

INTRODUCTION

Folks, now here's a story 'bout Minnie the Moocher / She was a red-hot hoochy coocher" is the beginning of one of the most famous songs of the Jazz Age. Cab Calloway and His Orchestra first recorded "Minnie the Moocher" in December 1930, while Calloway was presiding over Harlem's world-famous Cotton Club in the absence of Duke Ellington and the club's regular orchestra, who were then touring and making films in Hollywood. Perhaps the most famous "black and tan" nightclub, where white patrons reveled in black pageantry, the mob-owned Cotton Club has come to represent the sundry delights of the Jazz Age.¹ A New Woman and New Negro, Minnie signified an age of newfound freedoms. The story Calloway's song spins about black womanhood, however, is multiracial and spatial in nature. Minnie's exotic, erotic dancing—named the "hoochy coochy" in the song—was a fusion of "authentic" and fantastical forms of belly dancing borrowed from an imagined Orient, and in the course of her adventures, Minnie travels the length of Manhattan and finds herself in an opium den in Chinatown. This song, then, provides a complicated snapshot of Jazz Age New York, in which we find not just the Harlem of black entertainers and white interlopers, but a complex, multiracial, imperial cityscape.

In Jazz Age New York, exotic tropes of empire had captured the imaginations of city denizens. Nightclubs featured performances and décor inspired by idyllic dreams of island paradises;

cabarets, speakeasies, dance halls, and the sheet music of Tin Pan Alley teemed with jangling tunes infected with orientalist themes and images. Even the Cotton Club, renowned for its “high-yaller girls” and great orchestras, traded in other forms of exotica. Furbished with a plantation façade, palm trees, and other signposts of warmer climes, the club’s interior simultaneously recalled the U.S. South, Africa, Latin America, and the islands of the Pacific and Caribbean. “Minnie the Moocher,” with its reference to belly dancing, and other popular tunes such as “In Harlem’s Araby,” “Palesteena,” and “The Sheik of Araby” contained fantasies of Arabia, made popular in part through Hollywood spectacles. Performed nightly in New York’s speakeasies, cabarets, and nightclubs, the hoochy coochy marked its dancers, like Minnie, as sexual creatures with an exotic allure. One titillated vice investigator, describing a performance of the hoochy coochy, observed that the dancer stood in “one spot for about five minutes and simply wiggled her body around the middle from her waist down to a little below her hips, in such a way as to suggest that that part of her body was a universal joint.”² Calling on an imperial language of strangeness and sexual aberration, the disturbed vice investigator reported these movements as an oriental corruption that “released” dancers from bourgeois respectability. Indeed, for many New Women, orientalist forms became signs of self-possession, a way of mastering their bodies and their fates through a mastery of the Orient. However, such performances also brought some women to the notice of disciplinary powers, which perceived such women as perversely intimate with racialized wickedness. This imperial logic was thus double-edged. Minnie is described as “the roughest, toughest frail,” but by the song’s end, she is strung out on opium, a pitiable figure (“Poor Min, poor Min, poor Min”). In some versions of the song, she is left for dead. The same imperial markers that attract the listener to her also bring her to her end.

The musical scene set by Calloway’s signature tune includes other questions of travel, and not just white adventurers journeying to Harlem’s Cotton Club to encounter black performers. Not only were nightclubs filled with the sights and sounds of distant continents and tropical islands, but travelers from around the world—including the multiple outposts of the United States—made their ways through the city streets and spaces of nightlife. New migrants from the Philippines, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Mexico, Japan, and China crossed paths with black Harlemites and white

“slummers” in dance halls and speakeasies. Such movements traversed the city, but as one consequence of imperial reach, they also reconceived its ordering through more complicated racial and spatial schema. Though New York was often imagined as a city of discrete neighborhoods whose cartographies delineated racial boundaries—black people in Harlem, between 110th and 142nd Streets; Chinese migrants in Chinatown, around Mott Street; Jewish families near Delancey Street on the Lower East Side; and so forth—this song, like other cultural productions of the time, demonstrates that such boundaries were indeed traversable by neighborhood inhabitants, across the island of Manhattan. This is a simple fact, but one that troubles often presumptive racializations of neighborhoods that design and desire separable and static racial and national categories. Minnie’s tale begins with a hoochy coochy in Harlem, but she travels downtown with her lover to an opium den in Chinatown: “Now she messed around with a bloke named Smoky / She loved him though he was cokie / He took her down to Chinatown / He showed her how to kick the gong around.” Here, and in the later song “Kickin’ the Gong Around” (slang for smoking opium), Chinatown is a foreign destination, where lawless people find pleasure in illicit deeds. In such stagings of multitudinous travels across oceans and over thoroughfares, gender and sexual forms are transfigured not only through interracial mixing, but also through the transnational production of space as it remaps the imperial city.

These strange encounters present a novel account of the crucial presence of empire in Jazz Age New York. *Imperial Blues* offers a study of empire at home, one that critically rearticulates urban history and possible stories about race, gender, and sexuality in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century. This book suggests that without a new consideration of how empire circulated in everyday life to inform and transform national subjects and their understandings of the categories that defined their conceptions of home and away, friend and stranger, we cannot comprehend the complexities of how race and sexuality in the United States were lived in the interwar years that comprise the Jazz Age. For the most part, discourses of race in Jazz Age New York are framed around black and white dichotomies.³ In regarding the city not as a discrete object of study but as a global center for economic development and creative labor, *Imperial Blues* moves beyond the “black and tan” to examine the considerably more complicated borders and border crossings of the Jazz Age. Studies that investigate inter-

sections between Asian American and African American cultural practices and political discourses are proliferating, though these studies base their categories on the U.S. context.⁴ Taking Jazz Age music cultures as both a cue and a circuit, this book pursues those intersections that are transnational in nature. I ask, for instance, how did immigration from Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America transform city living and the imagination of artists in this critical interwar period? Furthermore, how did the imperial reach of the United States—or, indeed, its ties to other empires—shape these vibrant metropolitan cultures? How did the increasing prominence of eugenics and sexology as sciences of biological distinction and management traverse national and other borders? How did political upheavals surrounding women’s suffrage and continuing racial antagonisms manifest in Jim Crow and anti-immigration legislation influence governance, particularly in relation to imperial gendered, sexual, and racial formations? I propose that the traffic in these bodies and the crises of knowledge about them serve as evidence that the United States as a nation, an ideology, and a concept has always been permeable and heterogeneous across its populations and perimeters. *Imperial Blues* thus argues that the domestic or national organization of race and sex during the Jazz Age, and in New York City as an exemplar of this period’s sensibilities, cannot be understood except in the context of the growing ambitions of modern U.S. empire.

For me, empire must be a central analytic rather than simply a context for understanding Jazz Age New York because it was an everyday reality of changing urban demographics, and it played a large part in the creative imagination that guided the design of interiors, the making of music, and even the naming of spaces within the Empire City. Although imperialism brought people and ideas into a complicated mixture in the city, imperial logic served as a basis for meaning making. Imperial logic forms concepts of distance and intimacy. The connections between peoples and places produce complex conditions for contact, through which a nation or an empire relates stories of its past and establishes the cultures of its diverse subjects in the present. At stake in the mobilization of imperial logic are a breadth of concerns that pertain to the conception and organization of space and subjectivity, especially wrought through unstable categories of race, gender, and sexuality, which often serve as a way to envision and wield power.⁵ Revisiting the Jazz Age through the lens of imperialism renders visible (as well as audible) previously underacknowledged connections and collabo-

rations between domestic and imperial discourses of race and empire. I demonstrate that the domestic and the foreign are intertwined, and that modes of transgression and regulation emerge through their dense linkages. By approaching the cultural landscape of Jazz Age New York through the logic of empire, it becomes possible to analyze formations of identity within the nation by understanding both the influence of New York beyond its borders and more intimate circumstances through the movements of bodies in the city.

