Harmony Unveiled: The Cotton Club Chronicles

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When first reflecting on topic ideas, we knew that music and civil rights resonated with us the most. After researching possible crossovers between the two, jazz was frequently mentioned because it was a uniquely American, and Black, artform. Since jazz is such a broad topic, we decided that our specific turning point should be a major staple of early jazz. This is when we came across the Cotton Club and its influence on the spread of Black culture. We thought this topic was a great fit because we both enjoy listening to many jazz artists like Ella Fitsgerald, Duke Ellington, and Nat King Cole, yet we still had much to learn about the Cotton Club.

We first started by researching the history and background of jazz. We then began with many secondary sources on important jazz artists and figures' biographies along with the places they performed. Many of these musicians had prominent voices in the civil rights movement and also had performed at the Cotton Club. Because of this, we narrowed our research to the Cotton Club, its significance, and its performers. Afterwards, we went on to find many primary sources of newspaper ads, musicians performing, and commentary for the Cotton Club. We also continued to find new primary sources, for example, videos, images, and audio recordings, that would fit in our documentary.

In the beginning, we were thinking about making a website. Still, after much debate, we realized a documentary would give us more opportunities to show photos, and videos, and convey more information. We chose a documentary because it offers an immersive way to convey the rich Black history and culture of jazz and the Cotton Club. The documentary also offers much more freedom than the website, because we are not restricted to a word count and 10 minutes is more time for us to share our findings. We wanted to captivate our audience with real visuals from the beginnings of jazz so that our viewers could witness its evolution and

experience listening and enjoying its iconic voices. We liked this format because it not only educates but also engages audiences, so they may have a deeper appreciation for jazz.

The Cotton Club was a major catalyst for the spread of Black culture and its introduction to white society. Its prominence began during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, which was marked by a surge in Black authors, artists, and musicians. The club was a renowned speakeasy and performance hall in New York but played into harsh stereotypes of the time and rules of segregation. While it showcased influential artists like Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, the club introduced Black culture to white audiences in the context of discriminatory practices like Jim Crow laws, demeaning its Black employees. Despite these complexities, the Cotton Club marked a turning point by exposing Black culture through jazz to a substantial, predominantly white audience, and today jazz is America's first world-renowned artform that has diversified our society.

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