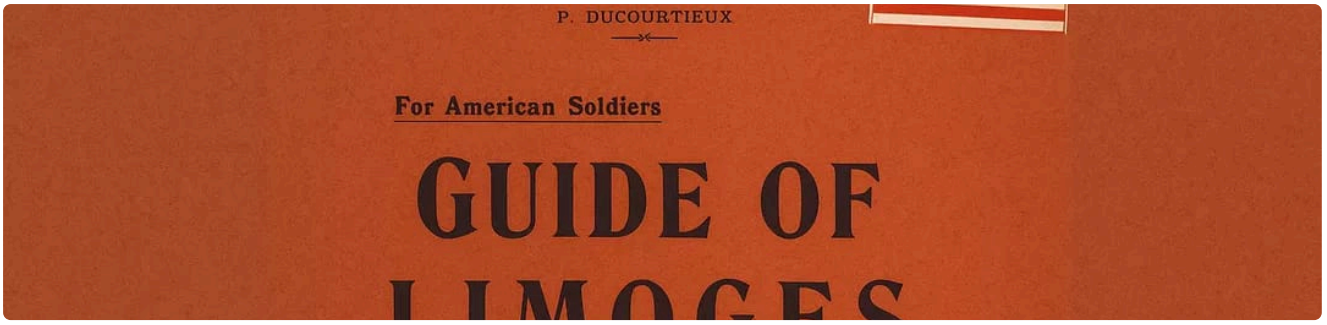
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Haute-Vienne on U.S. time: the Americanization of a French Province in the 1930s

Yaniv Arroua

When, how and at what pace did a French province become Americanized? This article traces the arrival and establishment of African-American music and dances in the Haute-Vienne department between the wars and the debates they fueled in local society.

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Haute-Vienne is a landlocked department in the center of France between Vienne and Indre in the north, Creuse and Corrèze in the east and southeast and Dordogne and Charente in the southwest and west. The population peaked at approximately 385,000 prior to the Great War before dwindling to 335,000 in the late 1930s. Its capital, Limoges, accounting for 27% of the population in the 1930s, is the department’s largest city. Haute-Vienne was a mainly rural area dotted with a few textile and porcelain factories where farmers and workers outnumbered the upper-class and aristocracy. During the “Belle Époque”, the peaceful, prosperous period between the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, Limoges and the department’s other urban centers underwent substantial physical and social changes. Literacy slowly advanced as transportation networks became denser and more modern.

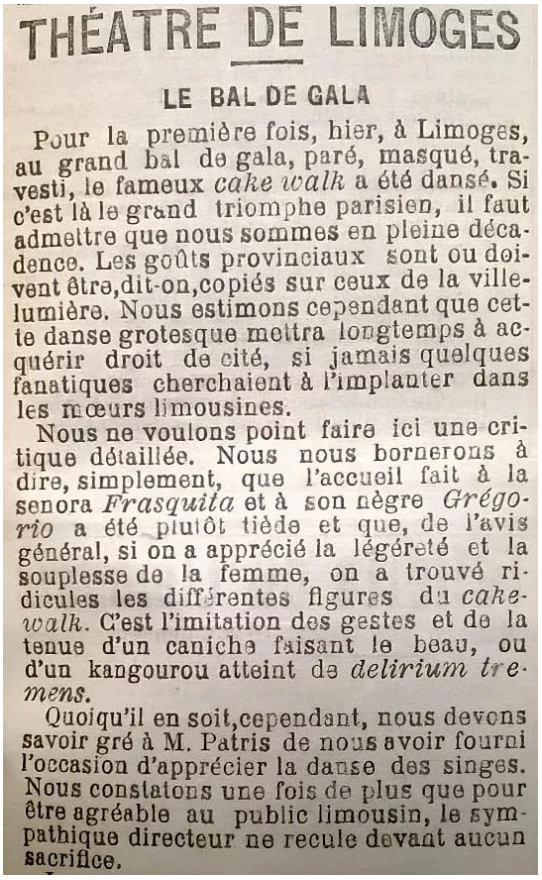
During that time, the voters of Haute-Vienne consistently leaned “red”, or socialist, but they were also drawn to extremes, in particular to anarchism and the far right. The consideration of the coexistence of diverse political forces is important in the historical interpretation of its Americanization since, beyond aesthetic, generational or social criteria, they influenced the reception of American culture, perceived either as a model of modernity or a dangerous threat to local traditions.