Imperial logic labors through a sometimes contradictory flow of signs. My contention is that it manifests itself through the complex workings of referentiality, and that the spaces, objects, and bodies that act as signs of empire are mutable. In other words, a geographic marker of China or Hawaii or Cuba might be repositioned in the city through a club's interior design, the placement of silk pajamas or pillows in a bordello, or the naming of a cabaret or restaurant. While this spatial reorientation may seem insignificant, these kinds of renamings and replacings were modes of exotification and titillation designed to lure clients off the streets and into these places of business through signs of empire. Imperialism, then, was a way to understand pleasure, consumption, and sexuality. Furthermore, the mutability of signs might also mean that imperially derived meanings could be transferred from one type of body to another. For example, although we might be used to thinking of Asian bodies as orientalized or orientalisable, white, black, and brown bodies could also be orientalized. Artists such as Martha Graham, Ruth St. Denis, Richard Bruce Nugent, Wallace Thurman, and countless chorus girls from Broadway and nightclub floor shows might put on the accouterment of the Orient for various purposes: to subjectivize or eroticize themselves, to build narratives of resistance to empire, or to prove their cosmopolitan sensibility. Importantly, then, not only were the markers of imperial logic peripatetic—attaching themselves to various spaces, objects, and bodies and then detaching themselves again—but the meanings created through their circulation rendered them unstable.

At stake in the mobility of meaning is the way that power structures people's life chances and access to subjectivity, as well as the way it values difference, whether it is racial, spatial, gendered, national, or sexual. Part of how imperial logic works, I argue, is through the belief in a model of power that presents colonizing and imperial nations as stronger or morally superior to those nations being colonized, a model that justifies

colonization. But the meanings enacted through these understandings of spatial and national relationships are not uniform, as the power structure offers diverse modes of narrative identification that help produce particular subject positions within social systems. These subject positions include those of a dominant citizen, a resistant artist, a social and moral outsider, a knowledge-producing collector of artifacts and songs, and an artist exploring a historical racial past, depending on whether one identifies with the colonizer or the colonized and how one understands that identification. Because a complex of meanings is produced through imperial logic, the use of imperial imagery in aesthetic production often speaks both to the modes of resistance and, simultaneously, to the limits of that resistance through regulation. For instance, the logic in a song like Porter Grainger's "In Harlem's Araby" might signal the sexual and gendered freedom of a neighborhood space by comparing it with an imagined Orient, but through this signaling it might also hail regulatory bodies to that space so that it might be policed. The logic, then, both in resistance and regulation, relies on making city space and its inhabitants strange through ideas of distant (and distancing) imperium, even while one celebrates that difference and the other attempts to control it. The narrating of imperial difference and its valuing become the basis for how people might be treated in these spaces and gives rise both to a discourse of internal colonialism and to a language for sexual and racial experimentation. Furthermore, as imperial logic is domesticated, it helps to make sense of the continuing need for imperial and colonial practice. In other words, the circulation of imperial logic at home helps to justify, and even make necessary, continuing and new colonial and imperial projects in the West and overseas.

Imperial Blues considers how jazz cultures are a particularly useful site for investigating these connections, working as a contact zone for a multiplicity of discourses and practices anchored in imperial logic. This book defines jazz cultures broadly, as places where nightlife, music and dance performance, art making, and novel writing collide with newspaper reportage, the scientific discourses of sociology and sexology, vice reports, and policing, and it draws the uneasy parameters of subjectivity and subjection, resistance and assimilation. Although this text is about jazz cultures, my focus is not always on the music, but often on spaces of musical performance. In order to understand the modes of racialization, sexual expression, regulatory regimes, and the imperial imagination, I inter-

est myself more broadly in the context in which jazz is played in public; the dances that might accompany jazz performance; floor shows; novelty songs; theatre; yellow journalism reporting on the chaos of the Jazz Age; music-oriented fiction, poetry, and graphic art; and vice reports aimed at monitoring and regulating this context. In doing so, I bring together texts and theories that may at first appear unconnected but whose discursive formations and regimes of representation often overlap, in order to show how empire informed the material and symbolic borders of the city. In this way, I hope to uncover the context that helps to make meaning for jazz. For example, in chapters 1 and 3, I examine the city's extravagant, multi-ethnic, multiracial, and polysexual ball scenes, where dancers crossdressed and wore costumes signaling imperial time and space from around the globe and throughout history. While these scenes were monitored by police and vice investigators, and the sexuality of the participants questioned in scientific reports, the mixing of people from various neighborhoods and countries created new meanings for space that simultaneously drew on and challenged discourses of empire. The alternative archive in which this book is situated provides new opportunities to work through these productive, repressive, and transgressive strains of jazz cultures as discursive inventions and improvisations tethered to the expansion of empire. Jazz cultures, I argue, are a key site for intimacies between colony and metropole, between the realms of art and science, between bodies across boundaries, and the other vectors of contact and encounter that form the heart of this book.

Central to this book's discussion of the logic of empire, orientalisms made the distant proximate, the national intimate, and the domestic foreign. Performances of the "Orient," through the hoochy coochy dancer or the cabaret's chinoiserie, brought its signs and symbols closer and ascribed to these bodies and spaces discourses of oriental sexual excess as promiscuity, (queer) perversion, or liberation from bourgeois norms—sometimes all three at once. Orientalisms also described and circumscribed the bodies and movements of Asians and Asian Americans who entered spaces of nightlife, mingling there with other members of the city's multiracial populace. Both imperial fantasies and diasporics' joint presence speak to epistemological and material intimacies across continents. In her important essay "The Intimacies of Four Continents," Lisa Lowe uses three meanings of *intimacy* in defining the "intimacies of four continents": first, intimacy

as “spatial proximity or adjacent connection,” as in the case of “the political economic logics through which men and women from Africa and Asia were forcibly transported to the Americas”; second, as the biopolitical management of forms of gender and sexuality within (and without) the bounded bourgeois private sphere; and third, as “the volatile contacts of colonized peoples,” including sexual, laboring, and intellectual contacts that often involved fears of racial mixture and unstable social order.⁶ Lowe’s schema provides a way to understand how imperial logic underlies aesthetic production in the Jazz Age, guided by new and continuing forms of empire. These frameworks are especially useful for thinking about jazz cultures through the multiple modes of intimacy that brought people together across national borders and that directed and regulated the forms of desire and anxiety circulating among them. Such intimacies between continents are brought to bear on the close encounters found in nightclubs and cabarets and balls and bedrooms, where imperial logic transformatively impacted encounters between empires, nations, and bodies.

Imperial Blues moves along these geographies to analyze the logic of empire on, first, New York as an imperial metropole and its jazz cultures, through which various racialized and nationalized groups were resignified by the circulations of imperial logic and signs, whether dangerous embodiments of sexual savagery or sensual seduction located on particular bodies in the dance hall; second, productions of knowledge about the racialized borders of neighborhoods through colonial discourses of invasion and occupation; and third, practices of local surveillance that drew on the government of empire. In this project, then, imperial logic shaped the movements of individuals and populations, as well as the construction of categories that engendered new forms of creative expression and claims to imperial selfhood.

IMPERIAL CITY

How did these intimacies come to be? What accounts for the imperial imagination in the Jazz Age? What effect did the presence of new immigrants from imperial outposts have on shifting currents of culture and politics in the city? How did they fit into a domestic racial order? How were they fathomed through prevailing and emerging discourses about sexual perversity or biological degeneration? How did the signs and symbols of the places the immigrants had left—or had never known, because so many

of these signs and symbols were already hybrid in their origins—follow them to this imperial city? Together, these issues begin to explain the relations of love and hatred (and indifference), and of intimacy and distance between bodies and between continents, that played out within New York’s public cultures.

If jazz cultures act as a contact zone, the first question I want to address is who is in that zone of contact. To do this, I turn to some demographic information that shows that immigration, caused in part by U.S. imperial expansion and the aftermath of World War I, made New York an extremely diverse space. The diversity of the urban landscape, however, did not mean that there was equality between participants in New York’s nightlife; rather, the melting pot was set to an anxious simmer. The influx of new U.S. nationals, the movement of people of color from southern states to northern cities, and their interactions with the people already there were considered fraught with peril. Often narrated as a danger to white women, interactions between races were sexualized, criminalized, and otherwise made strange through the use of imperial logic. This meant that people at once found the city space invigorating and in need of regulation. In this section, I explore the making of this multiracial space and begin to point to the anxieties these shifting demographic arrangements caused.

