists," wrote Mackey, "and, in this study, prostitution is viewed only from the world of the legal bar, or legal definitions, distinctions, and determinations."⁵³⁰ It is Mackey's critique of feminist analysis (which I would suggest is a framework) and Rosen's work, however, that demonstrates the subject-object debate among historians of prostitution. According to Mackey: "Having produced a work that tears apart American society and structure by the feminist-marxist-socialist numbers, Rosen

⁵²⁹ Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

⁵³⁰ Thomas C. Mackey, *Red Lights Out: A Legal History of Prostitution, Disorderly Houses, and Vice Districts, 1870-1917*, *American Legal and Constitutional History: A Garland Series of Outstanding Dissertations*, ed. Harold Hyman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 9.

leaves her readers without guidance about what to do to correct all these terrible problems.”⁵³¹ Mackey’s work situates prostitutes themselves as the “terrible problems,” leaving little doubt that the legal prosecution of prostitution is both just and necessary. Rosen, who situated prostitutes as the casualty of Victorian sexuality, questioned the legal and moral underpinnings of anti-vice movements in the Progressive Era. My study suggests that Rosen was likely correct. While brothel prostitution and red-light districting decreased in Kansas City after 1917, by no means was prostitution eradicated. Instead, prostitution was driven further underground, much to the detriment of sex workers. Unlike Rosen, however, this study uses the legal definition and prosecution of prostitution as evidence of the oppressive nature of antiprostitution reform.

Another major debate among historians of prostitution is region itself. Admittedly, this study of Kansas City is a regional one. Kansas City, however, is a city that I suggest defied the conventional concept of “region” by embodying both the rural sensibility of the western frontier and the modernized development of eastern American cities. The study of Kansas City is, therefore, one of rural Western and urban Eastern regionalism. A large number of works on the history of prostitution focus on cities such as New York and Chicago, where large and traditional vice districts were easily identifiable. This focus on specific urban centers mirrors the work of jazz canon historians, who positioned Kansas City as a site of jazz development that was geographically on the frontier. Studies of

⁵³¹ Mackey, *Red Lights Out*, 14.

prostitution in cities where a Western/Eastern or urban/rural delineation was not always as clear, such as cities in the Midwest and West, are more difficult to understand. At the same time, while studies of prostitution in the American West have focused on women's experiences as frontier sex workers, they have not dealt significantly with the work of women in Western cities at the turn of the century. Anne Butler's *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery*, widely recognized as the seminal work on western American prostitution, focused only on "the contributions prostitutes made to frontier institutional development, and the final rewards for prostitutes who participated in the experience."⁵³² Kansas Citians did not see prostitution as simply a regional concern. For example, Chief of Police Wentworth E. Griffin explained sex tourism to researcher Asa Martin with these words in 1913:

By reason of location and environment, Kansas City, Missouri, is confronted in its police work with conditions which have no parallel in any other inland city. Being the gateway for the entire West and Southwest, as evidenced by its size as a railway center, transient people in large numbers and for various causes are drawn here: a constant tide of emigration is passing through, and the criminal class comes with the throng.⁵³³

Kansas City existed in both urban and rural cultures, a Western and Eastern region, and such a clash of regional sensibilities are not prevalent in histories of prostitution. This is an extension of the problem created by traditional jazz historians, who insist that Kansas City was both an urban "wide open" city

⁵³² Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-90* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), xviii.

⁵³³ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 129.

on the road to New York, and an isolated “southwest” town where a jazz scene temporarily flourished.

This work is also intended to expose and explore a major breach in the history of prostitution: the effect of antiprostitution reform *after* the end of Prohibition. Traditionally, studies of prostitution end with the beginning of World War I and the passage of federal prohibition. Interestingly, this periodization roughly agrees with the traditional periodization of the jazz canon: with the end of prostitution and the closing of Storyville in 1917, jazz moves slowly to its position as a New York art form. Historians of prostitution follow this periodization. The works of Rosen and Mackey end at 1917, while Joel Best’s recent work *Controlling Vice: Regulating Brothel Prostitution in St. Paul* ends much earlier, in 1883. Why do historians of prostitution close their studies with the end of a broadly defined Progressive Era? I believe the answer to that lies in the anti-vice reforms of the Progressive Era themselves. The popular beliefs after World War I held that prostitution was eradicated, displaced, or for some reason no longer a concern. Once the concentrated red-light districts such as Storyville were “closed,” the public view of prostitution went underground along with the work. Though Mumford and others have shown that the disappearance of public prostitution is simply a myth, its appearance in the written history of prostitution continues. Historians are evidently following that trend, rather than investigating the long-term effects of anti-vice reform in American cities. As historian Joel Best explained:

There are relatively few studies of twentieth-century prostitution following the implementation of prohibition; however, the evidence from the major cities suggests that prohibition's critics were at least partially correct. Instead of eliminating vice, reform dispersed it into more neighborhoods, while increasing official corruption and, in some cities, the influence of organized crime. Yet these new problems did not cause as much public outrage as the Progressives had mustered against tolerating vice. Public awareness of prostitution as a major social problem fell throughout most of the twentieth century; prohibition did not have as many vocal critics as the policies it replaced.⁵³⁴

While this study of prostitution in Kansas City does not completely agree with Best's conclusions, it does provide a different view of the effects of reform in American cities. Prostitution and its reform did not end in 1917, and neither should the periodization of prostitution history. Just as Kansas City's jazz scene cannot be conveniently enclosed by dates, neither can the history of prostitution in the city's jazz scene spaces.

Kansas City's Red-Light District

What role did Mumford's "concentric circles" play in the spaces of jazz and prostitution in Kansas City? In the post-reform decades in Kansas City, the popular belief was that prostitution was eradicated: an opinion supported by historians of prostitution. Newspaper reports by historians in the 1940s and 1950s discussed the "former isolated zone" of the red-light district, in a false belief that the closing of downtown brothels was successful. It is clear, however, that jazz scene citizens in the city fully understood the relationship between the jazz scene

⁵³⁴ Joel Best, *Controlling Vice: Regulating Brothel Prostitution in St. Paul, 1865-1883* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 113.

and prostitution, and protected that relationship spatially. For instance, Kansas City's jazz district along Vine Street was traditionally a Republican stronghold. Henry McKissick was a ward boss for Casimir Welch in the Second Ward (bounded by Kansas City's Jazz District) who spoke at length about his "job" gathering votes and garnering support for Pendergast and his Democratic Party machine. Eventually, the black vote in the Jazz District switched to Pendergast, in order to protect both vice and jazz district business.⁵³⁵ There were fifty cabarets within the six blocks of 18th and Vine, all of which catered to white middle-class "slummers" seeking a sexual encounter with the "other." It is clear, however, that city dwellers understood those areas as "deviant" due to their location. During his interview with Pearson and Litwak, McKissick remembered: [There was a red-light district] in my ward, [at] Fourteenth and Thirteenth, and Cherry and Holmes. I have always thought that [it was better to have prostitution concentrated in one area].⁵³⁶ McKissick's recollection clearly indicates that Pendergast and his leadership saw the enclosure of sex tourism as important. Historian Sherry Schirmer wrote that the location of prostitution in the city was clearly a function of *moral geography*: the reformers drove prostitution out of their neighborhoods, and allowed it to flourish in so-called "deviant" neighborhoods: the Jazz District, the North End, and other neighborhoods of mixed race, ethnicity, and sexuality.⁵³⁷ In Kansas City, that meant that

⁵³⁵ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 166.

⁵³⁶ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 101.

⁵³⁷ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 126.

prostitution and jazz came to share the same spaces. Bennie Moten, leader of the Bennie Moten Orchestra and the first boss for such jazz greats as Count Basie and Eddie Barefield, started his career playing in Kansas City brothels where he “played mostly blues, because that’s what people like. The gals, they always have a hang-up. . . feeling low.”⁵³⁸

According to Moten, sex tourism created spaces in the jazz scene. The key to all of this written history, however, are the women who engaged in sex work. Did sex tourism create a world inside the jazz scene spaces of Kansas City? According to Ryan and Hall, the very enclosure of districts of sex tourism created a system of worldmaking. “Areas of prostitution, termed ‘red light’ areas,” wrote Ryan and Hall, “offer mutual support systems for their inhabitants.”⁵³⁹ This mutual support system, however, depended on the economic and social positioning of sex tourism in the city’s jazz scene. Sex tourism in the jazz scene was inherently connected to contestations about race, gender, and economics in Kansas City. As Kevin Mumford has explained, prostitution was increasingly affiliated with racial mixing in the first half of the twentieth century.⁵⁴⁰ Scholar Brian Donovan further explored the racialization of sex work by exploring the role of race in discourse about white slavery at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Donovan, discourse about sex work (white slavery in particular) was the result of contentious debates about the meaning of

⁵³⁸ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 100.

⁵³⁹ Ryan and Hall, *Sex Tourism*, 4.

⁵⁴⁰ Mumford, *Interzones*, 21.

race, migration and immigration among native-born white Americans.⁵⁴¹ Consequently, a new racial taxonomy in this period likely affiliated African American and immigrant women with racial and ethnic inferiority. There were 128 brothels listed on Kansas City police fines lists in 1910 alone: ninety-nine Caucasian “white houses” and twenty-two African-American “colored houses,” and seven with unlisted owners. It is unclear whether these houses were “white” and “colored” owned, or if that was simply an indicator of segregation among its workers and clientele. In addition, there were 147 “assignation houses,” where rooms were available for rent for use by sex workers who found their clients on Kansas City streets.⁵⁴² The red-light district also revealed the city’s continuing links to rural and western America. A 1910 survey of prostitutes found that one-third of Kansas City prostitutes were born in small towns, while only three percent were foreign born.⁵⁴³ Since African American, immigrant and poor white women inhabited the same city districts as the sex work district, the line between respectability and sex work was easily blurred by these changing discourses about race and sex work. Consequently, sex workers likely depended on each other for social support denied to them in the larger, hegemonic mainstream.

Another factor in exploring sex tourism districts as possible sites of worldmaking are the debates about gender, sex and respectability. As is the case

⁵⁴¹ Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 5.

⁵⁴² Fred Johnson, “The Social Evil in Kansas City,” in *Second Annual Report of the Board of Public Welfare of Kansas City, Missouri, April 19, 1910-April 18, 1911* (Kansas City, MO: Fratcher Printing, 1911), 127.

⁵⁴³ Johnson, “The Social Evil in Kansas City,” 138.

with other American cities, the history of Kansas City's working-class women was shaped by the Victorian social values of the city's 19th century elite. Victorian white morality, an English system that flourished in America before World War I, elevated the nuclear family and female "purity" as society's ideal. A white woman's role was as wife and mother, and proper women prized modesty over emotion. Victorian white men were free to work outside the home and congregate with their friends in the homosocial (single sex) atmospheres of saloons, but women were taught to build a refuge in the home.⁵⁴⁴ In fact, the arbiters of Victorian morality considered female sexuality an emotional illness that was either abnormal or nonexistent.⁵⁴⁵ This was further placed on African American women, whose race marked them as "hypersexual" in the minds of white Victorian city dwellers. Consequently, Victorian wives and mothers sheltered their sexuality to protect the home, while their husbands "sowed their wild oats" in saloons and brothels. However, as working-class neighborhoods such as Kansas City's West Bottoms grew with the railroad, it became increasingly difficult for the city's elite to keep female sexuality hidden. Many white, African American and immigrant working-class women required access to saloons and other institutions of the "men's sphere" in order to survive. Saloons and brothels often also served as the only source of clean water, cooked food and warm shelter for working-class women and their children. These laboring

⁵⁴⁴ Harriet Sigerman, "An Unfinished Battle: 1848-1865," chapter in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 266.

⁵⁴⁵ Carol Z. Stearns and Peter N. Stearns, "A Traditional View of Victorian Sexuality," in *Major Problems in American Women's History*, ed. Mary Beth Norton (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1989), 250.

families found Victorian morality oppressive.⁵⁴⁶ In an effort to provide for themselves, working-class Kansas Citians began building nickelodeons, burlesque theaters and red-light districts to provide both employment and entertainment. As social historian Kathy Peiss wrote, working-class sexuality at the turn-of-the-century was at odds with the sexual behavior represented as respectable among the Victorian elite. Women who visited public amusements, took gifts from men, or traded in sexual favors were seen as crossing into a homosocial world where a “heterosocial interaction” was a threat.⁵⁴⁷ Working-class ideas about sexuality, which included prostitution, invaded Victorian society through popular culture that (either fictionally or in reality) sold female sexuality as a commodity.

Though little information about Kansas City’s red-light district survives, some details exist about the major brothels and madams of the city’s pre-World War I period. As a railroad hub, Kansas City inevitably developed a large and thriving red-light district controlled primarily by three women. Once the city’s cribs and brothels became subject to municipal and state laws, the women of the “resorts” became targets for anti-vice Victorian reformers. The resulting clash with the Victorian elite did not destroy working-class women’s labor or sexuality. In fact, the events in Kansas City between 1880 and 1945 show those Victorian upper-class moralists simply reasserted their control over sexuality by appropriating working-class city spaces and defining public sexual expression as “abnormal” according to regional values and laws. Kansas City’s elite adopted

⁵⁴⁶ Higham, “The Reorientation of American Culture,” 31.

⁵⁴⁷ Peiss, “ ‘Charity Girls’ and City Pleasures,” 60-61.

the aspects of working-class sexuality they could reshape to their liking, and successfully outlawed everything else.

Kansas City's urban elite was part of a national movement against the public display of working-class sexuality. With the advent of the Progressive Era in the 1900s, both evangelists and urban reformers considered mass amusements emblematic of declining morality and rising working-class anarchy.⁵⁴⁸ Americans increasingly connected working-class leisure and immorality, especially with unregulated amusements. The biggest concern about leisure spaces was moral health, especially when it came to women and young people.⁵⁴⁹ Urban reformers criticized mass amusements as a threat to public health-- a danger that required both regulation and reform. Kansas Citians interested in amusement reform also discussed the danger of women seeking pleasure in the public sphere. According to one reformer, working-class women in amusement spaces were a source of social danger. In his investigation of working-class girls, the reformer wrote that he feared the cultural effect of "girls who were idling along, seeking some diversion, some amusement, girls who were loitering on the edge of that precipice over which so many fall to destruction."⁵⁵⁰ Urban reformers often connected the immorality of theaters, movie houses and amusement parks with prostitution and "fallen women." As Kevin Mumford explained, vice districts then became sites of commercial amusement, where working class and African American women

⁵⁴⁸ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 63.

⁵⁴⁹ Havig, "Mass Commercial Amusements," 341.

⁵⁵⁰ Recreation Department, *Annual Report*, 242-243.

were commodities, not audiences.⁵⁵¹ Consequently, following the adoption of state laws and city ordinances governing most working-class leisure activities all that remained for Kansas City's urban reformers to attack were the red-light districts.

This attack on sex work was particularly difficult to navigate for African Americans, both working-class women and men, who earned their incomes through the Kansas City's jazz scene spaces. African American were inherently criminal according to the city's white upper and middle class population, and when combined with the popular conception that African Americans were hypersexual, the policing and marginalization of African Americans in the city was likely the most stringent. Asa Martin, a Kansas City schoolteacher and graduate student, undertook a study of Kansas City's African American population in 1913, with the backing of the city's Board of Public Welfare. Martin was particularly focused on the study of African Americans as criminals. "Statistics show that the Negro is everywhere more criminal than the white man, and that his tendency towards crime increases," wrote Martin in 1913.⁵⁵² Using a 1911 report that the Kansas City Board of Police made to the Board of Public Welfare, Martin examined the role of prostitution in the increase of crime in Kansas City. According to Martin, there were 957 arrests for running or owning a brothel in 1911, of those arrests twenty were African American men, and forty-four were African American women. 346 African American women were

⁵⁵¹ Mumford, *Interzones*, 29.

⁵⁵² Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 129.

arrested for prostitution in 1911, compared to 471 white women; though Martin identified 834 white owned and managed brothels in Kansas City.⁵⁵³ How did Martin explain the “problem” of prostitution? Martin believed the root of the problem was race as a determinant of sex work among African American women. “The criminal tendency of Negro women, when compared with that either of white women or Negro men, is even more evident in city than State arrests,” wrote Martin, “though there are less than one-tenth as many Negro women as white women.”⁵⁵⁴

Though Martin was obviously focused on the criminality of African American women, he was just as focused on the criminality of jazz scene spaces for African American men, specifically the saloon. Saloons were, as mentioned previously, a space for both leisure and survival in Kansas City’s working-class districts. Different saloons catered to all racial and ethnic groups, giving men a homosocial atmosphere to socialize in, and providing women with an outlet for income and assistance with anything from cooked meals to an assignation room for part-time crib girls. For Martin, however, the saloon represented the foundation of African American “race problems.” As Martin wrote:

The saloon is thus made the general loafing place for the idle Negro, where he spends his extra change, if he chances to possess any, endeavoring to satisfy his natural thirst for liquor or to display the appearance of wealth to his many friends gathered around him. If a canvass of all the Negro-pool halls, barber shops, and saloons were made any evening between 7 and 10 o’clock, 1,800 or 2,000 Negro men would be found in them; and if the canvass were made on Saturday night, the

⁵⁵³ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 132.