While Haute-Vienne had the reputation of a cultural backwater, artistic, especially musical, activities were important, above all in popular practice. Choral societies thrived in the period 1890–1900, concert halls and bandstands were built, and audiences flocked to performances by civilian and military bands. Music, played or listened to, spearheaded the penetration of American culture.

This article will address the Americanization process in Haute-Vienne through the lens of music – both playing and listening to it – during the period from the Great War to the 1930s. Identifying the vectors and actors in this cultural transfer serves to highlight the cultural, social and moral issues involved.

The discovery of a cultural otherness (1900–1918)

The Americanization of music in Haute-Vienne and nationally occurred at the same time. During the Belle Époque, new trends from the United States reached the department. The cakewalk, which had emerged in nineteenth-century Virginia, was briefly presented to a mostly unreceptive public in 1903. The press regarded this high-stepping dance as a curious fad unworthy of further attention. [1]



THÉATRE DE LIMOGES

LE BAL DE GALA

Pour la première fois, hier, à Limoges, au grand bal de gala, paré, masqué, travesti, le fameux *cake walk* a été dansé. Si c'est là le grand triomphe parisien, il faut admettre que nous sommes en pleine décadence. Les goûts provinciaux sont ou doivent être, dit-on, copiés sur ceux de la ville-lumière. Nous estimons cependant que cette danse grotesque mettra longtemps à acquérir droit de cité, si jamais quelques fanatiques cherchaient à l'implanter dans les mœurs limousines.

Nous ne voulons point faire ici une critique détaillée. Nous nous bornerons à dire, simplement, que l'accueil fait à la senora *Frasquita* et à son nègre *Grégorio* a été plutôt tiède et que, de l'avis général, si on a apprécié la légéreté et la souplesse de la femme, on a trouvé ridicules les différentes figures du *cake-walk*. C'est l'imitation des gestes et de la tenue d'un caniche faisant le beau, ou d'un kangourou atteint de *delirium tremens*.

Quoiqu'il en soit, cependant, nous devons savoir gré à M. Patris de nous avoir fourni l'occasion d'apprécier la danse des singes. Nous constatons une fois de plus que pour être agréable au public limousin, le sympathique directeur ne recule devant aucun sacrifice.

Excerpt from an article about the cakewalk at the theater of Limoges, February 24, 1903

Source: La Gazette du Centre, 24 février 1903

Another innovation, travelling movies, which were called "American", timidly introduced bits of American culture in cities. While cultural otherness was primarily encountered at fairs, exhibitions and pop-up attractions limited to urban settings, they brought part of the population into contact with a new vocabulary and new artistic practices and technology (sound, dance and film).

The key moment accelerating the department's Americanization was the end of the Great War, when nearly 6,000 *sammies*, the locals' nickname for doughboys, were stationed in hospitals and camps there from 1917 to 1919. American soldiers occupied several buildings in Limoges requisitioned as military hospitals: the former seminary in rue Eugène-Varlin, the Lycée Gay-Lussac, part of the Haviland porcelain factory in Mas-Loubier, a camp in the Montjovis quarter and another on the Champ-de-Juillet. In contrast with the cakewalk fad, the presence of these groups in Limoges, Aixe-sur-Vienne and Pierre-Buffière created a much more favorable context for American culture to take root. While this presence was mainly military, its impact on culture and the arts in general, primarily in the field of music but also in language, are clearly observable. More broadly, this unique musical atmosphere fostered new forms of sociability.

In the summer of 1918, audiences began attending concerts by american army bands from garrisons based in and around Limoges. The World War, then, was decisive for importing the first real forms of African-American music in the department. The *sammies* introduced their language, their cigarettes and their music. A band of black musicians played in what is now place Winston-Churchill on July 4, 1918. Their parade was immortalized in a photograph.