Much of the great shift in New York’s population during the Jazz Age was accounted for by immigrants from imperial sites and Europeans trying to make a new start following World War I. Migration internal to the United States accounted for another significant change in population, as workers from rural parts of the U.S. South moved to industrialized northern cities. New York City’s population demonstrated these dramatic transformations wrought by war and industry. During the Great Migration following World War I, three-quarters of a million African Americans left the South to work and settle in industrial cities like Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and New York.⁷ In New York City alone, the black population grew from less than 100,000 in 1910 to more than 300,000 two decades later.⁸ Furthermore, rapid industrialization as well as “massive troop deployments during imperialist expansion and occupation, the World Wars, and other military projects” moved hundreds of thousands of working- and middle-class men (and some women) to city centers.⁹ In addition to these internal migrations, successive waves of documented and undocumented immigrants continued to enter the country, many from places with which the United

States had histories of economic and imperial relations. Immigrants from Canada, China, Japan, the Philippines, Western and Eastern Europe, the Pacific Islands, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Caribbean nations made up a growing percentage of New York City's population. Sailors and merchants from imperial outposts followed trade routes and troop deployments to new ports along the U.S. imperial archipelago. Taken together, these migrations force us to widen our understandings of race in Jazz Age New York beyond a dichotomous color line, thinking instead in terms of a larger colonial and imperial scope through which New York becomes an imperial city that might also tell stories about the Philippines, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Pacific Islands, as well as European settlement and African diaspora.

The kinds of racial, national, gendered, and sexual contact that occurred in the city, imagined through colonial actions and brought about by imperialism, also bear the burden of representation that inscribed modernity on the streets of New York in the Jazz Age. Indeed, scholars in postcolonial studies have long theorized that the colonies were influential in shaping the metropole and have connected that influence with the production of ideas of "the modern."¹⁰ This is an apt description of New York City in the Jazz Age. The very name of the period that began after World War I and lasted into the Great Depression—the Jazz Age, a term coined by the novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald—was shot through with such contradictions. Named for the popular music that was understood to capture the modern spirit as the U.S. empire marched across the globe, the Jazz Age usefully gathers the threads of contact and movement between parts of the world, though these were hardly experienced in the same way by everyone. The end of the transatlantic slave trade in the preceding decades had been followed by waves of "free" indentured laborers from Asia (often called coolies), arriving to work in Hawaii, California, and New York.¹¹ At the turn of the century, the U.S. empire swelled with the acquisition of Mexican territories, violence against and displacement of indigenous populations, and the wartime acquisition of Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, Panama, and the Philippines. These instances of both material and symbolic racial violence also enabled great leaps in technological progress and economic prosperity, encouraging the growth of industrial capital and urbanization and creating and circulating new consumer goods and entertainments. These modes of explaining, selling, and regulating the city became marks of modernity,

and New York situated itself as the Empire City within a cultural and social global economy.

The production of urban space through imperial discourses and through a shifting population also provided the means for the creation of a modern aesthetic culture. That is, aesthetic production in the Jazz Age was guided through imperial metaphor, read as dangerous through interracial contact, and rendered alluring through the sexualization of space. Indeed, the development of the modern city in the early twentieth century, Raymond Williams observes, had much “to do with imperialism: with the magnetic concentration of wealth and power in imperial capitals and the simultaneous cosmopolitan access to a wide variety of subordinate cultures.” “Within many capital cities,” he continues, “and especially within the major metropolises, there was at once a complexity and a sophistication of social relations, supplemented in the most important cases . . . by exceptional liberties of expression.”¹² These liberties of expression, I would argue, were grounded in imperial logic—a logic that might in some situations fight against the domestic social order, and in other instances might help maintain that social order. Aesthetic modernisms such as Art Deco and primitivism drew inspiration from colonial aesthetics, while the New Woman who danced the fox-trot and bound her breasts ushered in for some people a newly streamlined modern femininity, for instance. This abundance and avant-gardism was countered, however, by tempering forces, including Prohibition and other civilian and state stratagems to curb “vice,” which saw a moral crisis in such rapid metamorphosis. Indeed, these shifting currents of sounds and images, politics and art, proved to be both disquieting and vitalizing.

In fact, the presence of all the world’s peoples gathered together on this island metropolis was mobilized to fashion U.S. exceptionalism as a global spirit and a global culture. New York City was (and still is) understood as a crossroad of the world, and thus some of its denizens imagined themselves as world travelers, even if they did not leave the city. Especially during the Jazz Age, city restaurants, nightclubs, speakeasies, and cabarets made reference to this U.S. exceptionalism through far-flung geographic references, such as the names of the Roumanian Restaurant Inn, the Moscow Inn, the Parisian, Egyptian Garden, the Hacienda Club, Chez Mecca, the Riviera, the Coconut Grove, the International Café, Sugar Cane Inn, the Russian Palace, Bolivar Café, the Tokio, and the Little World Café.¹³ These names

connected city to empire as the United States stretched into the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, and they reflected the experiences of travel and displacement of migrants and refugees caused by World War I and U.S. imperial expansion. We might observe further that these contact zones enacted a sort of racial liberalism, inasmuch as new immigrants might be perceived in what Carrie Tirado Bramen names an “urban picturesque,” which contributed the “best” of the world’s unique cultures to the United States as a global exemplar. In this manner, Bramen argues, “the urban picturesque was an important vehicle for transforming immigrants from social threats to cultural resources, as signs of an urban identity but also of a national one. It was part of a cosmopolitanism with modern Americanism.”¹⁴ It would be no understatement to say that the imperial imagination of the co-presence and encounter of peoples and places from around the globe within the city ascribed meaning to those people, those spaces, and New York City as a whole, although, importantly, power across these geographies of scale might be distributed unevenly.

The notion of racial and ethnic tourism that work like Bramen’s relies on made sense to tourists and city residents alike, but it told only part of the story of race, ethnicity, and sexuality in New York’s neighborhoods. Those neighborhoods were, and still are, marked by racial and ethnic signifiers, but the neighborhoods’ boundaries were imminently permeable, and their populations were much more diverse than the schematic renderings would have one believe. Harlem, for instance, was a neighborhood marked by blackness. It was most often described as a site of black natives and white interlopers, but Asians, Latinos, people from the Caribbean, and some white ethnics also populated what was often referred to as the colony of Harlem.¹⁵ Alongside the black and white *flâneurs* and *flâneuses* who promenaded along its avenues, Asian and Italian immigrants also carved out a niche within the bustling metropolis.¹⁶ Harlem’s black denizens themselves were quite diverse, with 40 percent being foreign-born migrants.¹⁷ The Harlem Renaissance journalist, novelist, and playwright Wallace Thurman notes: “There is no typical Harlem Negro as there is no typical American Negro. There are too many different types and classes. White, yellow, brown and black and all the intervening shades. North American, South American, African and Asian; Northerner and Southerner.”¹⁸ In an essay on the “real Harlem,” Thurman and William Jourdan Rapp observe:

Like New York, Harlem is a cosmopolitan city. Its people are as varied and polyglot as could be found anywhere. The whites indiscriminately lump them together as “Negroes” or “niggers.” But they are really unclassifiable under any existent ethnic term, for the racial complexity of the American Negro is astounding. In his veins flows the mixed bloods of the Africans from whom he originally stemmed, the American Indians with whom he intermarried in pre- and post-slavery days, and of every white race under the sun. And then in Harlem this home-grown ethnic amalgam is associating and inter-mixing with Negroes from the Antipodes and Caribees, from Africa and Asia, South America and every other place that dark-skinned people hail from.¹⁹

Cosmopolitan and polyglot, connected to nations and peoples across the globe, Harlem’s spatial and racial narration stretched to make present and proximate the multiple histories of colonialism and imperialism that constructed New York’s heterogeneous population. Furthermore, imperialism, as a heuristic device, exposes the black-white binary that often characterizes scholarship on the Harlem Renaissance as inadequate to describing blackness, whiteness, or the plethora of imperial subjects visiting and living in Manhattan. The work before you, then, in lieu of presenting a stable, untroubled mapping of the racial and ethnic neighborhoods of Manhattan, suggests that the borders between neighborhoods—and, indeed, between cities, regions, and nations—is always already varied.