⁵⁵⁴ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 133.

number would probably exceed 3,000. . . the hold the saloons now have upon the race as a whole, all go to make this [reform] a most difficult task—so much that any solution of the problem would require years of persistent labor with the proper application of the elevating agencies that might be thrown about him.⁵⁵⁵

Given all of these concerns about sex tourism, crime, class and race, why did Kansas City reformers not try to simply eradicate prostitution? In addition to the moral zoning thought to defend “respectable” native-born white women, the enclosure of the red-light district led reformers to deal with other “problems” as a more immediate threat. First, defenders of Victorian American culture could see and criticize amusement parks and theaters because they were open to public view. Mass amusement advertisements appeared in newspapers and in public places in Kansas City, where upper-class reformers encountered them. Secondly, because prostitution was illegal the red-light districts of American cities supposedly did not exist. They were a part of an urban subculture that was out of sight to most people. Consequently, mainstream Americans had little contact with the red-light culture, and those who did have knowledge of the red-light districts certainly never discussed their experiences in polite company. The blatant sexuality of red-light districts also slowed the bourgeois response. Open sexual expression was still suppressed in mainstream American culture.⁵⁵⁶

Though mass amusements challenged the prevailing gender roles and moral codes at the turn of the century, sexuality remained a taboo subject. In urban red-light districts, sexuality was recognized as a special context. In addition, powerful

⁵⁵⁵ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 160-161.

⁵⁵⁶ Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, 72.

women like Annie Chambers with political connections often controlled the establishments in red-light districts, and their connections to the economic success of the city and the city's Pendergast world gave them a certain level of protection from the incursion of reform.

Much of the force behind both life in the jazz scene, and the written history that remains, is the construction of sexuality. Kansas City's elite, and their counterparts in other American cities between 1880 and 1940, believed that sex as pleasure was inherently male-driven and acceptable only as a man's activity. Women were seen as reproductive, not sexual. The diffusion of female sexual behavior from the wedding bed into mass amusements and social visibility resulted in a legal and moral "general policing of the gender order" in clearly class and race differentiated ways in that period.⁵⁵⁷ The regulation and eradication of gender expressiveness in public amusements such as the red-light district affected both men and women, while keeping the dominant upper and middle classes in power in America. According to historian Christine Stansell, the relationship between working women and the American upper classes was based on class divisions as much as gender divisions. The class distinctions between urban white women and their working-class counterparts were a major factor in the marginalization of working-class women.⁵⁵⁸ This marginalization of working-class women included the control of working-class gender behavior in

⁵⁵⁷ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 28.

⁵⁵⁸ See Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

public spaces such as the red-light district. As historian Richard Butsch wrote in his study of American leisure *For Fun and Profit*:

Thus, hegemony in leisure may be assessed by the degree to which practitioners of leisure are not the producers of their own leisure, the degree to which they are constrained by the conventions of the practice or limited by their access to the means of ‘producing’ that leisure activity.⁵⁵⁹

For working-class white and African American women, prostitution was much more complicated than reformers imagined. The transformation of American industry in the 1880s meant that working-class families could not survive on a single income. Single and widowed women could either marry or remarry, work in industry or domestic service, or become prostitutes.⁵⁶⁰ These occupations were inherently sexualized as not “respectable” for women, and harassment, sexual objectification and sexualization in the workplace was an everyday occurrence.⁵⁶¹ As historian Kathy Peiss explained, working-class women received mixed messages about sexual behavior because the expectation was that sexuality would be confined to the dependent conditions of marriage.⁵⁶² Just as the demand for prostitutes increased in the late nineteenth century, women sought some autonomy and economic security in the home by becoming part-time prostitutes known as “crib girls.”⁵⁶³ Upper-class women initially tolerated the rise of prostitution. According to Victorian moral codes, prostitutes protected

⁵⁵⁹ Butsch, “Introduction,” 8.

⁵⁶⁰ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 3.

⁵⁶¹ Peiss, “‘Charity Girls’ and City Pleasures,” 61.

⁵⁶² Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 110.

⁵⁶³ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 4.

American wives from the male sex drive.⁵⁶⁴ As Mumford explained, Victorian moral codes also represented vice as a zone of working-class and African American sexuality that was best enclosed and policed. Though working-class women used prostitution as a source of income, moralistic reformers also explained prostitution as a product of inherently immoral working-class society.⁵⁶⁵ Of course, upper-class women had little or no experience in red-light districts. Residents in red-light districts had their own commercial subculture with values and morals that outsiders hardly understood.⁵⁶⁶

Kansas City's World of Sex Tourism

Upper and middle class notions of proper Victorian morality and behavior continued to be challenged in Kansas City through the early years of the jazz scene in the 1910s. Kansas Citians were concerned with maintaining moral standards among the city's working classes tempted by commercial amusements and attractions. Their definitions of morality conformed to dominant Victorian definitions of gender behavior—the public man and the private, morally superior woman. In fact, until Progressive reformers began their campaign in Kansas City in the 1900s, only one city ordinance dealt with gender behavior. City Ordinance Number 291, which defined lewd behavior, was applied to everything from club

⁵⁶⁴ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 5.

⁵⁶⁵ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 6.

⁵⁶⁶ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, xiv.

entertainment to prostitution until the 1910s. Though this law existed, it was seldom enforced. Numerous clubs, theaters, saloons and brothels in Kansas City violated Ordinance No. 291. Kansas City civic leaders declined to close every saloon and brothel in town lest they offend workers and visiting businessmen. It seemed that Kansas City's economic success was largely supported by sex tourism in the city's red-light district and jazz spaces.

An organized assault on the red-light districts developed in the 1900s. Increasingly, reformers embraced movements to "purify" American life by ridding its cities of commercialized vice.⁵⁶⁷ With accusations of the white enslavement of working-class girls, anti-prostitution movements appeared in tandem with park and movie house reform campaigns.⁵⁶⁸ Along with their attacks on red-light districts, reformers exhibited a sudden urge to "counterbalance the home" with various other establishments. Their efforts produced a series of seemingly disconnected reforms such as a 1914 regulation requiring Kansas City skating rinks to attain official permits.⁵⁶⁹ Civic reformers demanded public licensing of dancing and drinking establishments, and the creation of censorship boards to control vice.⁵⁷⁰ However, these were all mass amusements, and urban reformers came to view the red-light districts as a "true form of evil." Located in the waterfront or tenement districts of a city, the bohemian red-light districts

⁵⁶⁷ John C. Burnham, "The Progressive Era Revolution in American Attitudes Toward Sex," *Journal of American History* 59 (March 1973): 887.

⁵⁶⁸ Burnham, "The Progressive Era", 887.

⁵⁶⁹ Havig, "Mass Commercial Amusements," 338.

⁵⁷⁰ James R. McGovern, "The American Women's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals," *Journal of American History* 55 (2), September 1968: 331.

exemplified a more obvious threat to the purity of women and acceptable gender behavior.⁵⁷¹ “The intimacy, vitality, and exuberance of these districts were deemed too inherently unladylike,” wrote historian Lewis Erenberg, who also observed that “In a society dedicated to progress and purity, sex was a troublesome matter.”⁵⁷²

While Kansas City leaders certainly agreed with the avoidance of sexuality, they also depended on a public display of sexuality for good business. Kansas City was an important city in the 1880s, but it had not lost its “wild west” character. The city had a reputation for permissive behavior, and was frequented by cattlemen and farmers who visited it on weekends in search of entertainment.⁵⁷³ The city directory of 1878 listed eighty saloons—four times the number of city schools, libraries and hospitals combined.⁵⁷⁴ The key to Kansas City’s success as a site of sex tourism was the railroad. Railroads were the corner of the city’s economic system, and as a railroad terminus Kansas City had national importance. The city’s livestock and meatpacking industries attracted businessmen and investors as well as a large transient workforce.⁵⁷⁵ Railroads brought seventy thousand people to Kansas City in 1869, the first year the Hannibal Bridge was open. Red-light districts were so named because of the red lights of railroad lanterns. During the development of Kansas City railroads, train brakemen carried red signal lanterns to brothels during stops. By hanging the

⁵⁷¹ Sinfield, *Out On Stage*, 50.

⁵⁷² Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 21.

⁵⁷³ Pearson, *Goin’ to Kansas City*, 78.

⁵⁷⁴ Montgomery and Kasper *Kansas City*, 85.

⁵⁷⁵ Miller *From Prairie to Prison*, 14.

lantern on the brothel or crib door, the brakemen were easily located in an emergency.⁵⁷⁶ Prostitutes adopted the red railroad lanterns, and hung them on their doorways when they were open for business.⁵⁷⁷ Kansas City's red-light district was easy to find. "Crib girls," as part-time prostitutes were called in the 1880s, lived near the Levee in houses close to saloons or railroad tracks. Saloons were vital to life in red-light districts. Saloon owners frequently promoted or managed prostitution.⁵⁷⁸ Owners built saloons near brothels to attract business and sometimes housed crib girls upstairs over their saloon. Kansas City's machine boss Tom Pendergast had interests in prostitution and saloons, in a manner similar to that of systems in other cities. For instance, Pendergast owned at least two hotels where the availability of prostitution was an open secret. Pendergast simply took a cut of the prostitution income payments to the city police.⁵⁷⁹ Pendergast also protected other venues such as the all-nude Chesterfield Club in exchange for the club owner's agreement to purchase Pendergast liquor. In an effort to hide prostitution from Victorian sensibility, city police allowed red-light districts to thrive without explicitly acknowledging the role of city leadership in keeping the red-light district alive. Saloon owners and madams paid police in return for such protection.⁵⁸⁰ One Kansas City madam recalled her morning routine in the 1890s in an autobiography: "I always had

⁵⁷⁶ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 105.

⁵⁷⁷ Fred L. Lee, "Annie Chambers High-Toned Brothel," *Kansas City Genealogist* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 83.

⁵⁷⁸ Rosen *The Lost Sisterhood*, 44.

⁵⁷⁹ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 68.

⁵⁸⁰ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 4.

plenty to do, getting the police and city hall out of the night's take put in envelopes, inspecting the laundry with the housekeeper, the cleaning bills, replacing busted chairs, lamps, linens."⁵⁸¹ Kansas City's police essentially helped create the red-light district, and punished saloon owners and madams only when they failed to make protection payments.⁵⁸² In this way, Kansas City's elite derided and policed prostitution in certain districts and spaces, but allowed it to flourish in order to protect the city's interests in sex tourism and its "wide open" character. According to Fred Johnson, a Board of Public Welfare official who studied prostitution in 1911, the city's sex tourism was directly related to its geographical position as a railroad terminus and "wide open" city.

The houses of ill fame are the centers of infection that permeates all the territory which surrounds the city. Visitors from out of town are numerous. Some of them seek vice; to others when openly tolerated it is a source of morbid fascination. Not infrequently, as a result of his first visit, the country youth who has hitherto led a virtuous life will carry away with him a contagion which is poison not only to himself and family, but to the community in which he lives. Every convention or civic celebration which attracts visitors from outside the city brings an additional supply of men to swell the number of frequenters of these resorts. Nor can the evil influence which open toleration exerts on the youth of the city be overlooked. The high ideals which the teachings of home, church and school may have instilled in his receive a rude shock when he appreciates that his elders tolerate a system totally at variance with their teaching. Thrown into the abyss of temptation he is well worthy of commendation if possessed of sufficient moral stamina to remain pure.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Nell Kimball, *Nell Kimball: Her Life As An American Madam By Herself* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 9.

⁵⁸² Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 5.

⁵⁸³ Johnson, "The Social Evil in Kansas City," 10.

For Johnson, and the reformers he represented, the indictment was clear. Kansas City's leaders were allowing sex tourism to continue, while teaching their children that vice was criminal.

In order to maintain the façade of reforming prostitution while encouraging it as part of the city's tourist reputation, Kansas City planners and leaders attempted to enclose sex tourism. Kansas City's red-light district was bounded by Second Street on the north, Main Street to the east, Sixth Street on the south and May Street on the west. Those crib girls who were managed by a "madam" lived in female boarding houses called "resorts." By 1905, most resorts were located in the two hundred block of west Fourth Street.⁵⁸⁴ There were literally hundreds of resorts and cribs in the red-light district. Single women who simply put red lanterns on their doors ran some cribs. Other women worked in high-class resorts run by powerful and wealthy Kansas City women. The red-light district created \$400,000 in Kansas City revenues each year.⁵⁸⁵

As Kansas City expanded south, the red-light district expanded south along Main Street. Some of the better-known resorts and cribs on Main were Clara's Crib at 1801 Main, and the Hotel Ester at 2035 Broadway. A crib at 1711 Walnut was called "The Irish Village," and catered mostly to Irish and German immigrants. Itinerant printer John Edward Hicks mentioned visiting several resorts or cribs in his memoirs. Hicks referred to the "high-priced beauties of

⁵⁸⁴ Lee, "Annie Chambers," 83.

⁵⁸⁵ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 71.

Annie Chambers” and the “twenty-five cent cronos at Lone Cottonwood.”⁵⁸⁶ Hicks’ tour of the red-light district on one drunken evening took him to many cribs and resorts now forgotten. Hicks listed a series of what he termed “boarding houses”: Mollie Paupaw's on west Fourth, Em Williams on Third, Bessie Stevenson’s on Broadway, Mollie O’Brien’s at First and Main, “and the tent kept by the notorious Becky Ragan at the foot of Main Street.”⁵⁸⁷ Hicks also reported a sensational story he overheard about madam Jennie Armstrong “who kept a ‘small place of sin’ at Fifth and Bluff and got arrested for beating one of her three painted mermaids with the business end of a stovelifter.”⁵⁸⁸ These sensational stories added to the growing Victorian fear of the dangers of open female sexuality in Kansas City, and added to the titillating mystique of Kansas City as a site of sex tourism.

The most notorious and popular resorts in Kansas City were located in adjacent buildings in the two hundred block of west Third and Fourth Streets. The madams of these three white resorts ran busy brothels that bore their names: Annie Chambers, Madame Lovejoy, and Eva Prince. One Kansas City reporter called these three resorts “the three most notorious houses of the kind in the ‘red-light district.’”⁵⁸⁹ A.B. McDonald also referred to the three resort owners as “the queens of the red-light” and mentioned that the “Salvation Army workers

⁵⁸⁶ John Edward Hicks *Adventures of a Tramp Printer, 1880-1890* (Kansas City, MO: MidAmerica Press, 1950), 29.

⁵⁸⁷ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 29.

⁵⁸⁸ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 29-30.

⁵⁸⁹ A.B. McDonald, “Gift to Union Mission of Old North Side Resort,” *Kansas City Star*, 18 February 1934, A5.

thereabout used to call them ‘gilded palaces of sin’.”⁵⁹⁰ Eva Prince’s resort was located at 204 and 206 West Fourth Street. The Prince resort shared a wall with Madame Lovejoy’s twenty-four rooms at 200 and 202 west Fourth Street.⁵⁹¹ The most famous of all these resorts was the house of Annie Chambers, a building at the southwest corner of Third and Wyandotte Streets just north of Lovejoy’s.⁵⁹²

Reformers for social purity gained support in both public and government sectors after 1900. The growth of sexual reform was largely attributed to violence in the red-light districts. A lurid axe murder took place in Kansas City in 1880 when a rejected brothel customer murdered another customer in a crib at Nineteenth Street and Broadway.⁵⁹³ In a report on New York’s Tenderloin district, a Kansas City reporter wrote of “girls who wearied of the monotony of rural life . . . and are frequently found by detective skill in the dens of infamy.”⁵⁹⁴ To combat crime associated with prostitution, reformers and their government supporters classified prostitution as a crime. Special courts, police units and correctional facilities were created especially for prostitutes.⁵⁹⁵ The Kansas City Florence Crittenden Mission opened in the red-light district to rescue “fallen women.” Social workers from Crittenden visited local saloons and dance halls to raise support for the Mission.⁵⁹⁶ Kansas City’s Board of Public Welfare, the agency charged with managing correctional facilities, launched an investigation in

⁵⁹⁰ McDonald, “Gift to Union Mission.”

⁵⁹¹ Lee, “Annie Chambers,” 84.

⁵⁹² Lee, “Annie Chambers,” 84..

⁵⁹³ *Kansas City Times*, “A Bloody Tragedy,” 3 February 1880, 5.