A U.S. Army band marching on the Champ-de-Foire in Limoges, July 4, 1918

Source: Photothèque de Paul Colmar

A U.S. Army band marching on the Champ-de-Foire in Limoges, July 4, 1918. Source: Paul Colmar photo library.

A picture at the National World War One Museum in Kansas City, Missouri shows African-American musicians outside the seminary in Limoges, probably rehearsing before a Bastille Day concert in 1918.



African-American musicians outside the Limoges seminary, July 1918

Source: National World War I Museum, Kansas City

These cultural exchanges were the starting point for an appropriation of the elements that make up jazz – sounds, instruments, rhythms, clothing styles, language – by some of the locals, especially the generation deprived of public dances during the war and who became mostly Americanophile in 1917–1918. For a while, Limoges lived on American time.

On July 6, 1918, *Le Courrier du Centre* advertised a concert of "American music" scheduled for the next day at the Champ-de-Juillet bandstand in Limoges. The varied program conducted by Edward Baldwin included *The Star-Spangled Banner*, *Going Up!*, *My Old Kentucky Home*, *Old Black Joe* and *Dixie*. In November, the Orsay Garden hosted another performance of American music and "victory concerts" took place across Haute-Vienne. This marked the start of Armistice Day's beginnings as a social ritual of city and village life.

Associated with technical innovation and dancing, African-American music caught on at every level of society. Social bonding underwent profound transformations; record collectors and radio listeners started clubs; musicians specialized in jazz; drums became omnipresent in the musical landscape; and the nature of dancing changed considerably. Corporal, spiritual, temporal, spatial and sonic codes were recast in a new socio-cultural mold. Jazz was adapted to French taste in Haute-Vienne and Americanization intensified.

Shape-shifting Americanization

American influence was also perceptible in shifting linguistic patterns. Paul Ducourtieux (1846–1925), a learned Limoges printer who wrote several guidebooks, published a *Guide of Limoges for Americans Soldiers* featuring a summary of the city's history, monuments and sights, shops and entertainment venues, useful local transport information and a city map. Many advertisements, translated into English for the occasion, were inserted into the book: the Café de la Paix boasted "the best high-class drinks" and the Café de l'Opéra an "American interpreter". The guide aimed to facilitate the social and cultural life of U.S. Army members and, by extension, contacts with locals.

Except for soldiers, few Americans were in Haute-Vienne. A handful of immigrants played a prominent role, especially in the porcelain industry. The most famous were the Haviland family, porcelain manufacturers whose correspondence with contacts in the United States is held in the department's archives (series 23 J, 1892–1941). The letters shed light on reciprocal cultural exchanges and, therefore, the introduction of a slice of Limousin culture to the United States: the factory began exporting its products en masse to New York in the mid-19^th century and even the White House was a customer in the 1860s and 1870s. This interaction between French and American culture in a high-profile manufacturing area secured the Haute-Vienne region's position between the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

Domesticating American music: the 1920s

Dominique Barjot defines Americanization as the "transfer of production methods, consumer patterns, lifestyles, socio-cultural practices or mindsets originating or adopted in the United States to Western Europe." [2] How did this process unfold for music in Haute-Vienne?

A young generation eager to embrace modernity and new trends welcomed jazz. This explains why student groups, such as the Association générale des Étudiants de Limoges (General Association of Limoges Students, AGEL), founded in the late nineteenth century, were exclusively responsible for the large-scale ballroom dances, partly based on the United States model, that proved so fashionable across the province at the time. Technological advances (instruments and recording, production and dissemination methods) paved the way for the penetration and spread of African-American music and dances and their popularity on a mass scale, despite the population's relatively low purchasing power. Dancing was a popular, mixed

and to a certain degree intergenerational practice, but theoretical debates on music, musicians and dances imported from the United States, while also intergenerational, were limited to social circles of upper-middle-class, well-educated men.