Restaurants and spaces of nightlife provided prime real estate for this kind of intermingling and neighborhood border crossing. Indeed, a typical space for jazz culture, like a dance hall, demonstrates how these forms of racial contact, which were simultaneously erased by the idea of racially bordered neighborhoods and monitored because those borders were never secure, caused a variety of reactions from city inhabitants and city fathers. Intertwining the presence of Asian immigrants with black creative endeavors, empire sets a context for, but is also sited in, the dance hall. The dance hall acts as one useful space I pursue in this book to investigate the multiple connections that extend across oceans and national borders, across histories of racial labor, across techniques and methods of representation, across scientific imperatives and aesthetic movements, across kinetic energies bounding between jangling limbs and pursed lips. The movements of so many people from so many places failed to escape the notice of civic

authorities, who viewed such promiscuous contact as a social threat. Although the mixing of peoples and cultures allowed New York to boast of its cosmopolitan character, it also led to innumerable moral panics.

Painted as corrupting, sexualized contact between races was part and parcel of the Jazz Age's zeitgeist, which embraced the exuberance of a space like the dance hall but also controlled what was viewed as deleterious behavior. This era ushered in the pernicious passage of anti-immigrant legislation, bolstered by the eugenic sciences that sought to sharply curb the presence of supposedly inferior stock inside the nation's boundaries. Such panics about racial contamination and their attendant spatialization also led to stricter municipal regulations for the licensing of cabarets and dance halls, which were already largely aimed at spaces where people of color gathered or, worse yet, people from across the "color line." In reference to the racial and sexual dangers presented by this kind of comingling, in 1926 the Board of Alderman flatly noted that "when strangers came to New York they wanted to 'run wild'" in Harlem.²⁰ Multiracial dance halls, one of the contact zones discussed in chapter 1, provided police and vice investigators with volatile ground for monitoring encounters between white women and men of color. The inappropriateness of the assumed sexual proximity written not only through race but also through space demonstrates how racial others "come to embody distance."²¹ The composite gaze of vice investigators, newspaper reporters, social scientists, and state authorities sought to implement boundaries of nation and empire in the city, reinforcing the understanding of Asian immigrants in the multiracial dance hall as strangers, not belonging to the places where they now lived and where empire had carried them. Jazz Age New York City, then, was constructed through an imperial logic that governed immigration and integration but also engendered modernist and avant-garde movements in politics and arts (and emerging subject positions through these movements), linked by New Yorkers' material and immaterial encounters with the sounds and signs of outposts of empire and other faraway lands.

SPACE AND SUBJECTIVITY

One of the major tenets of this book is that imperial logic is based in mutable meanings attached to stories about space. Spatial narratives provide the basis for understanding the confluence of the U.S. imperium, U.S. racialized domestic space, regulation and excess of sexualized bodies, and

aesthetic production. Space, race, and intimacy together render sensible various modes of subjectivity: from reclamations of a primitivized Africa to create the New Negro to performances of orientalized dances to sustain the New Woman, from the renaming of Harlem as a “Mecca” to make the space and its inhabitants both exotic and important to the renaming of black and white men as “sheiks” to instantiate their sexual prowess or excess. Nightly negotiations over subjectivity (and its value as ascribed through imperial personhood) helped to reproduce modes of empire, whether performers and artists reclaimed Africa’s past, imagined themselves as conquerors, or performed versions of exotic and sexualized masculinities and femininities; or whether the police, courts, journalists, and vice investigators, whose supposed task was to control these types of displays, might also produce that conspicuously consumable exoticism so that these spaces and bodies might continue to be regulated. From discourses of orientalized sexual freedom to justifications for internal colonialism, the ideology of empire broke through the borders of the city to mark its inhabitants as ready for subjectivity or subjection. In this way, modes of resistance and regulation, subject making and disciplining, worked together to bolster and reproduce imperial logic across an ever-changing variety of situations, bodies, and spaces.

In the Jazz Age, to borrow a phrase from Langston Hughes, blackness was in vogue.²² However, the meanings ascribed to Harlem and its residents were heterological. If the fact that blackness was “in vogue” means only that it was simply prized or exoticized, then this vogue does not speak to the complexities of how these two treatments might work together to produce a sense of racial and spatial difference. I suggest that the vogue of blackness was more complex and that it was informed, at least in part, by imperial logic’s creation of a spatial and ideological distance between the rest of the city and Harlem and its residents. As an image and a style, “Harlem” traveled around the world. Indeed, North American jazz and the literature and arts of the Harlem Renaissance came to stand for the spirit of the modern age. For instance, though hailing from Los Angeles, the jazz trumpeter Buck Clayton and his orchestra were nonetheless billed in Shanghai as the “Harlem Gentlemen,” so large did this New York neighborhood loom in the spatial narration of black America.²³ At the same time, between World Wars I and II the signs and objects of primitivism, which drew heavily on European appropriations (and inventions) of African aes-

thetics, became symbols of the avant-garde in European modernist culture. Such negrophile movements spoke in celebratory terms about all things *nègre*—an expansive category that combined North American jazz and the literature of the Harlem Renaissance with African and Oceanic carvings and Josephine Baker’s delirious performances—at the same time that they sought to preserve the primitive as such.²⁴ As moderns searched for new and novel forms to arouse the senses, stereotypes about the racial other that had long been coupled with civilizational backwardness and moral depravity became symbols of authentic freedom and spontaneous creativity. Such an aesthetics was duplicitous for, as Simon Gikandi notes, it is instead the modern who comes to understand or fashion his or her personhood, a process in which the racial other is used as both “raw material” and counterpoint: “Savagery and the artistic sensibility would intimately be connected in the aesthetic of modernism; however, it did not follow that the moderns were willing to give up civilization to become one with the savage.”²⁵ As with orientalism, primitivism produced a discourse about the racial other through a double bind of idealization and denigration. In either case, the racial other must stay in its place. Here collocated with imperial logic, both orientalism and primitivism transformed the imaginable range of human possibilities through modernist reinventions, while reinforcing the spatial and temporal distancing of racial others.

It is in this way that Jazz Age Harlem was a site of contradictory spatial ideologies. Often referred to as Black Manhattan or the Black Mecca, Harlem was alternately located as the seat of the aesthetic modern, adjoining but also distinct from the imperial city, and as a domestic Arabia recalling oriental and African tropes. This spatial confusion, caused by a reordering of referentiality, allows us to address the intersections of national and imperial discourses of race and space. For example, the Romanian immigrant Konrad Bercovici, in his 1924 travelogue called *Around the World in New York*, included in his chapter on Africa the nightlife of Harlem, along with a tour of its literary and political stars.²⁶ Such perceptions of distance and intimacy, mapped onto a distinction between a modern United States and a backward Africa, were profoundly felt in Harlem itself. Regarding the travels of black people to Harlem, Thurman and Rapp observed: “The American Negro looks down upon these foreigners just as the white American looks down upon the white immigrants from Europe. The native black man takes pride in the fact that he is a citizen of the ‘world’s

greatest country' and is proud that he has had the advantages of a supposedly superior civilization, with modern plumbing, a system of education and high wages."²⁷ These remarks raise numerous questions about spatial narrations of African American subjectivity with and sometimes against the United States as nation and as empire. Spatial narrations derived from imperial logic made distinctions between black progress (made by citizens of "the 'world's greatest country'") and black primitivism (people without "modern plumbing") that were located on black bodies.²⁸ In similar fashion, orientalisms also presented a way for people struggling for recognition as U.S. subjects to identify with Western civilization, in contrast to the benighted other. Contrasting themselves with the oriental woman confined to the harem, and to a despotic sexual slavery, some African American women (and some white women) dancing like Salomé sought to claim imperial personhood through discourses of mastery and distance from the Arabian other, for instance. In order to claim citizenship in the present, these women relegated the material history of black women's exploitation in the United States to the past and displaced it onto the premodern, orientalist other. However, the women were circumscribed in advance of—and especially during—their performances through a dangerous intimacy with the racial other. References to imperial logic, therefore, foster myriad possibilities for self-fashioning, but as Minnie the Mocher might attest, these are not reducible to freedom or captivity through such uneven and contradictory encounters. In reconsidering what have been seen as separate realms of material and immaterial forces—nation and empire—and their profound consequences for subject formation and art making, I trace this imperial logic as intertwined with the constant negotiation involved in the story of racialized peoples' incorporation into U.S. modernity.