⁵⁹⁴ *Kansas City Times*, “Gotham Dance Houses,” 30 January 1880, 2.

⁵⁹⁵ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 19.

⁵⁹⁶ Miller, *From Prairie to Prison*, 16.

the red-light district in 1910. Kansas City was one of forty-three cities that conducted formal vice investigations between 1900 and 1917.⁵⁹⁷ Kansas City police were required to enforce new anti-vice laws. Consequently and as discussed previously, 957 brothel owners and 471 prostitutes were arrested in 1911 alone.⁵⁹⁸ The Board of Public Welfare appointed reformer Kate E. Pierson head of the Parole Department of Delinquent Women in 1910. Pierson managed women's jails, industrial work houses and hospitals for prostitutes in Kansas City until 1912.⁵⁹⁹ Board of Public Welfare investigators recommended new laws, increased arrests, and waged a "relentless warfare against the houses of prostitution."⁶⁰⁰ As Board of Public Welfare investigator Fred Johnson stated in his 1910 study of Kansas City prostitutes:

The unprejudiced observer is convinced that no system of suppression can totally eliminate prostitution. First there must be a radical change in the amusements we tolerate, in public opinion, in our treatment of sex problems, in our economic system, in the attitude of the church, and in the teaching and influence of the home itself. As we have before noted, this evil is deep rooted.⁶⁰¹

All of these brothels were the center of the city's "isolated zone," a red-light district centered in what is now Kansas City's downtown. As Mumford has explained, however, prostitution was not limited to the red-light district.

Waitresses in jazz clubs and cabarets throughout the city were encouraged to turn

⁵⁹⁷ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 14.

⁵⁹⁸ Martin *Our Negro Population*, 132.

⁵⁹⁹ Board of Public Welfare, *Third Annual Report of the Board of Public Welfare of Kansas City, Missouri, April 18, 1911-April 15, 1912* (Kansas City, MO: Cline Printing, 1912), 295.

⁶⁰⁰ Johnson, "The Social Evil in Kansas," 137.

⁶⁰¹ Johnson, "The Social Evil in Kansas," 135.

tricks or work in underground sex shows.⁶⁰² It is likely that prostitution in the form of cribs and crib girls occurred all over the city, and certainly prostitution was a staple of life in the Jazz District. This was increased with the rise of the Pendergast machine in the Jazz District, a machine that ran prostitution and then funneled the proceeds into police protection and public works employment for blacks living in the district.⁶⁰³ Little is written, however, about the effect that the sudden “reform” of prostitution had on the lived experience of working-class women engaged in sex work. As Kevin Mumford has proven the *remapping of prostitution* shaped the lives of prostitutes and altered their lives in complex ways. Kevin Mumford explained that areas such as red-light districts “were in themselves complex social worlds, perhaps sites of cultural resistance, but certainly worthy of historical analysis.”⁶⁰⁴

Of the few archival documents or records about prostitution in Kansas City, only one seems to illuminate some aspects of prostitution according to the working women. As part of his 1911 study entitled “The Social Evil in Kansas City,” Board of Public Welfare official Fred Johnson published an informal survey of brothel madams and workers in Kansas City. Conducted by local pastors Reverend Frank Johnson and Dr. C.B. Miller, both members of the Board of Public Welfare Board of Directors, the survey data was collected from interviews of approximately 450 Kansas City sex workers.⁶⁰⁵ Though the survey

⁶⁰² Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 169.

⁶⁰³ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 169.

⁶⁰⁴ Mumford, *Interzones*, 49.

⁶⁰⁵ Johnson, “The Social Evil in Kansas City,” 1.

data is raw, it provides an interesting window on the lives of Kansas City's workers in the sex tourism industry. For instance, approximately half of the workers interviewed were married. One third began working as a prostitute in her own home, while only fifty-four worked in a brothel.⁶⁰⁶ The Johnson-led study also includes information that illuminates the race-differentiated aspects of prostitution in Kansas City during the early years of the jazz scene. While nearly one third of the white women interviewed worked in hotels or restaurants before working in prostitution, thirty-nine of the fifty-six African American women interviewed worked as domestic labor. A large percentage of white women reported that they were introduced to prostitution through dancing or betrayal, while most African American women interviewed replied that they were "coaxed" into prostitution.⁶⁰⁷ At the same time, however, much of the survey data belies shared concerns that crossed racial line. For instance, the women interviewed overwhelmingly stated that they *chose* prostitution in order to bring an income into their household after marriage, and regardless of race most of the women interviewed made four to six dollars per week.⁶⁰⁸ In such a limited body of evidence, the survey provides some insight into the backgrounds and concerns of women in Kansas City's sex tourism industry.

Unlike information from sex workers, there is much in the written record by reformers about their reform movements against prostitution, and how those

⁶⁰⁶ Johnson, "The Social Evil in Kansas City," 13.

⁶⁰⁷ Johnson, "The Social Evil in Kansas City," 16.

⁶⁰⁸ Johnson, "The Social Evil in Kansas City," 14.

reformers saw the “world” of prostitution. By 1900 reformers, who began to use the medical discourse of sexologists, classified prostitutes as sexual deviants.⁶⁰⁹ The moral classification of prostitution led to “social purity” crusades intended to reform sexuality. Social purity reformers described prostitution as the result of working-class urban culture, often specifically African American and immigrant women.⁶¹⁰ In an effort to describe prostitution as a “social evil,” reformers created a market for published memoirs of prostitutes as a form of education for urban women.⁶¹¹ Interestingly enough, in this move to prove prostitution as a deviant practice in need of elimination, the reformers created a record of the social worlds of prostitutes. At the same time, the reformers created a body of literature that described the sex tourism in American cities in voyeuristic, and erotic, terms. Such texts likely increased interest in red-light districts rather than prove the need for their elimination. Though little exists in written history about the lives of Kansas City’s madams and crib girls, one first hand account was published by social purity reformers in 1919. *Madeleine, An Autobiography* was the memoir of a prostitute who worked in the cribs of the American Midwest. Though the publication of *Madeleine* was sponsored by reformers, according to historian Ruth Rosen *Madeleine* is one of the few memoirs whose details were later substantiated.⁶¹² In fact, according to Rosen, *Madeleine* likely did not have

⁶⁰⁹ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 13.

⁶¹⁰ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, xiii.

⁶¹¹ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 11.

⁶¹² Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 78.

the effect that its publishers intended. It sold well as a prurient memoir, but its pages did not fully conform to the reformer's concept of the world of prostitution.

Madeleine worked in Kansas City in the late nineteenth century as a crib girl in Laura Lovejoy's brothel on west Fourth Street. Lovejoy's was known as the "Old Ladies Home" because the clientele was mostly local older men.⁶¹³ When she was seventeen, Madeleine arrived at Lovejoy's after leaving Chicago because of illness. Though she had worked in brothels before, Madam Lovejoy insisted on interviewing Madeleine about her life and family. Madeleine was then given "working clothes" and sent to the parlor to entertain a regular."⁶¹⁴ She worked at Lovejoy's for over a year before moving West. Madeleine described red-light life in Kansas City:

Red-light segregation was a name only, not a fact . . . Vice flourished in all parts of the city; wine rooms were wide open for anyone having the price of a drink; private houses and assignation houses abounded-- and the roadhouses ran full blast for twenty-four hours a day.⁶¹⁵

Though most of Madeline's memoir discussed Kansas City only briefly, it is clear from her memoir that the enclosure of the red-light district was not as successful as reformers imagined. Madeline remembered the camaraderie among the women in the brothel, and explained late in the memoir that her life as a prostitute was not as damaging as reformers would lead the reader to believe.

⁶¹³ Madeleine, *Madeleine: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), 65.

⁶¹⁴ Madeleine, *Madeleine*, 63.

⁶¹⁵ Madeleine, *Madeleine*, 70.

Annie Chambers, Queen of the Red Light

Madeline's short memoir about Kansas City reveals some information about the life of a working prostitute; there are limits on the information available about sex workers in Kansas City's jazz scene. Most of the information about prostitution in Kansas City lies in the story of a single brothel madam. Annie Chambers is probably the most famous madam in Kansas City history. She was born Leannah (last name unknown) in Kansas, and was married as a young girl to a man named Loveall. The Lovealls came to Kansas City in 1869, where they settled north of the Missouri River. However, when her husband died, Leannah was forced to earn a living. She opened a resort in the Loveall home north of the river, and welcomed Kansas City visitors who came across the river by ferry.⁶¹⁶ Mrs. Loveall then changed her name to Annie Chambers, and moved her resort to Kansas City in 1871. She met and married William Kearns, a bartender and gambler from the West Bottoms, but retained the name Chambers professionally. The resort house at Third and Wyandotte was built with Chambers' own money, and completed according to her instructions. From the beginning, the Chambers house was a brothel.⁶¹⁷ The Chambers brothel, with stained glass walls and a tiled entrance bearing Annie Chambers name, operated daily until 1913. During a conversation with a missionary couple in 1924, Chambers defended her resorts as

⁶¹⁶ Lee, "Annie Chambers," 83.

⁶¹⁷ Fred L. Lee, "Gone But Not Forgotten: Annie Chambers, Kansas City Madam, Dead at Age Ninety-Two," *Kansas City Genealogist*, 38 (2), Fall 1998; 88.

the only place where her girls could count on being safe and in control. As she told a newspaper reporter, Chambers told the young couple:

People think women of my sort are hard-hearted, but we have hearts, too, and sometimes they melt in sorrows. But we hide it from the world, for our business requires us to put on a gay front.⁶¹⁸

How much of Chambers' interview was a performance of respectability, and how much was a performance of sex work? According to historian of the American west Karen Anderson, women in the American west were (and are) represented "as helpmeets or harlots with hearts of gold."⁶¹⁹ Chambers' personal history indicates that she was a businesswoman first, and a strong factor in the Pendergast world and its dependence on sex tourism. For the wider public, Chambers seemingly represented herself as a sad, tortured yet innocent woman, hardened by her years in "our business." Inside the Pendergast world, it would seem more likely that Chambers would worry about tourists first. These two worlds collided for Chambers in 1921, when Chambers' "hard-hearted" world clashed with the Victorian morality of the hegemonic mainstream. According to scholars Ryan and Hall, sex tourism "presents an opportunity for people, male and female, to exploit their marginal status and their economic power to cross the line between the licit and illicit boundaries between the socially sanctioned and the 'socially suspect'."⁶²⁰ Chambers crossed the boundary of red-light district

⁶¹⁸ MacDonald, "'Gift to Union Mission.'"

⁶¹⁹ Karen Anderson, "Western Women: The Twentieth-Century Experience," in *The Twentieth-Century West: Historical Interpretations* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 99.

⁶²⁰ Ryan and Hall, *Sex Tourism*, 47.

enclosure, and used her marginal status to challenge the very nature of sex tourism and its reform.

The story of Annie Chambers represents a fascinating example of the complex social worlds of Kansas City's prostitutes, and the ways in which they served as sites of resistance and worldmaking. Annie Chambers never shied away from attention in local newspapers, and was anything but reticent about her work. Annie Chambers persisted in spite of the anti-prostitution campaign and successfully operated her resort again from 1913 through 1924, at times with the backing of Kansas City Boss Tom Pendergast. Progressive attacks against the resorts of the red-light district began in 1913. Annie Chambers was called to appear before the newly formed all-male Society for the Prevention of Commercialized Vice in November 1913.⁶²¹ The Society was run by Kansas City's elite: the judges for both city courts, the reverend of the City's leading church, Police Chief Griffin and Jackson County Prosecutor Cameron Orr. When she appeared at the Society meeting in 1913, she spoke to the membership about the reform movement, and the city's plan to eradicate the red-light district. The *Kansas City Journal* published Chamber's speech in full text. In her speech to the Society, Chambers expressed her view of the world of prostitution in the city:

When they come to us they have no place else to go. Their parents have turned against them, the church gives them no welcome, their friends spurn them and society kicks them further down. They are sick, heartbroken and weary and tell us if we do not admit them it will be either

⁶²¹ Jane Fifield Flynn, *Kansas City Women of Independent Minds* (Kansas City, MO: Fifield Publishing, 1992), 26.

the river or poison. We do not send for them. It is the haven of the last resort when the whole world has cast them off.⁶²²

Chambers urged the Society to stop its push to close the red-light district, and suggested it would have the opposite effect than its intent. Chambers asked for the Society to return to the system of fines for prostitutes that was stopped in 1912, and hoped that the Society would then give some of the fines to build a women's reformatory rather than the "workhouse" that was in operation. When Chambers told the Society that her girls were now dispersed around the city, the members asked her where they were. "You could not help them if you did [know where they were]. They would not accept a cent from this or any other organization. They'd die first."⁶²³ Chambers then left the group with one parting sentence: "I am awfully sorry that this thing has gotten into politics."⁶²⁴

According to the report about the meeting: "While admitting freely that the advice to 'begin at the beginning' was good and should be followed as far as possible, the committee did not take the rest of the talk seriously."⁶²⁵

One interesting aspect of Chambers' speech, and one that tells much about the actual mapping of prostitution, is Chambers' concern about plans for an injunction against brothels. According to the Society meeting report Chambers said that injunction "prevented the sale of it [property] if one chose. All insurance has been canceled, she said [Chambers] and thieves now run rife in the district.

The casting aside carelessly of but one match, she said [Chambers], and all would

⁶²² "Says Scattering of Vice is Wrong," *Kansas City Journal*, 12 September 1913, 10.

⁶²³ "Says Scattering of Vice is Wrong."

⁶²⁴ "Says Scattering of Vice is Wrong."

⁶²⁵ "Says Scattering of Vice is Wrong."

be gone.”⁶²⁶ A month after Chambers’ appearance, the Society pressured Kansas City’s mayor to sign an injunction against “bawdy houses” under the explanation that prostitution was a public nuisance. The injunction briefly closed the Chambers resort in 1913, and Chambers herself was briefly arrested and jailed.⁶²⁷ The Society secured injunctions against fifty brothels in 1913, closed their doors and forced their residents onto the streets of the city.⁶²⁸ Annie Chambers refused to accept the ruling by city officials and reopened her house against city ordinance. In an act of overt resistance, Chambers took the Jackson County prosecutor to the Supreme Court of Missouri seeking the return of her livelihood.

Kansas City’s Society for the Prevention of Vice successfully pressured the state government for a nuisance law against brothels in 1921. The Act of 1921 prohibited the maintenance of “all buildings, erections, room and places, and the ground itself in or upon such bawdyhouse, assignation house, or place of prostitution is conducted.”⁶²⁹ According to the Act of 1921, any county prosecuting attorney could “abate and perpetually enjoin” houses of prostitution, and temporarily close the brothels for whatever period of time city officials deemed appropriate.⁶³⁰ Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney Cameron Orr initiated a raid at Chambers house in June 1921, only three months after the law passed. Prosecuting Attorney Orr was encouraged to raid the Chambers home by

⁶²⁶ “Says Scattering of Vice is Wrong.”

⁶²⁷ Social Improvement News, “From Dark to Dawn: No. 3- The Case of Annie Chambers; Sinner, Saint,” *Social Improvement News* 1 (September 1943): 12.

⁶²⁸ Social Improvement News, “From Dark to Dawn: Condensed Information,” 28.

⁶²⁹ The State ex. rel. Cameron L. Orr v. Leannah Kearns, alias Annie Chambers, Supreme Court of Missouri case No. 24023 (264 S.W. 775), 31 July 1924.

⁶³⁰ State v. Kearns.

another city Prosecuting Attorney, William B.C. Brown. Brown was a Harvard educated lawyer and one of the founders of the Society for the Prevention of Vice.⁶³¹ Kansas City police entered the Chambers house at 3:00 P.M. on June 29. According to police testimony, there were ten women and two men in the brothel. Police found one girl hiding under a bed and another standing on the roof attempting to escape capture.⁶³² One police witness testified in 1921:

Q: "When you got upstairs, what did you find up there?"

A: "Found several girls in the rooms with silk garments on and different colors."

Q: "Bright?"

A: "Bright colors, yes, and in one room we found a man and a woman. This man was on the bed in his B.V.D's and this girl didn't have anything on but a teddybear."⁶³³

Following the raid, Orr ordered the brothel closed for two months, and Annie Chambers was jailed until December. It was the first time in its history that Chambers' brothel had remained closed for more than a single day (Chambers' house closed one day only upon her arrest in 1913). Orr successfully prosecuted Chambers in Jackson County Circuit Court and secured a permanent abatement for the infamous bawdyhouse. Throughout her incarceration and the abatement of her property, Chambers insisted that she simply ran a boardinghouse, and that she had not run a brothel in her home since the passage of Missouri's White Slave Act in 1913. Chambers was not prosecuted under her working name. Instead, Kansas

⁶³¹ Marshall and Morrison Publishers, *Political History of Jackson County: Biographical Sketches of Men Who Have Helped to Make It* (Kansas City, MO: Marshall and Morrison, 1902; reprint, Boure, MD: Heritage Books, 1997), 85.