Local studies on the history of the arrival of jazz in France and Europe have shown that musicians everywhere adopted American ways, first through language and by copying trends they saw in the press and other means that are less identifiable for historians, especially oral accounts. In Haute-Vienne, groups took American-sounding names; the many and often comical examples made references to barnyard animals (the Poultry Jazz Band led by Limoges-based musician Marcel Hyvernaud, and the Merry Pigs Jazz Band), madness (the Mabouls-Jazz Band) and the devil (Diabolic Jazz), or had the french word for "oddballs" in the title (Zigotos-Jazz). All of these groups were active in Haute-Vienne in the late 1920s and part of the 1930s.

Instruments such as bass drums were decorated with motifs mirroring representations associated with the world of Afro-American music between the wars. For example, a picture taken in Aixe-sur-Vienne circa 1935 shows interesting socio-cultural representations displayed on the Lous-ticks-Jazz band's bass drum. The scene at the bottom depicts a white man and woman dancing: she is wearing a skirt, he a tuxedo. The musician clearly displays the importance of jazz dancing on his instrument. Two other dancers, a white man and an apparently mixed-race woman, flank the central motif, which is what grabs the viewer's attention: five black musicians are dancing, playing music and drinking liquor, an image strongly associated with the postwar American jazz spirit during the Prohibition. All of them are wearing tuxedos. Two are playing the drums, one strums a banjo and another drinks liquor from a bottle, recalling the common association between alcohol and the lifestyle of jazz musicians.



The Lous-ticks Jazz Band's drummer, Aixe-sur-Vienne, circa 1935

Source: Photothèque de Paul Colmar

American musical culture can be glimpsed in other artistic and industrial products. For example, around 1930, painter Léon Jouhaud (1874–1950) made a preparatory drawing for an enamel called "La Revue Nègre". Porcelain manufacturers also traded on jazz and the ideas it conveyed. A group of figurines from around 1928 depicts white-suited black musicians based on Satchmo, a stereotype with protruding lips, while a 1925 vase by La Porcelaine Limousine features decoration inspired by Josephine Baker surrounded by nude dancers and exotic floral décor. These kinds of depictions entered the collective imagination.



"L'orchestre de jazz" ("The Jazz Band"), hard porcelain figurines, circa 1928. Collection of the Musée National Adrien-Dubouché, Limoges. Inventory number: ADL13082

Source: © GrandPalaisRmn (Limoges, musée national Adrien Dubouché)/Tony Querrec

Some players stood out for disseminating work based on the scholarly or crypto-scholarly model put forward in the first articles on jazz in French magazines. [3] In this respect, Jean Marcland (1903–1964) was a key figure in the Americanization of Haute-Vienne.

Jean Marcland, a mediator of Americanness

Jean Marcland was born into an upper-middle-class family in Limoges in 1903. His father, a doctor, wanted him to study medicine. As a boy, he studied classical piano at the city's music school founded in 1910. Later, he joined the AGEL and with three of his classmated founded Limoges' first real jazz group, the Odd Boys Band, which played in ballrooms in the mid-1920s. several details made Marcland a key player in Americanization and set him apart from other musicians, amateurs or bandleaders. He did more than just give his band an English-sounding name, like others who played at dances at the same time: Marcland was committed to disseminating African-American music in its original form.



The Odd Boys Band: left to right, Jean Marcland, Bernard Charles and Jean-René Sicot, 1925

Source: Collection Patrick Marcland

In 1926, Marcland gave a lecture on the "jazz band" to the Assemblée littéraire et scientifique du Limousin (Literary and Scientific Assembly of Limousin), a select, well-educated audience. The event reflected a desire not only to understand and absorb American modernity, but also to explain it in a quasi-scientific spirit. Marcland's talk coincided with the publication of the first French academic work on jazz (*Le jazz*, published by André Cœuroy and André Schaeffner in January 1926). The text proves that he had acquired a command of the technique and sound of jazz with relative ease. His scientific presentation combined jazz band history, a study of the musical instruments used and musicology, including some piano demonstrations to explain syncopation. Here are some excerpts:

"These bands… *play American music*, and it is a mistake for European orchestras to believe that they can be used to interpret, for example, French operetta arias or popular songs. An undeniable reflection of the American spirit, they were created on the other side of the Atlantic to popularize hitherto unknown Negro tunes imbued with a deep longing for the forests."

