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The Modern Race Woman: Josephine Baker, Hattie McDaniel, and the Black Press, 1925-1945

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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During the early twentieth century, the Black press—including newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Baltimore Afro-American*—became a source for debating and reiterating notions of race, gender, and sexuality. Through the figures of female celebrities such as Josephine Baker and Hattie McDaniel, the writers of the Black press articulated Blackness, Black femininity and sexuality, and older conceptions of race womanhood and uplift. Baker, a theatrical performer who found most of her popularity in France, was positioned as a positive example of Black modernity and success, but also as a potentially negative example of blatant sexuality and Black womanhood. McDaniel, whose Academy Award win for Best Supporting Actress in 1940 presented her a pioneer for Black representation on film, was both praised and harshly criticized for working within a white Hollywood which made little space for Black actors outside of stereotypical, small roles. During a period of upheaval for African Americans, including the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, and continuing segregation and racial violence, the Black press used public figures such as Baker and McDaniel to comment on both a past and a potential future of Black representation in the media.

INTRODUCTION

In April 1940, *The Crisis*, the eminent official magazine of the NAACP begun in 1910 by W.E.B. Du Bois as editor, featured actress Hattie McDaniel on its cover. In the photograph, McDaniel smiles in an elaborate fur coat, gardenias in her hair and across her shoulder. It is unclear whether the photo was taken at the Academy Awards ceremony held in February 1940, where McDaniel received her award for Best Supporting Actress for *Gone with the Wind*; the caption merely reads "Hattie McDaniels [sic]: Her "Mammy" in GWTW won coveted film "Oscar.""[1] Inside the magazine, the inclusion of McDaniel on the cover of *The Crisis*, which typically covered political and social issues affecting African Americans rather than entertainment or cultural news, is justified by noting that her win "marks the first time a colored film actor or actress has ever been given this honor" and that McDaniel herself received "unanimous acclaim" for her portrayal of Mammy.[2] The photo of McDaniel and the glowing description of her career obscures a complicated relationship between McDaniel and the Black press, including magazines like *The Crisis*. Like many Black actors who worked in the American film industry, McDaniel was the subject of both extensive praise and harsh criticism, her visibility in films like *Gone with the Wind* a reminder of the strides Black actresses had made as well as the deep limitations of the work available to them. McDaniel was far from the only Black female performer, whether on film or on stage, to be featured in the Black press on complicated terms. In their extensive coverage of notable Black women, the Black press expressed complicated views of race, gender, and sexuality through the figures of women who, through their success, could be used as both exemplars of Black womanhood or as figures of political and social criticism.

[1] *The Crisis,* April, 1940.
[2] *The Crisis*, April, 1940, 103.

At the beginning of the 20th century, newspapers catering to Black audiences began publication, particularly in urban centers such as Chicago, New York, and Baltimore. As the Great Migration brought thousands of African Americans to northern cities beginning in the 1910s, newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* or the *New York Amsterdam News* directly addressed these migrants, keeping them abreast of relevant political, economic, social, and cultural events. These newspapers drew on a long tradition of Black-owned and -operated papers that functioned, along with other institutions like churches and clubs, as a way of addressing political, social, and cultural concerns within Black communities.[3] As the Black populations in Chicago and New York swelled and were pushed into neighborhoods such as Chicago's South Side—known as the Black Belt—or Harlem, newspapers became one way to organize and connect growing urban communities. Articles on prominent Black men and women became modes of expressing praise and criticism of beliefs such as racial uplift or of public performances of race, gender, and sexuality, sometimes in contradictory terms. None were more likely to embody these contradictions than prominent Black women, particularly those who earned their fame and notoriety through theater and film.