⁶³² Marshall and Morrison, *Political History*, 85..

⁶³³ State vs. Kearns.

City's prosecutors filed against Leannah Kearns, a name she had not used since 1869.

Annie Chambers, however, did not give up easily. Chambers reopened her home as a "boardinghouse" for railroad workers and homeless women in late 1923. She appealed her case to the Missouri Supreme Court in 1924, where she successfully argued that "keeping a bawdy house is not a public nuisance in any sense of the term."⁶³⁴ Before the state Supreme Court, Chambers' lawyer J. Francis O'Sullivan argued that the 1921 act violated his client's Fifth and Fourteenth Amendment rights. In response, Jackson County prosecutors Cameron Orr and Society for the Suppression of Commercialized Vice officer Leslie Lyons said the injunction was legal because the Chambers house caused immorality. As the Prosecutors Orr and Lyons stated:

Said defendant was, on said date, using said premises and property, furniture and equipment therein, for the purpose of keeping and harboring lewd, immoral, and lascivious women therein, and permitting and requiring said women so harbored therein, to receive and entertain men in rooms in said house and building for the purposes of unlawful sexual intercourse, assignation, and prostitution, and for immoral purposes and conduct . . . [the brothels] are nuisances, and should be enjoined and abated, as prayed for in plaintiff's first amended petition.⁶³⁵

Along with the testimony of police officers and Prosecutor Orr himself, the testimony of Annie Chambers was read for Supreme Court justices.

Chambers stated for the record that she paid Kansas City police protection payments for forty years. Chambers testified that she paid weekly fines at the

⁶³⁴ Social Improvement News, "From Dark to Dawn: No. 3," 12.

⁶³⁵ State v. Kearns.

court clerk's office, and occasionally a uniform officer was sent to her home to collect the payments.⁶³⁶ One witness was Kansas City police captain Frank H. Anderson, who patrolled Chambers' neighborhood for thirty-five years. When asked if anyone ever told him the Chambers house was a brothel, Anderson replied that "they didn't need to tell me."⁶³⁷ The Supreme Court read Chambers' Circuit Court testimony into the record. Prosecutor Lyons questioned Chambers about her life as a madam during the Jackson County trial. When Annie Chambers was asked if she ran a bawdyhouse, she replied: "Not that I know of."⁶³⁸ Chambers then told the court that her brothel closed at the date of her first arrest in 1913. According to Chambers, she closed due to a "kind of wave or something. . . that drove them all out." When asked if that wave was the Society for Prevention of Commercialized Vice controlled by W.C. Brown, Chambers replied "yes."⁶³⁹

Missouri's Supreme Court found in favor of Chambers, and remanded the decision of the Jackson County court. The decision of the Court did not find Chambers innocent of running a brothel. However, the justices did agree that the Act of 1921 was not entirely legal. "So much of the judgement as constitutes a perpetual injunction upon the defendant against using the premises, in the maintenance of a bawdyhouse, should be affirmed," wrote Justice Lindsay, "and so much of it as closes the premises against any use whatsoever should be

⁶³⁶ State V. Kearns, Appellant's Abstract of the Record and Bill of Exceptions, 137.

⁶³⁷ State v. Kearns, Appellant's Abstract, 93.

⁶³⁸ State v. Kearns.

⁶³⁹ State v. Kearns, Appellant's Abstract, 139.

reversed.”⁶⁴⁰ Chambers returned to Kansas City and opened her house to working-class boarders and former prostitutes.

With the closure of its high-profile brothels, Kansas City’s underground urban culture was driven further from public view. What happened to the crib girls of Kansas City’s red-light district is unknown. However, the reporters and reformers of Kansas City carefully recorded the end of the three “queens of the red-light.” These three paragons of Kansas City prostitution were watched, reported and photographed as proof of the end of prostitution in the city. Shortly after the injunction law closed the resorts in 1921, Reverend David Bulkley moved to Kansas City to build a mission for the rehabilitation of drunkards and released criminals. Bulkley arranged for the purchase of the Madame Lovejoy house by coffee wholesaler Frank Ennis in the 1930s. “It had been vacant for years,” wrote *Kansas City Star* reporter A.B. MacDonald, “ever since the moral revolution had wiped out the segregated district of this city.”⁶⁴¹ Ennis then rented the Lovejoy house to Reverend Bulkley as the first building of the City Union Mission. Bulkley, along with his wife and young daughter, moved into the Lovejoy house and opened its doors to reform “fallen men.”⁶⁴² As MacDonald wrote: “And in the room of Madame Lovejoy, on the first floor, with the trap door through which she used to draw up wine and other liquors from the iced

⁶⁴⁰ State v. Kearns, Appellant’s Abstract, 139..

⁶⁴¹ MacDonald, “Gift to Union Mission.”

⁶⁴² McDonald, “Gift to Union Mission.”

troughs in the cellar, Dave [Bulkley] and his wife and daughter set up housekeeping.”⁶⁴³

The resort next-door to Madame Lovejoy’s, the house of Eva Prince, was still in operation when Bulkley opened the City Union Mission. “Next door to the west was the old Eva Prince house,” wrote MacDonald, “yet filled with women of the underworld, the very scum of it.”⁶⁴⁴ According to MacDonald, the fall of the Prince house began there with the death of a “baby of the underworld,” an illegitimate child of one of Prince’s prostitutes. The mother appealed to Bulkley and his wife for help, so the baby’s funeral was held in the old parlor of the Lovejoy house. The crib girls of Prince’s sat on the steps and in the windows of the Lovejoy house to listen to the service. At the back of the Lovejoy house, an elderly Annie Chambers opened her kitchen window to listen to the service. Shortly after the funeral, Eva Prince agreed to lease the Prince resort to Bulkley as an addition to the City Union Mission.⁶⁴⁵ Eventually, Eva Prince sold the house to the Bulkleys for \$2,000.00 and a promise from Dave Bulkley that the house would be used as a home for wayward girls.

The funeral and the sale of the Prince house led Chambers to build a relationship with the Bulkley family. Annie Chambers became friends with Mrs. Bulkley, and even lent Mrs. Bulkley her famous Alaskan seal coat for a trip to lectures at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.⁶⁴⁶ Chambers did not, however,

⁶⁴³ MacDonald, “Gift to Union Mission.”

⁶⁴⁴ MacDonald, “Gift to Union Mission.”

⁶⁴⁵ MacDonald, “Gift to Union Mission.”

⁶⁴⁶ MacDonald, “Gift to Union Mission.”

leave her work as a madam behind. Her home became a “halfway house” for young women in the city. Chambers ran the home with Murray Darling, an African American laborer and husband of Chambers’ deceased long-time personal maid. Beginning in 1932, right after the court decision, Chambers began to give tours of her famous home. Chambers’ house became a stop on “slumming tours,” tours of the then dead red-light homes and other sites of prostitution targeting upwardly mobile white couples as the tourists. As Kevin Mumford has explained, slumming was a part of sex tourism that provided access to “forbidden desires.”⁶⁴⁷ This was certainly the case for tourists at the Chambers home, who clearly came from upper and middle-class Kansas City families. Reporter W.G. Secrest described the tour attendees as “well dressed men and women, husbands and wives” who knew Chambers as a “name familiar to people of these parts for more than a half a century, albeit a name mentioned only with extremest care in polite mixed company.”⁶⁴⁸ Chambers allowed tourists to freely examine every room of the home, telling stories of the girls who worked in the gilded bedrooms. As Secrest wrote of one tourist visit: “Paintings of nude women, which ‘Miss Annie’ classifies as art, hang from a moulding near the ceiling. . . The rooms of ‘her girls’ are located on the second floor of the rambling, old brick structure. These also were visited by her new class of patrons.”⁶⁴⁹ Eventually Chambers gave such

⁶⁴⁷ Mumford, *Interzones*, 115.

⁶⁴⁸ W.G. Secrest, “South Siders Getting Thrill From Sights: Colorful Figure in Red Light District for Half Century Relates Her Story Nightly,” *Kansas City Journal Post*, 15 May 1932, 1(B).

⁶⁴⁹ Secrest, “South Siders Getting Thrill,” 2(B).

tours of the house every Tuesday and Thursday, since the house was rented as a nightclub the rest of the time.⁶⁵⁰

Throughout her tours and her public appearances in the 1930s, Chambers talked about her friendship with the Bulkley family. Shortly before Chambers died in 1935, she willed her house to the Bulkley mission with the stipulation that it be used to assist women in need.⁶⁵¹ In addition, Chambers required that Murray Darling be allowed to stay in the house and supplied with a monthly stipend. The red-light district, which once helped women in need earn and a living, became a home for religious reform and urban missionary work. While it might be expected that the remapping and spatial identification of prostitution in the red-light district would end with Chambers death, it did not. Chambers home was never used as a halfway house for women, as she requested in her will. The Bulkley's used it intermittently as a flop house for railroad workers, and Murray Darling continued to live there in a padlocked room on the second floor. Upon Reverend Bulkley's death in 1940, his widow and Chambers' friend Beulah Bulkley went before the circuit court to have the Chambers home razed. While Mrs. Bulkley tried to sell the house and land to a local truck company, she was stopped by an injunction placed by Murray Darling. According to Darling, Chambers was coerced into giving the house and furnishing to the Bulkleys. The court found, however, that Darling had no claim to the home or its furnishings: he

⁶⁵⁰ Secrest, "South Siders Getting Thrill," 1(B).

⁶⁵¹ Social Improvement News, "From Dark to Dawn: No. 3," 12.

was forced onto the street, and died in 1950. The Chambers home was razed to the ground in 1943, and all remaining rubble hauled off the old lot in 1946. As one reporter wrote in 1963: “Today no hint of the ‘scarlet’ corner remains. Bare concrete covers the corner where Kansas City’s most notorious ‘resorts’ were located and it serves as a truck terminal.”⁶⁵²

Chambers, and with her the history of jazz scene prostitution in Kansas City, was excavated once more in Kansas City’s the history of the city’s public spaces. The most famous painting in Chambers’ brothel was a nearly seven foot tall oil painting of a nude woman. It hung in her entry parlor for forty years. Sometime in the 1920s, likely during her court cases against Jackson County, Chambers gave the painting to her pharmacist for storage at his store at 1408 Grand. Unable to hang the painting in his store, the pharmacist placed the painting in storage. It was rediscovered during an estate sale. The painting was cleaned and restored in the 1960s, where it found its way onto the walls of a bar and nightclub in Kansas City’s Plaza shopping district. The painting was featured as the centerpiece of a wall “crowded with paintings, pastels, watercolors and drawings of nude women.”⁶⁵³ Decades after her crusade against anti-prostitution movements, Chambers was reduced to a nude on a nightclub wall.

That Chambers’ image later became a symbol of female sexuality hanging on the wall is analogous to the representation of sex workers and sex tourism in

⁶⁵² “Mysterious ‘Lady’ Won’t Reveal Her Past,” *Kansas City Star*, 6 December 1963.

⁶⁵³ Rudolph Umland, “Gambling Halls, Saloons and Bawdy Houses,” *The Attic Window: The Monthly Magazine for the Audience of Tiffany’s Attic*, July 1972, 41.

traditional jazz history. Sex workers are reduced to wallpaper, interesting and colorful backgrounds for the master narrative. The world of sex tourism in Kansas City's jazz scene, however, was more than just a backdrop. It represented a zone of sexual commodification, a front line of economic power, and a clear example of the role of identification in Kansas City's jazz scene spaces. The experimentations with gender behavior and boundaries among sex tourists and sex workers created a new list of gendered identities: homosexual men, prostitutes, lesbians, strippers, New Women, and independent single men and women. The power of sexual division remained, but new gender divisions altered the popular understanding of sexuality and acceptability. These changing ideas about gender, sexuality and respectability were not analogous or ancillary to the jazz scene. Sex tourism, and the challenges it represented to changing mainstream definitions, were an integral part of the jazz scene.

Conclusion

Kansas City reformers and working-class residents struggled with the issues of commercial amusement and female sexuality throughout the early 20th century. The battles took place in amusement parks, saloons, vaudeville and the red-light district. By the time the red-light district was closed, other working-class commercial amusements were either destroyed or appropriated by upper-class Kansas Citians. City reformers already created laws governing couples in dance halls, delineating sex-specific areas of parks, and closing traditional

working-class saloons. The key to Kansas City's cultural struggle was the gendered, raced and classed definition of acceptable behavior, and how that definition was portrayed and enacted in popular culture. The gender roles that were considered fluid and blurred in working-class neighborhoods and sex tourism spaces in the 1880s were strictly defined and policed by 1930. Vestiges of Victorian sexual divisions based on male and female spheres still existed in the 1930s.

CHAPTER 6:
EDNA MAE JACOBS

When the 1980 exhibition “Goin’ To Kansas City” premiered, it included in one section a black and white photograph of a performer known as “Mr. Half-and-Half.” The photograph has since been reproduced in Pearson’s *Goin’ To Kansas City*, as well as the Kansas City Jazz website “Paris of the Plains,” administered by Chuck Haddix. Both Pearson and Haddix point to this single photograph as evidence of gender, sexuality, and changing identities in Kansas City during its jazz heyday. It was this photograph that inspired me to study jazz spaces in Kansas City. I found the photograph in the Pearson book, and followed it (like other scholars before me) as though it were a map to a history of queerness in Kansas City’s jazz scene. While I was taking part in Christopher Nealon’s search for myself in those moments, I also found a veritable goldmine of information about the jazz scene in Kansas City. I went on to transcribe the interview that Edna Mintirn and her daughter Ida Mintirn, the original owners of the photograph of “Mr. Half-and-Half,” did with Pearson and Litwak in 1980. I was later informed about a collection of scrapbooks that included photographs of female impersonators from the 1920s and 1930s in Kansas City. I volunteered at the Spencer Library on the campus of the University of Kansas to complete a guide and finding aid for this collection. During my volunteer work cataloging

the scrapbook collection, I was surprised to turn a page and find the original photograph of “Mr. Half-and-Half.” These were the scrapbooks and ephemera of Edna Mae Jacobs- mistakenly identified by Pearson and Litwak as Edna Mintirn.

While well-known jazz performers lived and worked in Kansas City during the jazz scene, little information exists about those performers who did not achieve even local fame. Thousands of house band musicians, territory players, vaudeville and burlesque dancers, and table singers worked throughout Kansas City, but they seldom appear in the official history of jazz as more than the background or opening act for the development of jazz as music. Edna Mae Jacobs, in many ways, is an exception to that dearth of information.⁶⁵⁴ Jacobs appears in the City’s collected archival records in two forms. The first is the interview completed in 1980 by Pearson and Litwak. The second source of Jacobs’ narrative is a collection of her personal papers, donated to the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas in 1997. The Jacobs Papers include Jacobs’ own scrapbooks and mementos, clippings and matchbooks from the many clubs in which she performed across the United States, and photographs of the female impersonators at Kansas City clubs such as Dante’s Inferno. These photographs and scrapbooks represent the collected memories of a cabaret singer and working-class white women in Kansas City’s jazz scene, and include a wealth of information on the previously ignored history of gender identity and expression

⁶⁵⁴ Edna Mae Whithouse was married three time (Riggs, Jacobs, and Mears). Pearson and Litwak mistakenly listed her as Edna Minturn, the last name of her daughter Ida. Though her last name was Mears at the time of her death, when her papers were donated to the University of Kansas they were listed as the Edna Mae Jacobs Papers. For clarity, she will be referred to as Edna Jacobs throughout this work.

in Kansas City. Given the seeming importance of these collections to understanding Kansas City's jazz scene, why is Edna Jacobs completely excluded from the written history of the jazz scene in Kansas City? How did a single photograph from her collection become representative of an entire category of jazz scene performance, while evidence of her world was subsumed?

The answer to that question lies in Jacobs' personal history. Jacobs worked as a table singer and waitress, later a club owner and manager in Kansas City. She was not, according to the jazz canon, worthy of attention. The jazz canon, with its emphasis on the skill of famous male musicians and their ascension to New York's avant-garde, makes no attempt to include entertainers such as table singers. According to Norman Pearson, table singers were "usually working girls" (meaning prostitutes), and therefore not as important as the musicians and bands of Kansas City "Jazz."⁶⁵⁵ In fact, of the 123 interviews completed by Pearson and Litwak, only two were done with performers who worked primarily as singers. Both were female: Edna Jacobs and Myra Taylor. Taylor, however, was a featured singer with the Harlan Leonard band and later gained national and international fame as a recording artist: according to Pearson, she was a "vocalist."⁶⁵⁶ Edna Jacobs is not listed as a vocalist at all, even though some of the Pearson biographical sketches of interview subjects list "vocals" as one of their skills. According to Pearson, Jacobs was a "singer, dancer, and

⁶⁵⁵ Pearson, interview with Amber Clifford.