This book calls attention to the continuities and discontinuities between imperial and domestic categories of modern selfhood and subjection through spatial narratives of movement, intimacy, and distance. In this study, race and sex refer to mutable, "dense transfer point[s]" of power, to draw on Michel Foucault, that are embedded within histories of empire, including the transatlantic slave trade and Asian coolie labor, and also situated within national cultures.²⁹ These are distinct, but not discrete, realms, and this study follows a wayward path between movements and contacts between continents in order to connect the material conditions of empire and industrial capital with emerging articulations of subjecthood and cul-

tural labor. The rise of Western imperialisms and modernisms are linked, yet, as Fredric Jameson observes, the encounter between these historical movements does not reside just in content, but also in form.³⁰ In this book, I hope to show that empire both opened and resolved crises of differentiation about the content of the modern, through recourse to discourses and practices about space as the way of interpreting and managing these crises.

Practices of orientalism and primitivism and the rewriting of Harlem as Mecca or Africa conjure up the relationship between spatialization and subjectivity. Thus, much of my focus in this book is on the power granted through narrations of subjectivity, and how very tenuous that power might be. Building on this sense of space and subjectivity, I foreground imperialism as a constellation of power—not simply power over, but rather a field of forces that makes sensible, and sense of, many types of relations through spatial metaphors and exercises.³¹ As seen above, this takes place in the city through the renarration of space as being about power, race, sexuality, and subjectivity. My understanding of power, space, and subjectivity comes in part from the work of Michel Foucault. In the lectures collected as *The Birth of Biopolitics*, he argues that modern forms of subjectivity and subjection operate via both micropowers (which might intimately interact with the regulation of the body or create docile subjects) and macropactices (like the management of the body politic or the social body), and our critical queries as such must accommodate a variety of stops along a geographic scale, tied together through systems of thought. Foucault's intent was "to see the extent to which we could accept that the analysis of micro-powers, or of procedures of governmentality, is not confined by definition to a precise domain determined by a sector of the scale, but should be considered simply as a point of view, a method of decipherment which may be valid for the whole scale, whatever its size. In other words, the analysis of micro-powers is not a question of scale, and it is not a question of a sector, it is a question of a point of view."³² My interest in this formulation is in Foucault's use of space, power, management, and thought. He holds that power works along geographies of scale, but that management happens in the most intimate of spaces and in the grand strokes of institutions, which in the Jazz Age might be represented by the police or the courts. For the purposes of my project, I imagine the system of thought—what Foucault calls "a point of view"—as produced by imperial logic. The spaces touched by this logic are not confined, in part because it hinges on the continuous

unfolding of its “point of view” across the globe, and thus should be considered crucial to deciphering power elsewhere on the scale, which in this book is focused on the U.S. imperium; Manhattan; and its neighborhoods, cabarets and dance halls, and vice investigators and nightlife enthusiasts.

Indeed, beginning with the imperial contact coincident with the Enlightenment, discourses of race and subjectivity have been drawn from encounters with distant or intimate others. Thus, concepts of freedom and self-possession crucial to liberal selfhood are deeply embedded within spatial formations of the modern nation and empire. Charles W. Mills and Denise Ferreira da Silva, for example, both argue that race is a global idea that has persisted since the Enlightenment. For Mills, this has taken the form of “racial liberalism,” as seen in Immanuel Kant’s reflections. Mills writes: “Kant, the most important ethicist of the modern period and the famous theorist of personhood and respect, turns out to be one of the founders of modern scientific racism, and thus a pioneering theorist of sub-personhood and disrespect. . . . So the inferior treatment of people of color is not at all incongruent with racialized liberal norms, since by those norms nonwhites are less than full persons.”³³ For Silva, such modes of Enlightenment personhood continue to persist through raciality despite declarations to the contrary: “The Subject is dead! we have been told. So why is its most effective strategy of power still with us?”³⁴ My answer to this query is, in part, that modes of resistance still rely on imperial logic, even as we are left with subject-effects rather than Cartesian subjects, and that modes of power that rely on racial, sexual, gendered, and national difference can continue to reproduce themselves. In fact, the dissemination of imperial logic helps promote these very modes, whether one resists them (for resistance needs to create systems to resist) or perpetuates them (for perpetuation requires the remaking of challenges to the social order).

My interest here is to understand how Enlightenment notions of subjectivity are rendered meaningful through racial reference and spatial narratives that serve to divide humanity. The Cartesian subject, for instance, did not just demarcate the seat of reason in the mind against the body (a kind of spatialization of the consciousness). In Cartesian thought, space was understood as static and absolute, against which consciousness was produced—in Henri Lefebvre’s words, “as Object opposed to Subject, as *res extensa* opposed to, and present to, *res cogitans*.”³⁵ For Kant, space became a way to know particular peoples through their distinction and

demarcation, although such knowing was an extension of the (European and imperial) Subject. For instance, in his 1764 essay “Of National Characteristics, so Far as They Depend upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime,” Kant suggests that various racial populations are knowable and divisible (again, to the Enlightenment subject) according to their spatial occupations, so that Persians were designated as sensual and unreliable, and black Africans vulgar.³⁶ Thus does imperial contact assert that “otherwise diverse phenomena” should be grouped “into a single category or class”—again, a spatial metaphor that places objects (or peoples) together.³⁷ Furthermore, such placements help us make sense of the nation as a space. As Sara Ahmed explains, “the nation becomes imagined and embodied as a space, not simply by being defined as close to some others (friends), and further away from other others (strangers).”³⁸ We can elaborate on this understanding to note that these metaphors of “close” and “further away” also engender a point of view internal to national space: “other others” need not be outside the borders of the nation proper, but only identified or connected with extranational spaces.³⁹ It is in this way that space as both a physical and a metaphorical organization assigns subjectivity and subjection to particular groups and bodies. As we shall see, forms of resistance to, or preservation of, the social order or prescribed selfhood are thus intimately embodied through spatial discourses and practices.