Indispensably linked to the laws of mainstream music, they must nevertheless remain faithful to their original purpose: jazz bands for American music, American music for jazz bands…

It has been said that jazz is a temporary illness that will not last. But this music is in its twelfth year of existence and not doing badly at all, I assure you. It is creeping into everything, even, disguised, classical music concerts. Soon we will see the fourteenth blues concerto op. 25 by X appearing on programs alongside Faure's *Clair de lune* and *Les jardins sous la pluie*…

Jazz will become something more than dance music. It is a twelve-year-old learning more every day. In America, the number of academic works on the topic is increasing. In one conservatory, leading American composers are hard at work creating classical jazz… In the hopes of making you less skeptical, ladies and gentlemen, I will end my little talk here by quoting these words by André Coeuroy:

"The jazz we have in Europe is just a caricature of what ideal jazz will be." [4]

In the late 1920s, Marcland attended medical school in Paris and began playing in cabarets to earn some extra cash. To keep his side gig a secret from his disapproving father, he took the stage name Marc Lanjean. He became familiar with the capital's jazz clubs, notably replacing Jean Wiéner and Clément Doucet at the Bœuf sur le Toit. In the early 1930s, Marcland joined Ray Ventura et ses Collégiens and, after graduating from medical school, performed as the band's pianist or drummer on all its tours. Meanwhile, he tried his hand at arranging and wrote his first songs before doing his military service in Morocco and getting married after returning to France in 1934. After becoming a doctor, he was mobilized at the outbreak of the Second World War and taken prisoner. When peace returned, he gave up medicine to focus entirely on music. Gravitating within a circle of leading professional musicians, including Jacques Hélian, André Dassary and Ventura, Marcland wrote *La Maladie d'amour* with Henri Salvador, *Le Grisbi* with Wiéner and the music for the film *Razzia sur la chnouf* starring Jean Gabin.

Marcland/Lanjean spent most of his career outside Haute-Vienne, which lies beyond the scope of this article. His role as a mediator was not limited to playing music and lecturing on jazz. In 1931, he wrote a series of articles for *La Vie limousine* about his September 1930 journey to New York. They begin with his nighttime arrival after crossing on the *France*. Then Marcland describes his emotions at the sight of the majestic, powerful city. He wrote about his first contacts with Americans, the passport check (which pleasantly surprised him, contrary to what he had read about Ellis Island), his earliest impressions of New York neighborhoods and his wanderings in Prohibition America. His writing style is realistic, close to the streets and giant buildings in a city he describes as dirty. To his limited readership he revealed the impressions of a local boy on American soil, and in so doing conveyed some of his own ideas, describing a world far removed from the working-class and peasant masses of Haute-Vienne. The Frenchman in New York wrote that he had the feeling of "being in a movie". He crossed paths with fast Fords, white-gloved policemen, drugstores that were well stocked despite the Depression and "the abominable coca-kola" [sic] while half-heartedly criticizing this bustling, consumerist world and the *wattman*, also in white gloves, who operated the elevator speeding upwards through the floors of immense skyscrapers at 40 kph, prompting him to make a comparison with Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*. Lastly, he was disturbed by the segregation, social exclusion and legal subjugation of blacks, which only increased his admiration for their artistic and cultural creativity.

Marcland was not the only player in the Americanization of Haute-Vienne in the 1930s. In these years of economic crisis, the scarcity of amateur music-making gave way to a rise in large-scale performances that took place in the biggest concert halls, first in Limoges. This was an urban phenomenon, but one that the new technology of radio and records gradually spread to the countryside.

Americanization through performance and the machine (the 1930s)

In the 1930s, artists and bands stopped in Limoges on their tours, such as Josephine Baker in 1934 and 1938 at the Salle Berlioz (the theater's name after 1932) and Ray Ventura on several occasions. While not strictly speaking "American", these bands conveyed an imagination linked to exoticism and the African-American sound world. This was even more true for Baker. What is more, large audiences made these events an ideal way of popularizing not only the tunes themselves, but also a language and a unique way of seeing and performing a show.