⁶⁵⁶ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 227.

entertainer.”⁶⁵⁷ Driggs and Haddix discuss Taylor in more detail, listing her as “a vocalist and entertainer.”⁶⁵⁸ According to Driggs and Haddix, Taylor began her career as a singer and dancer in the Sunset and Reno clubs.⁶⁵⁹ In their discussion of Taylor, however, this early work as a table singer and dancer was both temporary and important only for the training ground it provided Taylor for her later success. Given these examples, it seems clear that in the jazz canon, table singing and dancing was not “real jazz,” and therefore did not deserve the attention of jazz historians. This also seems connected to the denial of gender and sexuality in the master narrative of jazz, if table singers could be explained into the invisible simply by marking those singers as prostitutes.

The jazz canon practice of marginalizing table singers and dancers is what caused Edna Jacobs’ story to be dominated by the master narrative. After the death of her friend and grandmother-in-law Edna Jacobs, Kansas Citian Donna Wilson contacted the American Jazz Museum and Hall of Fame about the possible donation of Jacobs’ scrapbooks, costumes and photographs. Representatives of the American Jazz Museum turned Wilson down, on the grounds that Jacobs was “not famous enough.”⁶⁶⁰ Five years later, when I arrived at the Western Historical Manuscripts Collections repository to listen to Jacobs’ 1980 interview, the curator offered to find a tape of someone more famous. In the scrapbooks were the memories and mementos of a working-class woman, a jazz

⁶⁵⁷ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 226.

⁶⁵⁸ Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 188.

⁶⁵⁹ Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 188.

⁶⁶⁰ Wilson, telephone interview with Amber Clifford.

performer, a Kansas City native, and someone who seemingly represented a challenge to representations of gender and sexuality in Kansas City's jazz scene. How did all of those seemingly disparate events come together? After decades of storage and misidentification, how did the memories of Edna Jacobs, both in recorded interview and personal papers, come together over me? More importantly, how did Jacobs' photograph gain jazz canon fame, while Jacobs' was herself subsumed by the canon?

The answers to those questions lie in the biography and memories of Edna Jacobs herself. Jacobs was a white, working-class table singer, and on the surface does not represent any great challenge to the mainstream social order of the time. Clearly, Jacobs considered her scrapbooks and memories important, important enough to keep and recollect for interviewers long after her career was over. Despite their vital personal connections, however, the sources still present a difficult test for researchers. While Jacobs' scrapbooks are interesting and important in terms of visual record, we have very little written information. Her 1980 interview was shaped as much by the preferences of her interviewers and her daughter Ida Mintirn than by Edna herself, who suffered from Alzheimer's Disease at the time of the interview. It is clear from the interview tape that the collected group viewed the scrapbooks while Edna spoke in 1980, but no discussion of the photographs exists on the tape. The importance of these documents, and of Edna's life, lie not in the face value of the documents

themselves. They lie in the unspoken, the *unvisible* aspects of gender and jazz in Kansas City included in the interstitial spaces of their pages and words.

According to Avery Gordon, hypervisibility (where there is no distinction between presence and absence) leads to *unvisibility*: the presence of a true lack of the visible.⁶⁶¹ It is this invisible space in the history of the Kansas City jazz scene that Edna Jacobs inhabits: always there in every reproduction of the “Mr. Half-and-Half” photograph, but always in its shadow. Edna Jacobs lurks in these shadows of the jazz scene, her experience neither explicit nor entirely lost, but subsumed in a process of jazz historicization and awaiting an encounter with recovery. Jacobs and her memories represent what Avery Gordon called *cultural blindness*: an aspect of cultural fear that leads to the ignorance of all but the most official knowledges.⁶⁶² This chapter is an attempt to write the story of this ghost, and to deal with its desires. It is an attempt to answer Edna, to write her into the present, and to analyze the forces of historiography and discursive formation that rendered her invisible. Avery Gordon, who also attempted to answer a ghost, wrote this on ghostly desires:

In order to manage this ‘remembering which seems unsure,’ it will be necessary to broach carefully and continuously the desires of the ghost itself. The ghost’s desires? Yes, because the ghost is not just the return of the past of the dead. The ghostly matter is that always ‘waiting for you,’ and its motivations, desires, and interventions are remarkable only for being current.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 16-17.

⁶⁶² Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 207.

⁶⁶³ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 169.

The “motivations, desires, and interventions” of the ghostly matters raised by researching Edna Jacobs in the present are directly connected to the spatialization of both her life and her memories. Jacobs lived in Kansas City’s largest working-class district, the West Bottoms. Her recollections of growing up in the West Bottoms reveal she identified strongly with the West Bottoms as a site of economic and class struggle. She later worked in Dante’s Inferno, one of the city’s most well-known female impersonator cabarets. The bits and pieces of Jacobs’ biography and memories comprise the ghostly matters that helps illuminate the ways that spaces such as Dante’s were identified with specific groups in the city’s jazz scene. These memories and connections are important, however, for what they haunt about the current. Within Jacobs’ story is the discursive formation of spaces, and the role that official knowledges played in silencing those not considered important to the “official” history of the jazz scene. By reducing Jacobs’ work and life as a table singer to a single photograph, the jazz canon essentially subjugated knowledges of table singers and dancers, Dante’s Inferno, and the everyday life of a jazz scene performer in Kansas City’s Pendergast world. By inviting Jacobs’ work and life as a table singer to haunt that history, we can disturb the representations of “Jazz Age” gender, class, race, sexuality and space seen so often in the jazz canon.

A Biography of Edna Mae Jacobs

Though her exact birthdate is unknown, Edna Mae Whithouse was likely born in 1905-1906. She told Pearson and Litwak in 1980 that she was born “in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma,” and came to Kansas City with her mother and younger brother upon the death of her father.⁶⁶⁴ Edna’s father was a religious singer, who evidently recorded songs on wax cylinders before his death.⁶⁶⁵ Young Edna and her family moved to the city to be near their maternal grandmother, a widow who lived at 2911 Gillham Street, a house in Kansas City’s West Bottoms district. Home to meat packing houses, railroad yards and factories, the West Bottoms was the center of Kansas City’s overcrowded tenements for the working-class population, whether white, black or immigrant.⁶⁶⁶ Because the West Bottoms was the city’s industrial center, its tenements primarily housed newly arrived native and European immigrant packinghouse workers, along with most of the city’s African-American population.⁶⁶⁷ Edna Jacobs moved to Kansas City with her family in the early 1900s, and lived in a five-room canvas tent home in the Bottoms as a child.⁶⁶⁸ The West Bottoms, because of its concentration of working-class and racially marginalized people, was often the site of labor disputes. Kansas City reformers, in fact, struggled with residents in

⁶⁶⁴ Transcript of interview with Edna (nee Jacobs) and Ida Mintirn, recorded 24 January 1980 by Norman Pearson Jr. and Howard Litwak, transcript by Amber R. Clifford, 18 October 2002 (Kansas City, MO: Kansas City Jazz Oral History Collection, Folder #KC0012, Tape #T.123 (12), Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Kansas City-Missouri), 2.

⁶⁶⁵ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 5.

⁶⁶⁶ Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, 4-5.

⁶⁶⁷ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 102.

⁶⁶⁸ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 3.

the West Bottoms throughout the early 1900s and into the jazz scene. While it was not the only clash, one labor strike in the First Ward was particularly violent. Kansas City's upper and middle-class residents often sent their cleaning to steam laundries, where women and girls worked in 120 degree temperatures for \$4.50 a week.⁶⁶⁹ Comparatively, as previously discussed, women working in prostitution could expect to make up to eight dollars a week. Demanding an eight-hour workday and better pay, the laundry workers at Minger Laundry on Twelfth Street (in the heart of the Jazz District) tossed laundry bundles into the street and burned them in late 1917.⁶⁷⁰ As the strike gained support, women strikers began to vandalize city laundry trucks. A Walker Laundry truck was pushed over Cliff Drive, the city's most famous and elite block of homes. An attack on a Silver Laundry truck at Seventeenth and Cherry resulted in the death of a non-striking laundry guard.⁶⁷¹ Eventually, twenty-six thousand union members in Kansas City went on strike in support of laundry workers. Working-class owned movie houses, breweries and saloons in the First Ward closed in support as well.⁶⁷² The strike lasted nearly six months, causing shutdowns and economic hardship across the city. Edna Jacobs, who was an eleven year old girl when the strike occurred, recalled the ways in which the strike affected her West Bottoms family.

When we lived at 2911 Gillham and the strike was on it was really, really hard times. . . They wanted you to pick all up any kind of metal. Screws,

⁶⁶⁹ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 169.

⁶⁷⁰ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 180.

⁶⁷¹ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 180.

⁶⁷² Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City*, 182.

butts, and bolts, anything. We got ten cents a pound for it, little brother and I with that wagon [a childhood wagon].⁶⁷³

Edna Jacobs lived and worked in Kansas City during the preeminence of the Pendergast-controlled machine. The spatial control of race, gender, sexuality, and popular amusement in Kansas City was integral to the Pendergast machine. While Pendergast garnered both income and popular support from his segregated patronage, it is clear that Kansas City's national reputation as a "wide open" city came from machine-controlled spaces in the Pendergast world.⁶⁷⁴ Clubs and brothels, known as Pendergast "sin palaces," blanketed the city's First and Second Ward districts. Brothels were concentrated in the West Bottoms, where 250 brothels operated on only four blocks of Fourteenth Street.⁶⁷⁵ Cabarets and other jazz clubs were located primarily in Little Tammany, a Second Ward area where fifty cabarets were located on Eighteenth and Vine alone.⁶⁷⁶ Edna Jacobs' life reveals that contested spatial territory that the occupants of the First and Second Wards navigated as part of the Pendergast world, especially Pendergast's reliance on segregation. For instance, when interviewers Pearson and Litwak asked Jacobs if Dante's *Inferno* allowed African Americans at the tables, Jacobs replied that club owners "didn't like colored people in there." She also remembered spending after hours time in the Sunset Club and the Subway Club, two African American clubs that often appear in the jazz canon as sites of performances by

⁶⁷³ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 5.

⁶⁷⁴ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 100.

⁶⁷⁵ Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast!*, 101.

⁶⁷⁶ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 125.

Kansas City's jazz greats. "Oh yeah!" Jacobs told interviewers, "We'd always have to go someplace and wind down. We'd go down to Niggertown and watch them jam. Oh boy."⁶⁷⁷ Jacobs saw herself as a West Bottoms native, but also a white person. Though she worked in jazz spaces all over the city, Jacobs evidently also went "slumming" in the Jazz District. Was Jacobs "slumming" though, or was she following the popular identification of that area of the Jazz District? After all, Jacobs does mention "winding down." What pressures caused Jacobs to need to "wind down?"

Due largely to Pendergast's segregation rules, this alignment of vice in working-class and racial minority neighborhoods followed the mainstream codes of morality in the Kansas City. White city dwellers, who found the thought of vice in their neighborhoods threatening, deemed it acceptable when segregated to unacceptable neighborhoods.⁶⁷⁸ This spatial enclosure led to an odd sharing of power between city fathers and the Pendergast world: vice districts would be allowed to thrive as long as they did not spread beyond the borders of the enclosed First and Second Wards. First Ward constituents like Edna Jacobs were perceived as deviant, although most patrons of vice districts in the city came from outside the wards. At the same time, Jacobs saw herself as superior to African Americans in the First Ward. The result was a double-edged life for people in the Pendergast world. While vice brought money and employment to the Pendergast wards, it also brought violence, sexual objectification, and an aura of exoticism to

⁶⁷⁷ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 16.

⁶⁷⁸ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 126.

African American and working-class city dwellers. The income and control that First and Second Ward city dwellers and their Pendergast patrons gained from the jazz scene came at the cost of racial segregation and the objectification of working-class women across racial lines.

Another example of the role of segregation in the Pendergast world, at Edna Jacobs' place in that world, is in her memories of African American jazz clubs. While clubs such as the Chesterfield served white patrons, another group of clubs operated for African American patrons. One of the few mixed-race or "black and tan" clubs in Kansas City was the Reno Club. The Reno Club was located at Twelfth Street between Cherry and Locust, and was the club where Charlie Parker supposedly played his first show.⁶⁷⁹ While the Reno catered to a mixed-race clientele, it did so by building a dividing wall through the middle of the club that prevented the intermingling of customers.⁶⁸⁰ Most African American music lovers listened to jazz at cabarets such as the Sunset and Subway clubs, along Highland Avenue in Little Tammany.⁶⁸¹ The African American Cherry Blossom Club was the home of Count Basie, and included a "no whites" policy to protect its female customers from slumming whites.⁶⁸² While Edna Jacobs remembered these clubs, her perspective was clearly that of a white woman. Jacobs recalled feeling welcome in African American clubs she visited after a

⁶⁷⁹ John White, "Kansas City, Pendergast, and All That Jazz," in *American Studies: Essays in Honour of Marcus Cunliffe*, Brian Holder and John White ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 238.

⁶⁸⁰ Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 169.

⁶⁸¹ White, "Kansas City," 238.

⁶⁸² Schirmer, *A City Divided*, 172.

night's work, and she told interviewers that she never felt endangered. Jacobs, however, also stated that while she knew musicians and cooks, she was not friends with any of the African Americans in the clubs. In fact, Jacobs remembered the Subway as "rowdy" and the Reno as a "dump." Her greatest recollection of the African American clubs was the availability of marijuana. "I never smoked a stick in my life," Jacobs told Pearson and Litwak, "but you'd breathe it. You'd see smoke coming up off the ashtrays."⁶⁸³ For Jacobs, a working-class white woman performing as a table singer, the African American clubs were not respectable.

Performing in Dante's Inferno

Beginning around 1920, Jacobs began working in Kansas City's jazz scene districts. Though she eventually built a singing career, her early adulthood was spent working as a waitress. Jacobs recalled her experiences working as a young waitress in Nicholl's Lunch, a popular diner in Kansas City near the Jazz District on.

You didn't want to sing there, you wanted to go squat, sit down a while. Oh, it was a work house, but I loved it. I loved the whole family. They had the cutest bunch of kids. . . little monsters, they'd come in there. . . They had floors [garbled tape]. I'd have the room all nice and clean, and they'd get in there and start skating.⁶⁸⁴

Her career as a diner waitress, however, was short lived. Sometime in the mid-1920s Jacobs became a table singer and waitress at Dante's Inferno. Another

⁶⁸³ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 13-14.

⁶⁸⁴ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 1.

landmark in Kansas City's Pendergast world, Dante's featured drag performers, including "Mr. Half-and-Half," along with a house band and floor show featuring special effects created by stage designer Frank Villareal. "He made monsters in there, and made them move," recalled Jacobs about the special effects floor show, "It's come crawl out of the cave. Bring over somebody's drinks, and they'd jump!"⁶⁸⁵ When Dante's Inferno gained enough popularity to outgrow its original location near Cherry Avenue, it was relocated in 1933 to 1104 Independence Avenue, at the corner of Independence Avenue and Troost. Near the heart of the Jazz District, the new Dante's attracted not only customers, but newspaper attention. The December 1933 reopening of Dante's was recorded in the *Kansas City Journal-Post* "Night Club Notes" section as the "hottest of the hot spots." "Old M. Satan himself holds sway with all his little devils in a setting that surely must make him feel at home," wrote the reporter, "Many novelty numbers keep the temperature at a high degree."⁶⁸⁶ That veiled reference to "hot" shows no doubt enticed and titillated city dwellers aroused by the thought of sexuality on display. Jacobs began work as a waitress in Dante's in 1929 when the club was still located near Cherry Avenue: she eventually became a table singer, and then a headlining act. As a waitress, Jacobs was required to wear revealing red satin uniforms to entice patrons of Dante's. "A little devil's suit and the horns," recalled Jacobs in 1980, "We had a tail but that caused a little business. You'd go

⁶⁸⁵ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 11.

⁶⁸⁶ "Night Club Notes," *Kansas City Journal-Post*, 3 December 1933, 4(A).

by with a tray of drinks and some sucker'd get a hold of your tail and stop ya."⁶⁸⁷ Jacobs performed under a variety of names, including Lorelei Lynn and Eddie Lynn. Newspaper clippings in Jacob's scrapbooks include reviews from Kansas City newspapers about her performances, along with copies of Dante's menu and flyers that list her among the performers. Jacobs' scrapbooks also include photographs of Jacobs and her peers at Dante's dressed in their mandatory uniforms.