If the terms of subjectivity that concerned Enlightenment philosophers were made sensible through both physical demarcations of space and spatial narratives, through imperial logic such terms were further wrought by trajectories of movement and contact. Whether actual traffic or imaginative metaphor, movement acts as a primary mode for meaning making via spatial logics. Movement and the contact it engenders can function, for example, as an enhancement, the modern’s freedom as mobility; as displacement, the removal or expulsion of a person or peoples from one place to another; or as a contravention, the breach of safety and security by a wayward other. These are not distinct, and also not necessarily discrete, movements. Most obviously, the myth of Manifest Destiny connects the crucible of a U.S.-based selfhood with the ruthless expulsion of and continued violence against indigenous populations in the name of territorial expansion and settler colonialism. So, too, did modernist aesthetics depend on mystified metaphors of movement, signifying commercial and leisure tourism as well as elite, individualized travel in an era of expanding the U.S. reach

around the world. To travel the world one need not go far; the cosmopolitan character of New York hangs on a “naturalized” mixing of peoples and cultures, and movement through the city is to experience the whole world. Yet, as transnational feminist scholars such as Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal demonstrate so well, cosmopolitanism and colonialism are inextricably linked in cultures of travel.⁴⁰ Inasmuch as immigrants—not a homogeneous group themselves—provide the raw materials for the creation of the global city and give cosmopolitans in search of travel opportunities for spatial expeditions, they are not themselves recognized as cosmopolitans, or as producers of modernist culture.⁴¹ Kaplan notes that such manifold “questions of travel” therefore operate as “signs of different critical registers and varied historicized instances.”⁴² Although to be modern might equate with the exercise of freedom of movement, not all those who moved could be understood as modern. And though the city was understood as modernist through movement, not all who lived in the city were recognized as modern or mobile. Imperialism and its spatial narratives spurred some migrations of less modern peoples through the forces of labor and capital and narrated some racialized groups as immobile, lending its ordering logic as a means of disciplining these wayward populations. Furthermore, some subjects experienced multiple forms of movement, such as forced migration but also pleasurable travel, whether real, imagined, or both (as in the case of Minnie in her adventures to Chinatown and on to exotic lands). As Kaplan observes, “many modern subjects may participate in any number of the versions of displacement over a lifetime—never embodying any one version singly or simplistically,” and therefore “the material conditions of displacement for many people blur these distinctions.”⁴³ What I draw from this insight for the project at hand is that real and imagined travel, both modes of imperial formation, do not necessarily signal just one meaning for any one person; rather, the meanings instilled by notions of travel form subjectivities that are multiple and changeable. This mode of subject making, then, reiterates the forms imperial logic takes as simultaneously resistant and regulatory, as complex and often contradictory.

Modes of spatial displacement—the renaming of Harlem as Mecca or Africa, travel across neighborhood borders, and travel across regional or national borders—can be used to think about how travel across empires, both actual and ideological, shaped the ordering of bodies, races, neighborhoods, cities, and nations. To establish a comparative analytic in this

book, then, I consider how distance and intimacy play out both within an empire and between empires. Through the first frame, *internal colonialism* becomes for me a term of comparison, allowing linkages within a single empire across oceans or borders. Following Linda Gordon's definition of the concept, I see internal colonialism as not only denaturalizing national boundaries as proper and inevitable, but also as allowing us to recognize that some racial others are always already strangers to the national polity.⁴⁴ Chinatown inhabitants were spatialized as foreign, for instance, nearer to China than to New York and otherwise belonging to another, strange social order.⁴⁵ Harlem, too, was understood as a colony by tourists and civic-minded scolds alike; as I show in chapter 4, the former found in Harlem an exotic destination, and the latter a depraved nature. These analogies, which often depended on naturalized relations of racial intimacy, thus perform specific cultural and political labors. In seeking to understand their implications for this colony of Harlem or Minnie's Chinatown, I reclaim the term through feminist and queer of color critique and deploy the concept to understand the strength of racial discourses as their mutable and movable components as well as to comprehend the concept's gendered and sexual imbrications, in contingent and contiguous intimacies with empires.

I also reposition domestic racial and sexual classifications and concerns through the idea of comparative empire. Imperial tropes often situated in domestic racial and sexual schemata were not entirely of U.S. invention. Rather, references to Arabian deserts or Indonesian batik fabrics drew heavily on far-flung dominions including the British, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese Empires. Indeed, the fantasy of escape from bourgeois sexual norms through contact with and sometimes conquest of racial others, including Salomé's, Madama Butterflies, and sheiks, was shared across European and U.S. empires and aesthetic modernisms.⁴⁶ Tropes that came from other empires, like the British or the French, found their way into the lexicon of U.S. empire through the circulation of novels like E. M. Hull's *The Sheik*; operatic performances like Henry Hadley's *Cleopatra's Night*; competitive collecting by museums of Egyptian artifacts; and travel across imperial territories by would-be adventurers, tourists, and artists. Categorical creations (and confusions) regarding sex, race, civilization, and humanity thus traveled through such intimacies among four continents, becoming transfigured as people encountered strangers in contact zones close to home, refashioned themselves through the signs and sym-

bols of racial others from distant lands, or found themselves brought closer together in body or metaphor for various purposes.⁴⁷ Indeed, to this end Ann Laura Stoler writes that studies in comparison allow us to denaturalize the nation as a “historiographic directive,” interpret metropole and colony as one analytic field, and fathom those circuits of knowledge and cultural production and governance moving between the United States and its outposts, between the United States and other spaces of empire.⁴⁸ With this methodological insight into the work of comparative empire, I hope to push the spatial boundaries of what urban histories might take as their object in thinking through the definition of city borders and the systems of thought, policing, and pleasure that occur in cities and beyond.

Jazz Age New York is thus replete with the material and metaphor of empire, crucial to the forms of subjecthood and cultural production that came to define this period’s political and aesthetic modernisms. To better grasp the consequences of such material and metaphor requires histories of cultural labors that illuminate emerging and often complicated subject positions, and critical and cultural practices that are more receptive to transnational movements. *Imperial Blues* proposes paths of inquiry for some of these histories and labors, with the entangled rise of jazz and empire, by analyzing discourses of space that create new subject positions, negotiate power, and reiterate justifications for empire. Importantly, the reimagining of flexible urban borders—particularly as people and cultural objects move in and out of city space, and as artistic inspiration becomes the unbounded invention of tropical islands, East Asian royal courts, and North African desert landscapes—provides a valuable context for understanding the uneven distribution of value associated with personhood and the desire to police racial, sexual, and gendered boundaries.

INTIMATE COMPARISONS

Imperial Blues suggests a reorientation of Jazz Age New York, in multiple senses. I ask how differing orientations toward and away from the Orient, including the physical directionality of the body and its movements, might transform the meaning of race and sex in the imperial city. It would almost be an understatement to say that movement constitutes a source of both intense power and acute anxiety for the imperial management of race and space. Such movement is multidimensional or multidirectional—not just shifting resources and bodies for war or labor, but actually placing and re-

placing categories related to sex, race, civilization, and even humanity. This replacement—meaning substitution, settling, dislodging, and moving or redirecting elsewhere—is central to the ways through which imperial logic operates as a discourse of spatial and racial arrangement. At stake in this argument is a more complex account of how imperial logic territorializes spaces and bodies through new or transfigured orders of desire and danger, so that a subterranean cabaret in Harlem becomes an Arabian outpost, and those who are close (within the bounds of the city, a neighborhood, or the same dance hall) become materially and symbolically strange. In this I follow Ahmed, whose uses of the term *Orient* also elaborate on its multiple meanings simultaneously. “My analysis of orientalism,” asserts Ahmed, “suggests that spaces become racialized by how they are directed or oriented, as a direction that follows a specific line of desire. It shows us how the Orient is not only imagined as ‘being’ distant, as another side of the globe, but also is ‘brought home’ or domesticated as ‘something’ that extends the reach of the West.”⁴⁹ Ahmed’s mode of analysis rethinks the meanings of space and how value is unevenly assigned to racialized and sexualized bodies described by different spaces. For Jazz Age New York, this analytic line intersects obliquely with analytics that imagine city space and the characterizations of urban residents as static and defined only through the immediate geography. Just as margins shape a text, what lies outside of the city also shapes our ideas about the modern city and the flappers, molls, dandies, and swells who winged their way along its boulevards.

In thinking through imperial logic’s mobilization of distance, intimacy, and race, I also find it useful to turn to queer of color critique—a term coined by Roderick Ferguson⁵⁰—as a mode of analysis, though with a difference. Because my interest is primarily in modes of imperial thought and draws heavily on postcolonial studies and postnational American studies for its methodological grounding, my use of queer of color critique necessarily joins with questions about the borders and meanings of national space. Queer of color critique itself draws on a genealogy of women of color feminisms to understand how analytic categories such as race, gender, and sexuality are related to structures of economy. In this process, Ferguson also uncovers the ways in which we are encouraged to think of these categories separately and what the cost of that kind of analysis is for social justice projects and aesthetic production. For example, racial analyses—such as those forwarded by the author Richard Wright, which do not account for

gender and sexuality—retain hegemonic structures that ensure inequality. In this way, social justice projects that remain focused on one category of analysis might help reproduce modes of capitalist injustice. For my work, I foreground the aftereffects of imperial violence rather than political economy as a way to understand how personhood is drawn and valued. To do this, I extend the reach of queer of color critique to understand the relationships between nations, how those relationships are racialized and sexualized, and what that process means for the construction of identities and the policing of peoples within the borders of the United States.