At the same time, radio came into its own, although local stations did not really start playing jazz until the late 1930s. The Limoges P.T.T. relay occasionally broadcast tunes by popular bands in eclectic programs. In 1931, the station succinctly offered "jazz" [5] and in 1936, American folk tunes with a "choir of Negroes performing 'spirituals'" and popular dance music played by a Negro jazz band. But the phenomenon was far too isolated to speak of a cultural revolution.

In early 1938, a show entirely devoted to jazz was launched with the name "quart d'heure du Hot Club Limousin" ("Fifteen Minutes from the Hot Club Limousin"). Hosted by a trailblazing jazz broadcaster in Limoges, student and amateur trumpeter Roger Blanc (1913–2007), it aired every Thursday for six months. One listener, Jean-Marie Masse (1921–2015), who fell in love with jazz, became a drummer and founded the Hot club in Limoges in 1948. It appears, then, that while Americanization in Haute-Vienne began between the wars, fueled by new technology and live big band music, it picked up speed in the 1940s, especially after the war. Ideological opposition to the importation of United States culture was very strong in Haute-Vienne, which may have delayed cultural Americanization through language, dance and music in comparison with other French cities.

Americanization, a battle for souls

Critics of music and dances imported from across the Atlantic contributed to questioning, if not stemming – but without stopping – their introduction in Haute-Vienne. Among the most criticized or mocked American fashions, dance held an essential place. This had to do with the history of mentalities, reception and tastes, as well as gender.

The press was the main medium for disseminating derogatory messages and images, which were sometimes humorous, sometimes serious and purportedly "scientific". The popularity of American cultural norms in Haute-Vienne sparked a backlash in the early 1930s. Despite fierce opposition, the Charleston and the American-style surprise party became commonplace between the wars.

In addition to cartoons in the press, in the late 1920s alarmed doctors issued dire warnings about the effects of modern dances imported from America on women's health and procreation. One example is a 1928 article, "Dancing et santé" ("Dancing and Health"), in the *Revue limousine*. An Haute-Vienne physician, Doctor Laumonnier, wrote that modern dances cause "weight loss, flat breasts and hips and certain pelvic disorders". Further on, he asked, "How many young women who were previously in the best of health have succumbed to the after-effects of these parties, which last until daybreak"? The theme had a special resonance in a country struggling with a demographic crisis after the Great War. The sociability allowed by dances was called into question. Doctors described the alleged consequences of the new form of musical sociability on demographic growth and public health.

The cultural history of the introduction of African-American music and dances into daily life, correlated with that of Americanization, is a fertile field of inquiry for researchers working on the history of the body and hygiene as well as on gender studies. The opponents of jazz considered the Charleston and other dances a "choreographic error", a throwback "to barbaric dances borrowed from exotic peoples by way of the Anglo-Saxons". [6] Drawings depicted naked dancers twisting their bodies to do the black bottom or the shimmy, while others mocked the freneticism of the Charleston. Guy de Breix even wrote an article called "The Charleston Trial" in the Christmas 1926 issue of *La Revue limousine*:

"It is a NEGRO JIG … It is a choreographic ERROR, because dancing must be a source of pleasure, not a cause of fatigue … Next year, the Charleston will be replaced by something else. Will it be a bamboula, which will be danced naked except for a grass skirt or a nose ring? … The Black Bottom undoubtedly got its name because you have to kick yourself in the behind with your heel."



Drawing published in *L'Almanach du Courrier du Centre*, January 1, 1928, artist unknown

Source: Gallica

The history of the encounter between jazz and the Western world is crucial in determining the causes and consequences of profound transformations in the ways people met and socialized between the wars. The example of Haute-Vienne is the reflection of a French, even a European phenomenon. Whatever the point of view of those reacting to African-American modernity, it had obvious repercussions on mores in the first half of the twentieth century, even in rural France. In reaction to criticism from a generally older, erudite generation promoting the defense of a regionalist ideology, contemporaries sided with the "moderns" by tolerating and/or defending this cultural transfer.