Cabarets like Dante's, unlike other more mainstream jazz clubs, was a space for experimentation with gender roles. Cabarets featured floor shows and singers, as well as a public dance floor. The mixed-gender contact in the cabaret directly challenged the Victorian cult of domesticity. Cabaret performers were often women who were portrayed by critics as sexual beings. Cabarets were open to diverse populations, but their environment of sexual expressiveness attracted a working-class crowd. Quickly, critics of cabaret derided such establishments as lower-class spaces that were "influencing and infecting good women of better classes."⁶⁸⁸ It is doubtless that this portrayal of cabaret as a bastardization of proper entertainment led to the marginalization of cabaret and cabaret performers in Kansas City's jazz scene history. Cabaret, however, was integral to the development of changing attitudes about gender in the jazz scene. Cabaret was essentially a sensual space for mixed-gender crowds. Unlike vaudeville and minstrel shows, cabaret performances took place on the same floor level as the

⁶⁸⁷ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 10.

⁶⁸⁸ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 81.

audience, and no children were allowed.⁶⁸⁹ These conditions in the cabaret removed barriers between genders, and destroyed the illusory barrier between performance and reality that the legitimate theater institutionalized. Patrons of Dante's Inferno came not only for the music and the entertainment, but for the desire-driven chance to blur boundaries as well. Perhaps it was that same desire that brought Jacobs to Dante's Inferno looking for work, and kept here there until the club closed permanently.

That Jacobs saw Dante's as a transgressive space that represented a particular period of her life is a plausible reading of her scrapbooks. Of the two scrapbooks in the Jacobs Papers at the University of Kansas, only one is complete. That scrapbook contains Jacobs' mementos and memories of her career as a singer and club owner. Over half of the scrapbook is dominated by clippings, photographs and ephemera from Dante's Inferno. Each page was carefully arranged by Jacobs herself, and each page focuses on a specific aspect of her time at Dante's. For example, one page early in the scrapbook shows a young Edna at the beginning of her career: in her Nicholl's Lunch uniform in the bottom left corner, Jacobs and an unidentified Dante's employee wearing their devil costumes in the upper right corner, with remaining space showing club manager Eli Madloff, clippings about Dante's from the newspaper, a portrait of Jacobs and the same unidentified employee in evening gowns, and a pair of small portraits. Who is this unidentified person? For some reason, Jacobs did not put captions, details

⁶⁸⁹ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 113.

or descriptions on any of her scrapbook pages. No people are identified, nor are dates placed on the pages. Through the photographs and clippings, it is clear that the scrapbooks are in chronological order. On another page of the scrapbook Jacobs arranged a series of clippings and photographs from Dante's after it reopened on Independence Avenue. The photographs show Jacobs with the same unidentified employee as seen in previous pages. A photograph in the top left corner show Jacobs, other Dante's employees and the house band posing in an empty Dante's. Surrounding clippings are predominately announcements of the schedule of performances at Dante's, and a clipping about club owner Joe Lusco, along with one photograph of a female impersonator. Again, however, there are no notes, details or identifications, not even on the backs of the photographs. According to Donna Wilson, Edna Jacobs did not allow anyone else in the family to touch her scrapbooks, or to look in them without her knowledge. In fact, Wilson explained that Jacobs kept the scrapbooks hidden, and allowed no one else to work on them at any time. Wilson also said that "Grandmother was a woman ahead of her time."⁶⁹⁰ It seems clear that Jacobs' considered her time as a jazz performer, and specifically her time at Dante's, time spent in a transgressive space where silence was important. What was Jacobs, and her family, not saying?

The secret in the scrapbooks lies not in the visible, but in the invisible and tacit details it includes. Beginning with the opening of the second Dante's Inferno on Independence Avenue, Jacobs moved from table singer to floor show

⁶⁹⁰ Wilson interview.

performer as half of the Lynn Sisters- Eddie (Edna) and Billie. Edna Jacobs had no sisters, and Billie was actually Billy Richards, a well-known female impersonator. Richards made several appearances at Dante's as a "toe tap dancer and blues singer extraordinary."⁶⁹¹ While it was a frequent occurrence in cabarets to have fictional "sister acts," the Lynn Sisters were special- they were supposed to be a pair of female impersonators. While Richards was locally well-known as a female impersonator, Jacobs entered the performance representing a much contested identity: biologically female, Jacobs represented a man performing as a female impersonator. Through the early 1930s the "Lynn Sisters- the Sisters of Harmony" performed nightly at Dante's. Jacobs' paper include several loose photographs of Richards, both dressed in drag and dressed in more masculine street clothing. Inscriptions on the photographs from Richards read "For Eddie, A girl I shall always remember as a real and true friend," and "For Eddie, one gay girl I know shall go far."⁶⁹²

Female impersonators were far from unknown in Kansas City's jazz scene. Homosexual performers, drag performers and sex shows were understood components of the "sin palaces" of the city, even if historians did not make it seem so. As noted in chapter 2, Kansas City Ordinance 291 was in existence and should have applied to such performances. While this law was available, such laws were ignored in the Pendergast world where money and patronage was law.

⁶⁹¹ Edna Mae (Whithouse Riggs) Jacobs Collection, #97-05-04, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas-Lawrence Campus, scrapbooks.

⁶⁹² Jacobs Collection, Folder 1.

Since these clubs were marginal even within the jazz scene, however, their history has since been silenced. Though historians such as Pearson, Driggs and Haddix did not associate such performances with the jazz scene, they were part of the professional world of performers in America's jazz scenes. Gender impersonators traveled a circuit from Chicago to Kansas City, and then from Kansas City to San Francisco. In fact, the now infamous "Mr. Half-and-Half" was Arthur West-Brussard, a well-known circuit performer based in Chicago who performed under names including A. Brussard and Art West. In an announcement in the *Kansas City Call* in 1935, Brussard's performance impersonating Mae West was publicized. "Known all over the east and in Chicago as 'Mae West,'" wrote the columnist, "in private life he is A. Brussard."⁶⁹³ Kansas City, as a railroad terminus, was far from unknown in the world of gender impersonation. In fact, as discussed in chapter 3, such performances likely served as a signpost of Kansas City's jazz scene for its queer audiences. In a 1978 interview, band leader Woodie Walder remembered the "sexual attractions" this way:

In the black clubs they had female impersonators' night. . .And everybody's come to see 'em dance. It's like a big ball they have in New Orleans, for the Mardi Gras. They have a big drag act where all the gays in town came out and do their show. Hell, man, we judge people by what they want to be themselves, you dig what I mean? These people were good, they're always good to you. They'd fill up the kitty if they make some money.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹³ " 'Mae West' Well Known Female Impersonator Here," *Kansas City Call*, 14 June 1935, 11(A).

⁶⁹⁴ Pearson, *Goin' To Kansas City*, 102.

According to Walder, drag performances were clearly gathering places for queer city dwellers, as well as popular spaces in the Kansas City jazz scene. Their popularity, however, did not reflect the opinion of the city's genteel reformers, who found the atmosphere at Dante's Inferno an increasingly dangerous threat to the city. Reformers, in fact, were especially troubled by the display of gender variance and sexuality in Dante's. Some of Kansas City's reformers published a newsweekly entitled *The Future*, aimed at reformers interested in preparing the city for middle-class modernity. In a 1935 article entitled "Night Life of the Mortals," anonymous *Future* writers spent the night touring some of the city's well-known nightclubs, including the Chesterfield and Dante's Inferno. At the Chesterfield, the investigators recalled seeing a "tiny child, certainly not yet five" singing a song entitled "Oh! You Nasty Man!"⁶⁹⁵ Their description of a visit to Dante's illustrates the mainstream attitude about the club, and the dangers of sexuality it represented.

The interior is decorated with a lurid red substance which must be inflammable as the flames of hell it symbolizes. We were there for the first show, an extremely unpleasant ordeal, for the female impersonators who gave it were an inept and pitiful lot. One of them came to our table, sat down in all his finery and ordered a sherry flip. Kansas City, he lisped, was the crudest place he had ever worked in. 'The folks here are sure dumb. They don't get nothing subtle.' He went on to explain that he worked on a circuit which extended from New York to New Orleans; made pretty good money but had to spend a lot of it on snappy costumes. He was wearing, at the time, a little tulle model decorated grotesquely with a bunch of bananas. One look at the croupiers behind the gambling table decided against trying our luck there. We left just as the soft-spoken

⁶⁹⁵ "Night Life of the Mortals," *Future*, 1, no 12 (29 March 1935), 1 and 8.

Mr. Lusco was arguing with two young men patrons in an attempt to prevent them from dancing together.⁶⁹⁶

The attitude displayed in this “expose” of Dante’s Inferno seems indicative of the mainstream attitude toward gender impersonators. The investigators willingly identify the impersonator, club owner and patrons as suspect and feminine, while proposing that the painted flames of hell are more than just illusion. While this attitude was likely prevalent outside the Pendergast world, it did not stop the flow of customers to Dante’s and other “sexual attractions” in the city.

There is no way to know how much Jacobs said during her 1980 interview about her work with and as a gender impersonator at Dante’s. Regardless of the numerous photographs in her scrapbooks, there are no captions in the Jacobs Papers that identify Richards as her partner in the “sister act.” Other than matching signatures, there is no other method Jacobs used in her papers to identify the costumed and street-clothed photographs of Richards as the same person. The fact that Richards gave Jacobs both types of photographs clearly demonstrates that Jacobs was more than just a fan. In addition, the ownership of both types of photographs demonstrates the interstitial space that gender impersonators occupied in the city: both genders, and perhaps both as performances, only came together in the dressing rooms at Dante’s Inferno. Through the lack of captions, it is also apparent that Jacobs distinctly identified her career among gender impersonators as a spatially identified period in her life.

⁶⁹⁶ “Night Life of the Mortals,” 1 and 8.

In the chronological scrapbooks, later pages on Jacobs' career as a female singer at World War II military bases include many photographs of Jacobs with clippings and captions. Meanwhile, when the scrapbooks were donated to the University of Kansas, the donation arrived with all the photographs of female impersonators at Dante's in an unmarked envelop, tucked inside the back cover of the Dante's scrapbook. In that envelope of photographs, each photograph is signed and inscribed to "Eddie." They are not contextualized, captioned, of further mentioned by Jacobs. According to Donna Wilson, these scrapbooks were never touched by family members after Jacobs died, and were donated to the Spencer Library as Jacobs left them.⁶⁹⁷ In this way, Jacobs continues to haunt the jazz scene, and the photographs of performers such as "Mr. Half-and-Half." Like other forgotten members of the jazz scene, Jacobs felt the need to hide desires represented by interstitial spaces such as Dante's Inferno, even though she was an insider in that contested space.

Given all the silence and performance inherent in Jacobs' career as an impersonator at Dante's, can researchers identify her with a particular gender? Pearson, in his 1980 book, clearly represented Jacobs as a patron of female impersonation- there is no indication that Jacobs told Pearson she worked in Dante's as part of the impersonator floor show. In a section of interview in the Pearson book but now lost, Jacobs seemed to empathize with the impersonators while separating herself from them. "A lot of people didn't like impersonators,

⁶⁹⁷ Wilson, interview with Amber Clifford.

but I learned a lot from them all,” Jacobs told interviewers, “They’re wonderful people, very talented, and our crowd loved them.”⁶⁹⁸ What did she learn from “them,” and who was included in “our crowd?” Does this tell us anything about Jacobs’s identity? According to scholars Kristina Straub and Elizabeth Drorbaugh, not only is such a concrete subjectification unnecessary, in the case of male impersonators it is nearly impossible. Unlike their female impersonator counterparts, male impersonators had an additional layer of sexual subjectification to deal with as biological women. Consequently, such performers were often silent on their own sexual desires or identities. In her study of 18th century male impersonation, Kristina Straub explained that women who worked as gender impersonators were deemed especially dangerous by the mainstream because they put the very concept of feminine submissiveness into question. In addition, notions that female sexuality was supposed to be contained were contested by female performers who expressed sexuality other than the heteronormative, therefore putting containment itself into question.⁶⁹⁹ According to Straub, women who worked as male impersonators threatened a “nondominant, non-authoritative, even impotent masculinity” that seemingly regulated violence against such performers.⁷⁰⁰ In short, male impersonators engaged in silence about their own sexuality to protect both their performance persona and their personal safety, thereby reifying the very construction of gender and sexuality that kept them

⁶⁹⁸ Pearson, *Goin’ To Kansas City*, 102.

⁶⁹⁹ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 89.

⁷⁰⁰ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 134.

marginalized. “Female theatrical cross-dressing,” wrote Straub, “constitutes a site of cultural resistance to this narrowing of masculine and feminine down to certain opposite, prescribed roles, even as it serves as one of the grounds of its construction.”⁷⁰¹

A clear example of how this silence about sexuality is prevalent in the history of male impersonators lies in the story of Storme DeLarverie. DeLarverie worked as a female singer in night clubs before joining the Jewel Box Revue in 1955. The Jewel Box Revue was a female impersonation floor show and touring act. Founded originally in Miami in 1939, the Jewel Box relocated to New York in 1955, where the Jewel Box had its base of operations until it closed in 1973.⁷⁰²

DeLarverie was the only female in the show, and the only African American member of the Jewel Box Revue. She joined the show as a male impersonator and emcee, and gave birth to the Revue’s tagline: “25 men and a girl.”⁷⁰³

Photographs of DeLarverie from the Jewel Box Revue program show a slender African American who looks like a young man: in a slim cut suit and tie, close-cropped hair and an inscrutable look, holding a cigarette on a pinky-ringed left hand. The caption reads “Miss Storme De Larverie: The Lady Who Appears To Be A Gentleman.”⁷⁰⁴ Throughout the program, photographs of female impersonators show them in both costume and masculine street-clothing. No such juxtapositioned photographs of Storme DeLarverie appear.

⁷⁰¹ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 143.

⁷⁰² Michelle Parkerson, “The Jewel Box Revue,” in *Storme: A Life in the Jewel Box*,” Lesbian Herstory Archives, Biographical Files- Storme DeLarverie, 1-3.

⁷⁰³ Parkerson, “The Jewel Box Revue,” 3.

⁷⁰⁴ File- Jewel Box Revue, Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn, New York.

Research about Storme DeLarverie and her work with the Jewel Box illuminates several aspects of Jacobs' biography. First, according to scholar Elizabeth Drorbaugh, DeLarverie avoided any gendered or sexualized labels. DeLarverie's cross-dressing helped spatialized her as "family" in the world of gender impersonation, a position she did not wish to endanger by discussing her own desires.⁷⁰⁵ DeLarverie's desire to retain some gender fluidity shares commonalities with Jacobs, who entered her work as an impersonator after a stint as a singer. Jacobs, perhaps, felt included in the community at Dante's, the world she "learned a lot from," and did not want to endanger that world by revealing her own sexual desires, whatever they were. Another aspect of this question of identity is pivotal to understanding the subjectification of gender impersonators: we cannot forget that they were performers. According to Drorbaugh, performers of gender impersonation resisted being read as one gender or another, preferring ambiguity to identification.⁷⁰⁶ Did Jacobs hide her scrapbooks, and exclude captions, in an effort to resist identification? Jacobs did, after all, allow Pearson and Litwak to identify her as "Mintirn" though that was not her name. In addition, Jacobs did not tell them about either her work in Dante's or her three marriages to men. Perhaps Jacobs most identified with, and felt comfortable, in ambiguity. Taken together, the gender impersonation work of DeLarverie and Jacobs illustrate the fact that gender and sexuality is inherently performative, and

⁷⁰⁵ Drorbaugh, "Sliding Scales," 128.

⁷⁰⁶ Drorbaugh, "Sliding Scales," 139.

defies attempts to determine its position in historical individuals, As Judith Butler wrote, sexuality:

Always exceeds any given performance, presentation, or narrative which is why it is not possible to derive or read off a sexuality from any given gender presentation. And sexuality may be said to exceed any definitive narrativization.⁷⁰⁷

Such ambiguity, however, likely contributed to the subsumation of Jacobs in the historical record. After all, if it was the threat of discovery and the comfort of ambiguity that kept Jacobs from contextualizing her scrapbooks, or that prevented Jacobs and her daughter from being more detailed in the 1980 interview, then it is that same combination of factors that leaves Jacobs lurking in the shadows of the jazz scene.

Life After Dante's

Club owner and Pendergast crony Joe Lusco was shot by Pendergast rivals in 1938, and as a result he closed Dante's and opened the independent, New York-style Stork Club downtown on Baltimore Street.⁷⁰⁸ Jacobs, now without a job, signed with a touring group. Beginning in 1938 and continuing through 1943, Jacobs worked as the singer in a vocal-piano duo known as Lorelei and Lillian. Jacobs, who took the name Lorelei, worked with pianist Lillian May along a circuit that ran from Kansas City to Los Angeles.⁷⁰⁹ Jacobs also joined the circuit performers by signing with the McConkey Orchestra Company, a talent

⁷⁰⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25.

⁷⁰⁸ Jacobs scrapbook.