It is in this way that *Imperial Blues* concerns itself with empire's repercussions in the intimate and public spaces of U.S. history in general, and Jazz Age New York in particular. Such a study must certainly include and account for Asian Americans in the racial mix of the city.⁵¹ But it is even more critical to reframe the concept and lived experience of race through techniques and methods of rendering space, both as a politics of representation but also a practice of regulation, especially as technologies of race and racialization are founded on crises of differentiation that in turn hinge on fixed borders. For instance, Alva, the antagonist in Wallace Thurman's most famous novel, *The Blacker the Berry . . .*, is of mixed race—part white, part black, and part Filipino.⁵² His movement across the city's strata as an ambivalent figuration of the Harlem Renaissance is made possible by his journey as an imperial subject to the imperial center. In contrast to a nation-based arrangement that isolates race and racialization within national borders, Thurman's Alva suggests that even domestic racial discourses of subjecthood (and objecthood) are created through transnational processes and imperial logic. The language of racial mixing, meant to guard the boundaries of race and sex in the city, often borrowed the rationale as well as the schema of empire and colonial rule to do so, imbricating the regulation of women's sexual behavior, men of color and their movements, and the distinction between public and private space and making them central to the governance of bodies. Even though racial classification itself is fraught with creative fancy, as Jennifer Brody notes in regard to racial taxonomies, "the language of purity is imprecise and impossible, as are the lines that distinguish (binary) categories."⁵³ Though racial (or sexual or gendered) categories are "impossible," it is still important to understand how they are mobilized and for what purposes. In Jazz Age New York, racial mixing might signal racial uplift, sexual freedom, or a reason for increased

disciplinary attention. Indeed, municipal regulations even suppose that race and racialization might pass from neighborhood to neighborhood, raising the specter of contamination and degradation through zoning laws and other boundary enforcement. The language of racial mixing thereby suggests multiple forms of contact—of being touched by another, whether through sexual acts or mere proximate association—which requires further inquiry.

In the first two chapters of this book, I propose a staging of multiple, overlapping gradations of contact in order to understand the profound anxiety about the discrete otherness of racial bodies and, as we shall see, the objects appended to those bodies. That anxiety expressed itself through the policing of spaces where interracial contact could be construed as sexual, but it also created a queer black aesthetic that purposely played with and denied the expectation of stable boundaries (of race, gender, sexuality, and nation). How, then, do contact zones create crises of differentiation through a crisis of referentiality for imperial logic that seeks to draw distinct boundaries between bodies—those of a friend and a stranger, for instance—and between bodies and objects? That is, how is our desire for difference (both sexual and taxonomic) denied or enforced when the referent of discourses of race, primitivism, or orientalism moves across various bodies—like the orientalizing of white men or women, or black men or women—rather than remaining attached to those bodies that are already coded as racialized in particular ways (like the orientalizing of Asian or Asian American bodies), or are imagined as foreign and strange.

In chapter 1, I introduce the inhabitants of the city in more substantive ways. I argue that the sexual proximity and intimacy created in city spaces marked by interracial contact were presented as simultaneously alluring and dangerous. A configuration that drew readers, spectators, and customers to these spaces and stories about them also drew the attention of curious authorities like sexologists, sociologists, journalists, vice investigators, and the police. In examining the mix of bodies in these spaces, I elaborate on the concept of jazz cultures as a “contact zone,” borrowing Mary Louise Pratt’s formulation, to consider 1920s New York, the imperial city, as a space for improvisational encounters between empire’s subjects.⁵⁴ Highlighting jazz’s sensual and kinetic energies, and the discursive and performative productions of these energies, I argue that such contact is manifold. That is, jazz as a site—or an assemblage of spaces—draws bodies

and movements together with popular and scientific discourses of racialized sexualities and across genres of cultural labor, including sexological studies, newspaper reportage, vice investigations, pulp fiction, and experimental literature. Jazz is therefore a contact zone struck through with desire and danger. From the dance hall where Asian immigrant men were thought to hold young white women much too close and the sensational reporting of the unsolved murder of Vivian Gordon, a former chorus girl thought to have been killed by variously racialized men—either a sheik, a Latin lover, or a “darktown gigolo”⁵⁵)—to Thurman’s mixed-race queer characters in *The Blacker the Berry . . .*, I pursue the multiple discourses about race and sex that jazz cultures summon.

In these encounters we find Foucault’s “especially dense transfer point[s] of power,” through which imperial logic reverberates across domestic realms of gender and sexuality. Orientalisms in the popular cultures of the 1920s and 1930s borrowed from, and subsequently transformed, imperial signs and symbols to generate new cultural forms of sexual expression and popular entertainment as well as new languages of control about foreign bodies and domestic bodies made stranger. In thinking through these new forms and languages, I argue that the contact zone, subject to medical, hygienic, and regulatory gazes, is also a zone of ontological indeterminacy. In the sexological and eugenic sciences touched on in the book’s first two chapters, mixed-race bodies and queer bodies metaphorically occupied such a zone as admixtures of supposedly discrete, but unstable, categories of race and sex. I argue that orientalisms have a significant effect on gender and sexual forms even in the absence of actual oriental bodies. Because orientalisms act as the signs and symbols of imperial projection, attached to particular bodies but not essential to them, the signs and symbols are mutable and mobile, repeating a crisis of referentiality that founded such imperial logic in the first place. The music, movements, and accouterment of spaces or bodies marked as oriental (including those assigned to East Asia, the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, West Asia, and North Africa) could easily be reproduced by—but also importantly on—cabarets and nightclubs as well as musicians and other performers in New York City. In the case studies I offer here, I argue that race and racialization thereby occur through modes of comparison and contact that are also spatial in nature—such as distance, contamination, analogy, intimacy, proximity, juxtaposition, and directionality.

In some of these cases, race and racialization may arise through an intimacy between a body and the signs and symbols of racial others from elsewhere in the empire. The body is the primary site implicated in racial discourse because race is presumed to be in but also on the body, and it is something that informs how bodies might sexually interact with one another. As Jennifer González notes, race is especially “subject to display”: “There is no escape from the fact of its ‘epidermalized’ status; the materiality of the body is understood to offer a continuous surface of legible information.”⁵⁶ Stuart Hall likewise observes—writing of the look that confirms the “fact of blackness,” as Frantz Fanon argues—that “exclusion and abjection are imprinted on the body through the functioning of these signifiers as an objective taxonomy—a ‘taxidermy’—of radicalized difference, a specular matrix of intelligibility.”⁵⁷ With these remarks in mind, the mixed-race body renders narratively unintelligible the skin, now a suspect surface of disorienting information. Indeed, as I discuss in the first chapter, Thurman’s Alva is one such figure, someone whose materiality confounds categories even as his depiction relies on the imperial logic based on those racial taxonomies. Because race as a category is struck through with sexual meaning—race might signal exotic and erotic pleasure, hypersexuality or sexual excess, or frigidity—the boundaries of race might also inform the boundaries of sexuality, and vice versa. This is certainly the case for Thurman’s Alva, whose racial mix signals his bisexuality. For Thurman, the mixed-race body follows sexological knowledge that renders it simultaneously queer. In this way, expected connections between race and sexuality, and between the nation and the city, contribute to the meaning of bodies in the city and what dangers and pleasures their proximity held. The combination of unease and heightened desire for this kind of racial mixing, then, could produce a range of reactions: newspaper articles that breathlessly retold the story of intimacy, police raids and other forms of internal colonialism, and aesthetic portrayals intended as social commentary about the difficulties and joys of negotiating these various boundaries.