The debates on dance halls and the values they conveyed were a reaction their success. Sound and other technological innovations met with varying responses in intellectual circles – journalists, critics, lecturers, academics, doctors and writers. Clashing mentalities and a generational divide triggered written and verbal battles. Debates and articles on the cultural changes rocking postwar France abounded. In this sense, Haute-Vienne was in tune with the rest of the country. All the avant-garde movements – Dadaism, Surrealism, Cubism, etc. – fueled discussions in the region's artistic circles. With respect to music, the African-American repertoire caused the greatest stir and a battle of mores began, first in the press.

Conservatives from an older generation, including regional writers such as Raoul Roche and Raymond d'Étiveaud, denounced practices they considered dangerous for Limousin identity. Imbued with regionalism and fearing an alteration of local identity, they were joined by doctors, who backed up their arguments with health rhetoric. In step with the period's ideas on hygiene and the fight against contagious diseases such as tuberculosis, they harshly criticized African-American dances and music. Others did not fight jazz specifically, but made the defense of regional traditions their leitmotiv. Music publisher and store owner Jean Lagueny (1904–1967), a member of Félibrige, an association founded in 1854 to defend literary and cultural traditions, collected and published regionalist music with help from poets Joseph Mazabraud (1816–1898), Jean Rebier (1879–1966) and René Farnier (1888–1954), local composers and musicians Paul Ruben (1841–1933), Alfred Sarre (1882-1941), Léon Roby (1872-1946), André le Gentile (1878-1966), etc. Lagueny carried out an abundant correspondence with the members of his circle. [7] His activity climaxed with the publication in 1935 of *Per diverti lo gen*, a collection of Limousin songs in dialect. For these ardent defenders of regional identity, Americanization was a threat that had to be fought by the revival of forgotten traditions. But Lagueny was still a businessman, and Americanization offered a sales opportunity not to be missed, even in his shop. Catalogues and inventories show that his store was well stocked with American records, instruments and machines in the 1930s.

Limousin regionalists took the fight outside their territory. A unique form of musical sociability kept regional identity alive in the Limousin diaspora across France. For example, during a regionalist evening in 1929, the Chanteurs Limousins (the "Limousin Singers") "… almost entirely recreated [the] folk heritage of [Limousin] song and dance in the heart of Paris, despite the syncopation and morbidity of negro jazz and the epileptic Charleston". [8]

The progressives were especially present among the younger generations, like the members of AGEL, in which students from upper-class backgrounds, including Marcland, gravitated. But literati were also in this camp, such as music critic Charles Christian, who defended african-american music many times in *Le Courrier du Centre*.

Questions of gender, health, music, education and sociability fueled jazz debates in Limoges, as in the rest of France, from the 1920s onwards. Highly virulent and visible in the second half of the 1920s, these jousts disappeared from the sources in the middle of the following decade. If this can be seen as a form of acceptance, the disappearance of the great discussions on the legitimacy and quality of Afro-American fashions undoubtedly proves their lasting imprint on mores.

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NOTES

1 See *Le Courrier du Centre*, 17 août 1903 and *Le Réveil du Centre*, 24 février 1903.

2 Dominique Barjot, *L'Américanisation en Europe au xx^e^ siècle : économie, culture, politique* (Lille: Université Charles de Gaulle, 2002), 7.

3 Laurent Cugny, Martin Guerpin, *Anthologie de textes en français sur le jazz*, Tome 1 : *1918-1929* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2019).

4 Excerpts from Jean Marcland’s lecture, February, 1926. Patrick Marcland Collection.

5 *Courrier du Centre*, February 12, 1931. The press advertises Donaldson’s *Little White Lies*; Shapiro’s *That's Where the som* [sic, pour *South*] *begins*; Tremaine’s *Swing low, sweet chariot* and *There is one more river to cross*.

6 *La Vie limousine*, 25 mars 1927.

7 Held in the department’s archives (series 37J).

8 *La Vie limousine*, 25 avril 1929.