⁷⁰⁹ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 8-9.

agency headquartered in Kansas City. McConkey had strict rules about the behavior and attire of booked performers, and as Jacobs recalled in 1980, cross-dressing was not one of the options.

He [Mr. McConkey] interviewed me. . He said, uh, how's your wardrobe. He said, I insist you have. . . One black skirt, and a outfit for Sundays. We worked Sundays all the time. And you didn't wear naked clothes on Sunday you know, we wore sleeves. Look like a lady.⁷¹⁰

When Jacobs appeared as part of the performers in the McConkey books, she was also a young mother of three. While on tour, Jacobs' children lived for a short time with her mother on Gillham Road. During the first three years of touring, Jacobs' first husband Riggs died, her son enlisted during World War II, and her two daughters separated. Her eldest daughter, Ida, stayed in Kansas City and worked on the Plaza while living with her grandmother.⁷¹¹ Though Jacobs' daughter mentions her mother's separation from the family in the 1980 interview, Jacobs' scrapbooks are filled instead with matchbooks, photographs and newspaper reviews of her performances on the McConkey circuit. It seems that in Jacobs' life, the scrapbooks were a remembrance of her professional career, not her home life. One such clipping, from the November 13, 1943, issue of *Billboard*, included an announcement about Lorelei and Lillian's recent performance in Chicago: "Take feminine beauty, add musical talent and lovable personality, and you really have something- in this popular duo," wrote the reviewer. "Lorelei, 'Duchess of Memory Songs,' with Lillian, 'Princess of Piano

⁷¹⁰ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 10.

⁷¹¹ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 9.

Capers’.”⁷¹² In one trip to San Francisco in the 1940s, Jacobs visited Finocchio’s, a famous impersonator club. According to historian Nan Alamilla Boyd, Finocchio’s was a queer nightclub and enclave gathering space where impersonators included both genders and cross-racial representation.⁷¹³ A program, matchbook and menu from Finocchio’s was tucked in the back of Jacobs scrapbook, left unassociated with the ticket stubs, clippings and matchbooks from her other stops in San Francisco.

Finished with touring as part of the McConkey circuit in 1943, Jacobs did not return home to Kansas City. Telling interviewers that her children “were all grewed up,” Jacobs chose instead to spend two years singing with Lillian May for boot-camp soldiers in Alexandria, Louisiana.⁷¹⁴ Jacobs’ granddaughter recalled that Jacobs used a special songbook to take requests in Louisiana. Jacobs’ “hook” was her claimed ability to sing any song requested. Evidently, Jacobs kept a scrapbook of clipped sections from the lyrics of songs. Whenever someone requested a song, Jacobs would look up the lyric in her scrapbook, and use the clipped lyric as a mnemonic tool to recall the melody for both she and Lillian May. She also kept a scrapbook of military insignia in Louisiana, so that she could address her male fans by rank correctly.⁷¹⁵ The Jacobs Papers include dozens of photographs and request cards from Alexandria, frequently signed with

⁷¹² Jacobs Collection, scrapbooks.

⁷¹³ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 52.

⁷¹⁴ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 9.

⁷¹⁵ Wilson, interview with Amber Clifford.

such words as “To Lorelei, who lures men on.”⁷¹⁶ One photograph shows two Army soldiers, posed before a jeep with the word “Lorelei” painted on the wheel well.⁷¹⁷

Jacobs’ performance time in Louisiana was her last. She returned to Kansas City around 1945, quit singing and returned to her work as a table waitress in the city’s cabarets. When interviewers asked Jacobs in 1980 why she stopped singing, she revealed that her time in Louisiana was not pleasant. “That was, that was rough,” Jacobs told Pearson and Litwak, “And, I think I just kind of burned out.”⁷¹⁸ Upon her return to Kansas City, Jacobs worked as a hostess at the Tropics, a club downtown that included a nightly “tropical storm,” and waitresses dressed in sarongs.⁷¹⁹ Sometime shortly after her return to Kansas City, however, Edna married Joe Jacobs. It seems likely that Joe and Edna knew each other before World War II, when Edna performed at Dante’s. Joe Jacobs was an enforcer for the Pendergast machine, who purchased the Kentucky Bar-B-Q from its original owners sometime in the late 1930s. The Kentucky was a well-known eatery and jazz space in Kansas City, made famous by its early morning jam sessions attended by musicians leaving their nightly gigs in nearby Jazz District establishments. Edna Jacobs frequented the Kentucky, for both food and entertainment.⁷²⁰ In her scrapbooks, there are photographs and clippings about

⁷¹⁶ Jacobs Collection, scrapbook 1.

⁷¹⁷ Jacobs Collection, Folder 4.

⁷¹⁸ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 8.

⁷¹⁹ Wilson, interview with Amber Clifford.

⁷²⁰ Jacobs collection, scrapbooks 1 and 2.

Joe Jacobs mixed with news about other Pendergast employees such as Dante's owner Joe Lusco and emcee Eli Madloff.

While it is not clear exactly when Joe and Edna Jacobs met, what they did after their marriage is part of the Jacobs Papers. By the time the Jacobs married in 1945, the power of the Pendergast machine was broken. Boss Tom Pendergast was arrested and convicted of tax evasion in 1944, and the Pendergast machine was dismantled by reformist city officials and Attorneys General. Jacobs remembered the post-Pendergast era as a more peaceful one in the city. "It seems like people. . . Got along better," she told interviewers, "Between the factions there used to be so much unrest."⁷²¹ Together, Edna and Joe Jacobs purchased the abandoned Riverside Jockey Club on Highway 40. The Riverside Track and Club was originally opened and managed by Tom Pendergast in 1928, but it reopened under the ownership of the Jacobs as the Paradise Club and Riverside Supper Club. Newspaper announcements from 1945 mentioned the fact that the Paradise was owned by Joe Jacobs, with Eddy Lynn "in charge of floor and hostess."⁷²² Joe ran the Paradise and Riverside, while Edna worked as hostess and booked the nightly entertainment. Large sections of Jacobs' scrapbooks are devoted to the opening and operation of the Paradise, including photographs of Joe and Edna seated in the center of their jointly owned dance floor. The nightly house band was led by Sam "Baby" Lovett and his "Gentlemen of Jive." With Lovett as the

⁷²¹ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 8.

⁷²² Jacobs collection, folder 3.

headlining act, the Paradise became a popular jazz club in the 1940s, and remained open until Joe Jacobs died in the 1950s.

Edna Jacobs's granddaughter Donna Wilson recalled playing as a child at the Paradise, where Edna introduced her daughter Ida to future son-in-law Charles Minturn. Once the Paradise Club closed in the 1950s, Jacobs opened the small Eastwood Hills Tavern near the site of the Paradise Club, where patrons could hear jazz music and eat fried chicken dinners. The last entries in Jacobs' scrapbooks concern the Paradise Club. While Jacobs' granddaughter recalls spending afternoons playing with her siblings in the Eastwood Hills Tavern, Jacobs did not put anything about the tavern in her scrapbooks.⁷²³ Edna Jacobs retired from work in the 1960s.⁷²⁴ Her grandchildren lived with her for a number of years, and Jacobs remarried a man named Mears. Only one clipping in the Jacobs scrapbooks mentioned any activity after 1950- a short letter from the Director of Kansas City's Veteran's Home thanking Edna and her daughter Ida for singing for the veterans.⁷²⁵ Late in life Edna Jacobs developed Alzheimer's disease, and moved in with her daughter Ida Minturn. The 1980 interview with Pearson and Litwak was recorded in the Minturn home. The Jacobs Papers were donated to the University of Kansas in 1997 by Donna Wilson, after Edna's death and Ida's deterioration due to Alzheimer's disease made the security of the papers somewhat precarious.

⁷²³ Wilson, interview with Amber Clifford.

⁷²⁴ Jacobs Collection.

⁷²⁵ Jacobs Collection.

Jacobs and Kansas City's Jazz Scene History

Jacobs' story is representative of the problematic work of researching marginalized groups, such as working-class women and table singers, in Kansas City's history. The lack of working-class women such as Jacobs is a direct result of the inherent gendering of the written history of the city's jazz scene. The concept of Kansas City's "cocksure," Pendergast era "Jazz Age" past in essence silences any other subjects in the jazz canon. This subsumation of individuals such as Jacobs is evident in everything from the texts of the jazz canon to the treatment of collections in archival repositories. For example, the Jacobs Papers at the University of Kansas are listed as the Edna Mae (Whithouse Riggs) Jacobs Papers. Jacobs, however, never performed under any of those names. Her various stage names are described in the collection's accession records as: "Lorelei Lynn (changed her name later to Eddy Lynn) was a singer, 18th and Vine, Kansas City."⁷²⁶ Jacobs did not perform in the 18th and Vine Jazz District, nor did she perform in Kansas City as Lorelei Lynn. Given that description, patrons could easily assume that Jacobs collected the papers of Lorelei Lynn—not that Jacobs performed under a variety of stage names. In fact, the description of Jacobs' collection presents Jacobs as a patron, not a performer. Perhaps the greatest reflection of the role of gender and sexuality in avoidance of subjects such as Jacobs, especially in the jazz canon writings about Kansas City, pertains

⁷²⁶ Jacobs Papers, accession records.

to the 1980 interview by Pearson and Litwak. Pearson always referred to this interview as the Mintirn interview, using the last name of Jacob's married daughter.⁷²⁷ In his 1987 book *Goin' To Kansas City*, Pearson discussed the "Mintirn interview" as one with primary evidence of homosexuality in Kansas City's jazz scene. Despite that proclamation, Jacobs never said the word "homosexual," and Pearson did not identify passages he thought specifically discussed homosexuality. It seems, instead, that Pearson took Jacobs' stories about female impersonation as evidence of homosexuality. In addition, and despite Pearson's statements about the interview's importance, only a small section of the interview was transcribed for the Pearson book. Though the original Jacobs interview was nearly two hours long, only thirty-five minutes of the interview now exists on tape. The tapes from Pearson's project were originally deposited at the Smithsonian Institution, Rutgers University, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City, along with Pearson's personal copies. Today, only the thirty-five minute fragment in Kansas City remains. The full interview was never transcribed, and is no longer available for transcription.⁷²⁸ The fact that the original interview is lost possibly explains some of the power dynamics related to gender and sexuality, class and professional historians' concepts of propriety that subsumed not only Jacobs' narrative, but the contested territory of Kansas City's jazz scene altogether. Exactly the cause of the loss of

⁷²⁷ Pearson and Litwak not only mistakenly used Jacobs' daughter's last name, they also misspelled the name. Ida married Charles MINTURN, not MINTIRN as listed in the Pearson collections.

⁷²⁸ Despite extensive search, Norman Pearson cannot locate the (Jacobs) Mintirn tape in his private collection.

Jacobs' narrative will likely never be known. It is, however, interesting to note that the interviews Pearson and Litwak conducted with famous male performers, such as Count Basie and Jay McShann, were fully transcribed in 1987 and are available to researchers in all three archival repositories.

Another problematic area associated with Jacobs' biography lies in her relationship to the narrated events in the 1980 interview. Jacobs is listed in the Pearson book as an important source on the history of sexuality in the city, but her interview reveals some reticence about talking openly. Pearson later remembered the Jacobs interview: "We [Pearson and Litwak] both recall her being interested in the interview, and interesting, but somewhat coy about some aspects of her professional life in that era."⁷²⁹ It was not Edna Jacobs, however, but her daughter Ida that had the most contentious relationship with her mother's past. The 1980 interview was conducted in the home of Ida Minturn, and it is obvious from the recording that the interview was practiced. Ida Minturn shaped the interview through interruptions, clarifications, and the use of archival material in the scrapbooks to supplement her mother's memories. This power dynamic was as much personal as cultural, and reflected her daughter's understanding of Edna Jacobs' personal history. In a sense, Ida Minturn interpreted Edna Jacobs' narrative before it reached the tape recorder. During the course of the interview, Edna Jacobs lost control of her own narrative as her daughter guided both questions and answers for the interviewers. This level of performance in the

⁷²⁹ Norman Pearson, e-mail to Amber Clifford, 14 June 2006.

Jacobs interview poses a methodological challenge, because an interpretation of the interview depends on untangling the memories of mother and daughter.

According to Donna Wilson, Edna Jacobs suffered from Alzheimer's Disease, which doubtless affected Jacobs' ability to recall the past, and likely facilitated Ida Minturn's guidance during the interview.⁷³⁰ There are sections of the interview, however, where it seems that Minturn's concern is not her mother's memory, but the stories her mother might tell. These sections are concerned primarily with race, and specifically with "Baby" Lovett. An example is this fragment from the 1980 interview:

Interviewer: Would, um, would you have any friends who were black? That band members, like Lovett, maybe Lovett knows folks.

But just members of the audience, would you socialize much?

Edna Jacobs: Oh, I was always close to Baby because, uh. . .

Ida Minturn: No, black people. Besides in the band, were there black people that you were friendly with?⁷³¹

It is clear from Jacobs' scrapbooks who "Baby" was: drummer and bandleader Sam "Baby" Lovett. The word "Lovett" appears only once in the existing interview tape, in the passage above when mentioned by the interviewers. The passage is also indicative of another feature of the interview. Whenever the word "Baby" was uttered by Jacobs, her daughter redirected the question or changed the subject. Jacobs' scrapbooks, however, are filled with matchbooks, flyers, and photographs of Lovett in clubs and cabarets around Kansas City. In addition, there are many photographs of Lovett at dinner tables, on dance floors,

⁷³⁰ Wilson, interview with Amber Clifford.

⁷³¹ Jacobs, interview with Pearson and Litwak, 15.

and even in the stands at a Kansas City Monarchs baseball game. Who is the photographer for this collection of snapshots? Who haunts these images? As mentioned previously, the scrapbooks were tightly controlled by Jacobs alone.

Samuel Lovett was born in Louisiana in 1894. He arrived in Kansas City in 1922, and played with George and Julia Lee, the Kansas City Rockets, and occasionally filled in for Jo Jones, the drummer for the Count Basie Orchestra.⁷³² Known today in the jazz canon as an originator of Kansas City be-bop style drumming, Lovett was inducted into the Kansas City Jazz Hall of Fame in 1972—an honor he followed with a week of shows at the Hotel President.⁷³³ In a 1957 interview with jazz stakeholder Frank Driggs (in preparation for his 1959 essay), Lovett recalled the foundations of his musical style:

When I was just a young kid I used to go to the holy roller churches and get as close to the window as I could, and I heard the rhythm and it kind of grew in me. With just a drum, tambourine and a guitar, they'd get one solid beat and it would last about an hour. The longer they'd play the happier the congregation would get. It's something that grows in you and I'm still playing the same way today, nothing's changed.⁷³⁴

Though it is impossible to know exactly when Lovett and Edna Jacobs met, they likely were introduced when Lovett played drums at Kentucky Bar-B-Q. Jacobs frequented the Kentucky, the club/restaurant located at Nineteenth and Vine eventually became home of the first Gates BBQ restaurant. Lovett played at the Kentucky as part of Woodie Walder's Kentucky Club Swing Unit, the

⁷³² Howard Rye, "Lovett, Baby," *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* (New York: Grove Dictionaries Limited, 2000), 629.

⁷³³ "Music in Mid-America," *Kansas City Times*, 20 September 1972, 8(A).

⁷³⁴ Transcript of interview with Samuel Lovett, Frank Driggs Oral History Collection, located in File- Baby Lovett, Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri, Public Library.

Kentucky house band from 1934 until approximately 1939.⁷³⁵ Lovett played various shows at the Sunset, Subway and Spinning Wheel clubs, among other clubs in Kansas City. Each of these clubs was mentioned in the Jacobs interview, along with occasional mentions of “hearing Baby.” Though Jacobs left Kansas City and performed across the country, when she returned to Kansas City and opened the Paradise Club, Lovett and his band became the nightly headlining act.

An example of the ways in which the combination of desire and space worked in Kansas City’s jazz scene lies in the invisible story of Edna Jacobs and Baby Lovett. Throughout her interview, Jacobs made frequent mention of “Baby,” including his skill as a musician and his friendship with Jacobs. Each mention of his name, however, resulted in Ida Minturn changing the subject or interrupting her mother to speak to interviewers directly. Was the act of interrupting the narrative event simply racism on Ida’s part, an attempt to avoid racism from Edna, or a deeper reaction by Ida to her mother’s life experiences? While the interviewers seemed to sidestep the question of “Baby” through choice or suggestion, the presence of Baby Lovett in Edna Jacobs’ life is unmistakable in her scrapbooks. The scrapbooks span nearly forty years, and each section contains clippings, flyers and/or photographs of Baby Lovett. While some of these mementos show Lovett in performance, the rest show much more personal and private moments. What exactly was Jacobs’ relationship to Baby Lovett?