This kind of play between meaning and context, between danger and pleasure, and between race and sexuality, could, then, serve multiple purposes. Chapter 2, “Queer Modernities,” centers on a crisis of referentiality arising when bodies imagined to signify categories that lend themselves to a stable social order within a national discourse instead refer to heterological and transient meanings conveyed by mutable and imperial geographic

and ideological borders. Through the production of a crisis of referentiality, artists like the Harlem Renaissance writer, graphic artist, dancer, and bon vivant Richard Bruce Nugent fashioned a semantic, visual, and mobile vocabulary for queer black aesthetic practices. For this reading, I build on Jacques Rancière's notion of the "reconfiguration of the sensible" and the insights of queer of color critique to analyze Nugent's and Thurman's artworks as examples of their queer black aesthetic.⁵⁸ Nugent mobilized the signs and symbols of primitivism as avant-garde culture, reclaimed from the modernist movements in both Europe and the United States as particularly African, together with images and styles of the Orient, inherited from the European decadent queer canon, to collapse distances between maps and bodies. The chapter also discusses Thurman's presentation of Paul Arbian, a character inspired by Nugent, in his novel *Infants of the Spring*.⁵⁹ The figure of Arbian disrupts the boundaries of race, nation, gender, and sexuality. Thurman boldly juxtaposes and collapses these categories, referring to Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and other famous imperial texts as a way to express the stakes involved in, and the purposeful tenuousness of, a queer black aesthetic. By commingling primitivism and orientalism, Nugent and Thurman seek to escape referential certainties, even while they rely on empire's signs and symbols. In this way, the wielding of imperial logic both set the stage for an assertion of queer sexuality and imposed limits on the representations of that sexuality.

The transgression and transformation of boundaries remain central to this chapter. Through the works discussed in it, I show that Nugent and Thurman adopt multiple strategies for confounding—or, indeed, queering—those forms of knowledge built on spatial and racial arrangements, including doubling, collocation, and collapsing. All these forms come together in Nugent's novella "The Geisha Man,"⁶⁰ whose protagonist is the mixed-race child of Butterfly and Pinkerton, Puccini's operatic lovers. Following this character, named Kondo Gale Matzuika, as he experiences various spatial and racial dislocations as a Japanese prostitute, immigrant to the United States, and queer black man reveling in Manhattan's polysexual, multiracial ball scene (which I also describe in more detail in chapters 1 and 3), Nugent whimsically fictionalizes the meanings of bodies, objects, and fantasies flowing across borders and the changes these bring to modes of identification. In doing so, Nugent questions the ontological determinacy of bodies and objects, and the use of race and sex as maps for

their distinction. Through the accouterment of an Orient perceived as particularly queer, Nugent's works—including his best work, his life—seek to interrupt the referentiality of the black body and the perception of the space of that body's gestures and movements, within both political and aesthetic modernisms.

As I describe in the second part of this book, the traffic in Araby during the 1920s relied on intimacies between empires. In the final two chapters, I focus on circulations of the signs and symbols of North Africa and West Asia throughout Jazz Age New York, shifting the timeline of U.S. interest in these regions from the standard origin after 1945 into the Jazz Age. Though the United States did not have a direct colonial relationship with North Africa or West Asia in the 1920s or 1930s, it was nonetheless expanding its imperial interests in these regions through informal means (for instance, the Metropolitan Museum of Art funded and supported the excavations of the British Egyptologist Howard Carter) and through cultural and political exchanges with the French and British Empires, which did directly rule parts of these regions. These chapters thereby explore comparative practices of empire. Stories about intrepid archaeologists unearthing ancient treasures in the desert circulated in newspapers and popular magazines, and Hollywood studio productions such as *The Sheik* (1921), set in Algeria, or *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924), set in Persia—featuring enslaved princesses, irresistible princes, and rapacious sultans—all suggest contact between empires.

Looking at multiple orientations toward Arab embodiment and movement, chapter 3, “Orienting Subjectivities,” focuses on performances of Salomé and sheiks by a diverse group of performers—none of them Asian or Asian American—to consider how each might embody a politics of space as particularized subjects through their world facing, to and away from the Orient and the U.S. empire. I rely here on the heuristic devices of the archive and the repertoire as discussed by Diana Taylor and Jacques Derrida in order to understand the formation of subjectivity across diverse bodies.⁶¹ Although the collection of artifacts, even those for live performance, is associated with archivists' projects that lend a sense of distance and, in turn, mastery over the objects being created, the repertoire slides more generously into that foundation of native goods and acts for, collapsed, into, and performed. My argument, then, explores the slippages between these imperially forged categories and attempts to understand the

difference that race makes in performances of empire's elsewhere. For instance, white women who sought to claim an imperial selfhood through imperial activities, such as collecting the forms and objects of civilizational others, nonetheless found themselves as performers too close to these forms and objects to be judged through rubrics of expertise. Indeed, their orientalist archives marked them as cosmopolitan, but their repertoires branded them as carriers of a moral decay. The dance, we could say, had got under their skin. In this way, orientalism as a discourse of promise and power was brought to bear even on nonoriental bodies, and the Salomé dancers' display of an exotic sensuality and the disciplinary endeavors of civic and state guardians of morality remained inseparable from one another. Here I turn to Ahmed and her conceptualization of "orientation" as a complication of orientalism as directional, and proximate, to understand how these and other performers—including African American men and women—generated heterogeneous claims that did not necessarily secure imperial subjecthood, even while such performances relied on the imbalance of power supposed by imperial structures of knowledge.⁶²

In chapter 4, "Dreaming of Araby," I argue that references to West Asia and North Africa, although manifesting the foreign in the imagination, activated forms of imperial subjecthood and subjection in the domestic order of race and space. In doing so, I demonstrate that the distance between the foreign and the domestic is an ideological construct. In examining these connections further, I revise a concept of internal colonialism through feminist and queer of color critique in order to understand the uses of imperial metaphor to warrant surveillance and control in the colony of Harlem, as well as annexation into the continental West. Although some African Americans had begun to claim a national affiliation with a cosmopolitan United States, or a racial affiliation with Africa through their use of exotic images and styles, vice investigators and lyricists construed a disturbing distance between African Americans and the rest of the national body, seeing both African Americans and West Asian and North African peoples as part of an uncivilized cohort. Conversely, African Americans saw Harlem as Araby, a space of intrigue and sexual freedom. Following Porter Grainger's "In Harlem's Araby," a novelty song that traces the adventures a tourist might have in the neighborhood, experiencing its nightlife, and enjoying pleasures described through an orientalist lens to lend the space of Harlem both a mysterious and erotic sensibility. The final sec-

tion of the chapter traces the use of Arab or Muslim signs and images to denote domestic spaces through strangeness and follows the courted New York traveler to Palm Springs, California, via a tourist booster tract that names this desert “Our Araby.” Describing the desert in the familiar terms of Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley, while promising friendly, disappearing, and removable natives, the tract introduces a symbolic realm of Arab signs and symbols to manifest the material expansion of U.S. empire throughout western North America.

This investigation into Jazz Age New York will, I hope, make clear that the various domains and borders that seem to be distinct actually remain unclear. It may seem simple to say that empire both creates distance and breaches it, but this fact has had profound implications for our histories of and inquiries into those boundaries and the encounters that we pursue or refuse with strangers. Indeed, the accounts I have brought together here help us see that an imperial logic of distance may make people who are close to us disappear, even as the intimacies among four continents bring them closer.

In *Imperial Blues*, I pursue questions that reconfigure the meaning and management of race and sex in Jazz Age New York through the differential knowledge that bringing empire home places before us. This book is oriented toward these histories of intimacies in order to reconsider what political stories inform the categories of race and sex, and what other stories we might tell from the confusion of those categories. Toward this end, Rancière is illuminating when he observes that “the ‘logic of stories’ and the ability to act as historical agents go together. Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct ‘fictions,’ that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done.”⁶³ This rearrangement is what I hope to accomplish—to engender new relationships between signs and images, politics and art, friends and strangers, and those other forms through which we encounter empire at home and abroad.