⁷³⁵ Donna Martin, *Kansas City. . . And All That’s Jazz* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McNeel Publishing, 1999), 27.

It seems clear that Lovett and Jacobs were at least friends, even though Jacobs told interviewers that she had no African American friends. The frequent inclusion of Lovett in the scrapbooks, however, might indicate a more serious relationship. Jacobs, for instance, wrote details and captions on photographs from the 1940s of her performances on the road, and about her co-ownership of the Paradise Club. While the photographs of Lovett in performance are sometimes captioned, the photographs and mementos associated with more private representations of Lovett have no context or captions at all. Like the photographs of female impersonators, images of Lovett in anything but a professional context are kept invisible. Coupled with Ida Minturn's avoidance of the subject of Lovett, Jacobs' mentions and remembrances of Lovett suggest that even if a relationship did exist, Jacobs considered it a taboo subject on a number of levels. Did Jacobs have a deeper relationship with Baby Lovett in the segregated Pendergast world? If so, what pressures caused her to continue to segregate their relationship in her scrapbooks?

Whether an intimate relationship between Lovett and Jacobs existed or not, why was Ida Minturn constantly avoiding the subject? The answer lies in the links between desire and space. The desiring body defies boundaries, whether those boundaries are between races, genders, sexualities or classes. Hegemony, however, seeks to reterritorialized those bodies by suppressing desire and replacing it with the representation of acceptability. Given the geography of desires and its jazz scene spaces that Jacobs and Lovett existed within, it is

obvious that whatever personal or cultural desires they may have had were suppressed by the hegemonic representation of interracial relationships as criminal and deviant. This same reason governs the lack of cross-identification for separate photographs of Billy Richards, and the disappearance of the complete Jacobs interview from the historical records. These images, these memories, were deviant and belonged in limited times and spaces. Once those spaces were ignored by the jazz canon, excavating their history was deemed unacceptable. As a scholar of Deleuze and Guattari wrote: “The ethical question is not one of inside/outside, but rather of how one or a collective inhabits an unavoidably corrupted context for which there is no outside.”⁷³⁶ Trapped inside this corrupted context are Jacobs, Richards and Lovett.

Another important part of the corrupted context of Jacobs’ memories is its intersections. Though there are multiple levels of information and evidence of overlapping discursive formations in Jacobs’ story, the main thread is her portrayal of spatial segregation. This spatialization includes female impersonators and table singer, working-class Kansas Citians, and racial segregation. Edna Jacobs engaged her interviewers in several short discussions about spatialization in Kansas City’s jazz scene, as well as her experiences as a “slummer” in black clubs. Her memories of race in Kansas City reflect Jacobs’ position as a white woman, but it also reveals her understanding and empathy with other performers in a context driven by music. Her scrapbooks further demonstrate this duality in

⁷³⁶ Sexton, “There Is No Interracial Sexual Relationship,” 145.

Jacobs' position. Her scrapbooks are filled with signed photographs of African American jazz performers and bands. In addition, Jacobs frequently discussed band leader Baby Lovett in her interview, and signed Lovett as her headlining act at the Paradise Club. Another major strain of discourse and analysis in the Jacobs materials are her memories of living as a woman in the Kansas City jazz scene. As a woman performer in a gendered and sexualized jazz scene, Jacobs' recollections of clubs, performers and environments in the jazz scene reveal her position as a performer and an insider in a spatialized and contested territory. Finally, Jacobs' interview serves as evidence of working-class life in Kansas City before World War II. Throughout the 1980 interview, Jacobs discussed her childhood and adulthood in Kansas City's working-class neighborhoods. Her recollections of collecting scrap metal as a child, waiting tables while her mother worked as a maid, and living in a tent in the West Bottoms excavate a largely forgotten aspect of Kansas City's jazz scene. The evidence of working-class life in Jacob's experience creates a concept of the past that greatly diverges from the common popular and historical representation of "pink and pretty" girls in a "wide open" town.

Conclusion

According to Avery Gordon, haunting transforms the shadow of a life into an undiminished life history.⁷³⁷ Edna Mae Jacobs has lurked in Kansas City's

⁷³⁷ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 208.

jazz canon shadow for decades, her life a footnote, and her memories reduced to a fetishized photograph. She was never famous, and the single photograph of “Mr. Half-and-Half” continually marginalized by traditional jazz historians. Jacobs’ story is representative of the problematic work of researching marginalized jazz scene lives in Kansas City’s history. Her story, however, also illustrates the importance of examining identity and subjectivity as a discursive production of both space and knowledge. Jacobs’ haunting of the jazz scene reveals and produces an encounter with many subjects, subjects whose voices were not preserved on tape, but whose images survived despite their liminal position in the jazz canon. Through Edna Jacobs, the spaces of the jazz scene, and the contested lives of those who lived and worked in the Pendergast world, are excavated. According to Munoz, worldmaking is inherently a collection of practices that critique the oppression of difference.⁷³⁸ In the scrapbooks and interviews, the photographs and recollections, lays Edna Jacobs’ worldmaking practice: the maintenance of memories and ephemera of a world so marginalized it was rendered invisible. Jacobs could have burned her photographs, refused an interview request, thrown her Finocchio’s program in the trash. She did not, because Jacobs’ critique of oppression was not an act of open defiance, or an overt performance of the subjugated. Her critique was (and is) in her refusal to be quiet, and in her remembrance of difference otherwise silenced by family, disease, and the historians who used one of her photographs as proof of some kind of

⁷³⁸ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 195-196.

illusionary and modern acceptance. Edna haunts jazz history, and represents an oppositional practice that still results in a worldmaking of the present.

CHAPTER 7:
CONCLUSION

Two events that were based on Kansas City's representation in the jazz canon took place in September, 2006. First, the corner of Twelfth and Vine was officially dedicated as "Goin' To Kansas City Plaza" on September 11. The blocks known for its "neon riot of bars, gambling dens and taxi dance halls" was turned into a monument of commemoration. "Kansas City, and the world, has a physical symbol to help us all remember, and relive, the wonderfully vibrant early days of Kansas City jazz," wrote Juanita Moore, Executive Director of the American Jazz Museum at the plaza's dedication, "I urge you all to go see the 'Goin' To Kansas City Plaza' at 12th Street and Vine and reminisce."⁷³⁹ During the weekend celebration of the plaza, the Kansas City, Missouri, City Council adopted the song "Kansas City" as the official city song. The classic song was written by Mike Stoller and Jerry Lieber: the two composers had never been to Kansas City.⁷⁴⁰ First recorded under the title "K.C. Lovin," the song was based on the mythos of Kansas City as a "wide open" town. Given the sexualized and the spatially-identified lyrics, the song reveals much about the pervasiveness of the myth of Kansas City's jazz scene.

⁷³⁹ Ed Fenner, "Goin' To Kansas City Revisited," *JAM: Jazz Ambassador Magazine*, December 2005, 25.

⁷⁴⁰ Fenner, "Goin' To Kansas City Revisited," 24.

I'm goin' to Kansas City, Kansas City, here I come
 Yes, goin' to Kansas City, Kansas City, here I come
 They got a crazy way a-lovin' an' a I wanna get me some

I was standing on the corner, of 12th Street and Vine
 Yeah, standing on the corner, of 12th Street and Vine
 With my Kansas City woman an a bottle of Kansas City wine

Well I might take a plane, I might take a train
 If I have to walk, I'm going there just the same
 I'm going to, Kansas City, Kansas City, here I come
 They got a crazy way a-lovin' an I wanna get me some
 Oh yeah

Keep your hands off of her, don't belong to you
 Keep your hands off of her, don't belong to you
 She's mine all mine, no matter what she do

Well I might take a plane, I might take a train
 If I have to walk, I'm goin' there just the same

I'm goin' to Kansas City, Kansas City, here I come
 They got a crazy way a-lovin' an I wanna get me some
 They got a crazy way a-lovin' an I wanna get me some
 They got a crazy way a-lovin' an I wanna get me some!
 Yeah!⁷⁴¹

Much has changed in Kansas City since the days of the jazz scene suggested in the Lieber and Stoller song. Through a reminiscent nod to the “genteel lady” of Kansas City, however, traditional jazz historians have failed to understand how jazz scene history and its spatialization were linked through reterritorialization. Deleuze and Guattari, in their book *Anti-Oedipus*, discussed their theory of reterritorialization. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the

⁷⁴¹ Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller, “K.C. Lovin’,” lyrics on-line at <http://www.bluesforpeace.com/lyrics/kansas-city.htm>, accessed 30 June 2007.

theoretical “body without organs” was deterritorialized by desires, but hegemonic institutions constantly sought to reterritorialize the body by defining and redefining enclosed individuals.⁷⁴² While Deleuze and Guattari initially intended their theory for application in studies of identity and the body, the same theory can be applied to spaces. Through desire individuals deterritorialized spaces, but hegemonic discursive practices subjectified those individuals and consequently reterritorialized the space identified with those subjects. The changing identification and use of jazz scene spaces in Kansas City was not simply an effect of development- it was a reterritorializing subsumation of the city’s jazz scene history through the destruction of space, and the production of a written history that denied the historical meanings of such spaces. Through this reterritorialization and the master narrative of jazz history, Kansas City’s jazz scene spaces became melancholy plazas where the contested meanings of music, sex, race, and space were reduced to lyrics.

This reterritorialization of spaces is visible when examining the current state of some of the spaces associated with the city’s jazz scene in this study. Many of these spaces are now gone. 2911 Gillham, once home to a tent city where Edna Jacobs and her family stayed in the early 1900s, is now a warehouse. Dante’s Inferno, the famous home of female impersonation, was torn down to make way for an interchange between Independence Avenue and Interstate 35. Used by a trucking company for many years as an extra parking lot, the lot that

⁷⁴² Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983; 10th edition, 2000), 33-34.

was home to Annie Chambers' brothel was left vacant and abandoned until 2000. That year, the City of Kansas City and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources approved the lot for development. In the development report, officials for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources identify the lot this way: This 1.8-acre Kansas City site saw many uses throughout its history, including a saloon, a warehouse, a theatre, and a couple of trucking companies. At the time of cleanup, it was a parking lot." After four years of work, Hok Sports Venue opened their international corporate headquarters on the site in 2004.⁷⁴³ Hok is an internationally-known architectural firm specializing in sports arenas and stadiums. Currently, Hok is the architectural firm leading the City of Kansas City's plans for redesign of Kauffman Stadium and Arrowhead Stadium, as well as the in-process downtown Sprint Arena.⁷⁴⁴

While those spaces were reterritorialized by their destruction, others remained on the city's map as historical sites of the "Jazz Age." The most famous of these is the 18th and Vine "Jazz District," which Driggs and Haddix explained this way:

Eighteenth and Vine miraculously escaped the urban renewal wrecking ball that leveled surrounding neighborhoods during the 1960s. A multi-million-dollar redevelopment effort, launched in 1997, featuring the American Jazz and Negro Leagues Baseball Museums, has sparked a minor renaissance in the historic district. New housing units have been erected, and two new restaurants anchor the stretch of 18th Street between Paseo and Highland. The renovated Gem Theater has reopened as a performing arts venue. The jazz museum, situated on the corner of 18th

⁷⁴³ Missouri Department of Natural Resources, "Wyandotte 300 Project," on-line at <http://www.dnr.mo.gov/env/hwp/bvcp/docs/Wyandotte%20300%20Project.pdf>, accessed 30 June 2007.

⁷⁴⁴ Hok Sports+Venue+Event, on-line at <http://www.hoksve.com/>, accessed 30 June 2007.

and Vine, showcases the legacies of Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker.⁷⁴⁵

False storefronts erected at 18th and Vine for production of the film *Kansas City* (1997) remain attached to the buildings, and as Krin Gabbard explained in her review of the film, the only musician with dialogue in the film is Charlie Parker.⁷⁴⁶ As Driggs and Haddix explained in their book, however, the Gem Theater was not a club where “jazz” musicians played. It was a small theater that “offered second-run photoplays and modest theatrical productions.”⁷⁴⁷ While Parker was a Kansas City native, as traditional jazz historians have continuously emphasized, Fitzgerald, Ellington and Armstrong were musicians who only appeared in Kansas City occasionally as a tour stop. In these examples, the spaces that “miraculously escaped the wrecking ball” were not jazz scene spaces at all, but recreations of a jazz scene discursively produced by traditional jazz historians. The spaces of the “wide open” and contested jazz scene were reterritorialized under the guise of “development,” while spaces built to represent Kansas City’s “Jazz Age” were produced as multipurpose monuments of a master narrative.

In this reterritorialization of jazz scene spaces, the master narrative of Kansas City’s “Jazz Age” also enclosed the worldmaking aspects of those spaces. Critical geographer Gill Valentine wrote that performance and its manipulation of

⁷⁴⁵ Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 234-235.

⁷⁴⁶ Gabbard, “Review: *Kansas City*,” 1274.

⁷⁴⁷ Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 29.

an audience can inscribe a geography of desires on its audience.⁷⁴⁸ According to James Duncan, it is this very inscription of desire that makes a space representational. In what Duncan called the “spatialities of representation,” desires become inscribed not just on the body, but on the space where such desires are performed.⁷⁴⁹ These desiring-performances become spectacles, but not spectacles of the hegemonic mainstream. Instead, as Jose Esteban Munoz wrote, such spectacles give minoritarian subjects a representational space in which to position themselves, and thus an avenue to create community and obtain agency.⁷⁵⁰ According to Munoz, identity is produced in a space between self and society.⁷⁵¹ These spaces, in the case of Kansas City’s jazz scene, were not psychological or theoretical. They were the actual cabarets, brothels, and clubs of the jazz scene where a counterpublic spectacle could be performed, watched, and desired.

With the denial of such desires in Kansas City’s jazz canon, and the reterritorialization of their spaces, traditional jazz history in Kansas City created a disciplinary monotony. According to Foucault, the enclosure of a heterogeneous body requires first a disciplinary monotony. Kansas City’s jazz scene history put this monotony into practice.⁷⁵² Second, Foucaultian discipline requires the breaking up of collectives by giving each subject a discursively formed “place,” a

⁷⁴⁸ Gill Valentine, “Creating Transgressive Space: The Music of kd lang,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 20, no. 4 (1995), 478.

⁷⁴⁹ Duncan et. Al., *Companion to Cultural Geography*, 90.

⁷⁵⁰ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 1.

⁷⁵¹ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 6.

⁷⁵² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 141.

move Foucault called the “principle of partitioning.” The third step in Foucault’s theory of discipline is functional sites, or the creation of a multipurpose space that is coded by hegemonic discourse.⁷⁵³ The American Jazz Museum, the “Goin’ To Kansas City Plaza,” and the Hok Sports company are all sites of multipurpose spaces, spaces that reify and support the version of Kansas City history memorialized in the jazz canon. Finally, according to Foucault the last step in disciplining bodies is to rank units. For Foucault, this meant that individual subjects had to be classified, and meanings about those subjects disciplined according to their discursive formations. By relegating subjects such as madams, gender impersonators, and table singers to the backdrop of the jazz scene, traditional jazz successfully ranked those subjects: musicians who played the music later classified as “jazz,” jazz men who displayed the masculinity and skill inherent in such a classification, were given a place in the canon, while those who contested disciplinary monotony were represented as an anomaly. Charlie Parker became the subject of “Kansas City Jazz,” and Edna Jacobs became the table singer who was not famous enough. As Avery Gordon demonstrated, Parker remained visible in the history of the jazz scene, while Jacobs was rendered invisible through the cultural blindness of traditional jazz historians, scholars, and Kansas City jazz history stakeholders.

⁷⁵³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 143.

According to Munoz, disidentificatory practices are those practices that simultaneously work with, on and against cultural forms.⁷⁵⁴ “The minoritarian subject employs disidentification,” wrote Munoz, “as a crucial practice of contesting social subordination through the project of worldmaking.”⁷⁵⁵ Historians, scholars, stakeholders and fans—none will ever know exactly how the patrons of Dante’s *Inferno* felt about that space and their place in it, if that question ever entered their minds. None will ever know if the women employed by Annie Chambers felt a sense of kinship, or if the gender impersonators of Kansas City lived and worked in an enclave of queer community. What is important is that they were part of the jazz scene, and that they signaled a challenge to the discursive formations of gender, sexuality, race, class, and space that traditional jazz historians have represented as truth. In their performances, these Kansas City jazz scene dwellers worked on, with and against formations of difference in the city. Their world, the intersectional and contested Pendergast world, was more than just a backdrop for “Kansas City Jazz.” It was a geography of desires, of desire-producing spaces, that traversed the city. The concept that such spaces gave minoritarian subjects a space of agency is, in itself, a challenge to those historians and the “Jazz Age” they claim to represent.

⁷⁵⁴ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 12.

⁷⁵⁵ Munoz, *Disidentifications*, 200.

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