This thesis examines the ways the Black press of the mid-1920s through the end of World War II commented on race, gender, and sexuality through the figures of Josephine Baker and Hattie McDaniel. During this period, newspapers saw these women as symbols of success and role models for other Black women, but also as warnings and subjects of scorn or ridicule. Baker's successes in France were praiseworthy and her life was a fairy tale to the same writers and readers who might condemn her personal life or write objectifying articles on the role of Black femininity and sexuality in her stage performances. Similarly, McDaniel's Oscar win and

[3] Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997).

her presence in scores of popular films made her one of the few Black women to become a Hollywood celebrity, but her roles as maids and slaves earned her opprobrium for degrading Black women onscreen. As well, her own personal life and appearance became subjects of criticism and, occasionally, mockery. The Black press, like other public institutions, engaged in regulation on Black women's lives as they navigated what Saidiya Hartman describes as the afterlife of slavery in urban spaces where Blackness, gender performances, and sexuality were highly visible and exposed for stigmatization and criminalization.[4] While the lives and careers of Josephine Baker and Hattie McDaniel might seem far removed from the average Black woman living in a northern city, both women were judged by the same standards according to their varying expressions of gender and sexuality, as well as along the ways their success—or lack thereof—contributed to perceptions of Blackness and African Americans in general. As visible examples of Black success, women like Baker and McDaniel were figures writers could use to express opinions on a variety of political issues affecting African Americans. Within the Black press, journalists, writers, critics, and occasionally activists used Baker and McDaniel to comment on appropriate gender performances, racialized sexuality, Black success and economic mobility, and the ever-present role of discrimination and anti-Blackness in the lives of Black women.

Josephine Baker and Hattie McDaniel provide the subjects of this thesis for a number of reasons related to their lives and work. Both women were active and arguably peaked in their careers in similar time periods—Baker in the 1920s and 1930s, McDaniel in the 1930s and early 1940s. Both women were born, raised, and lived in cities. Baker was born in St. Louis and lived in both Philadelphia and New York while working her way through stage shows as a chorus girl

[4] Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019).

and dancer, while McDaniel was raised in Denver, lived and worked in Chicago briefly, and finally settled in Los Angeles. Their careers overlapped as well, as Baker began her career in all-Black stage shows and revues before becoming a celebrated stage performer in France, where she also appeared in film and worked as a singer. Meanwhile, McDaniel also began her career performing on stage before enjoying a short career as a blues singer and eventually a film and radio actress. In other ways, however, the contrast between Baker and McDaniel makes their appearances in the Black press notable for the differences in coverage. While both women worked in film, Baker appeared only in French films (albeit in leading roles) with limited releases in the United States, whereas McDaniel was a major supporting actress in American film throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Baker lived and worked abroad throughout her career, returning to perform in the United States only in 1936, and her experiences internationally were used to comment on politics in America. McDaniel worked only in the United States throughout her career and was closely involved with African American politics in Los Angeles, such as the fight over housing discrimination. More importantly, the perception of both women by the Black and mainstream white press was radically different. Baker was little-known to white American audiences for much of her career, but was popular amongst Black audiences and covered extensively by the Black press. McDaniel's fame was much greater amongst white audiences, however, and not limited to Black audiences in the same way as Baker. The age difference and appearances of both women also starkly contrasted, which was reflected in the articles about them. Baker was frequently sexualized, her light skin tone repeatedly emphasized, while McDaniel was regarded as matronly and occasionally received comments on her dark skin or weight (an issue which formed the basis of her alleged rivalry with Lena Horne.) The similarities and differences between the two women allow for coverage of them in the Black press to cover a

wide range of attitudes towards Black women's success, colorism and beauty, proper performance of gender, and displays of sexuality.

CHAPTER 1: Historiography

A study of the Black press and its coverage of Josephine Baker and Hattie McDaniel is one which situates itself within several different historical fields, including African American history and histories of gender, sexuality, and cultural productions such as theater and film. While individual biographies and studies of Baker and McDaniel have been conducted, which use materials from the Black press, comparative studies of the Black press and Black female performers is worthy of further exploration. For example, although there are monographs or articles that specifically uncover the history of Black film criticism or entertainment journalism, the number is few. There is a much larger field of work done on Black women in film and representations of Black women in the media, as well as reception studies, Black studies, and cultural histories of Black newspapers. These sources provide a foundation for my examination of Baker and McDaniel within the Black press.

While several biographies of Baker have been written, Bennetta Jules-Rosette's *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image*'s combines a brief biography with a deeper examination of Baker's work, particularly the way her personal image was disseminated through stage performances, film, photography, recorded music, and artistic representations.[5] Because my paper is concerned with how Baker was perceived, rather than in the specific details of her life and career, Jules-Rosette's book—drawn from her background in sociology and African American Studies—provides a more rigorous analysis of Baker's life through her performances. As the most recent biography on Hattie McDaniel, Jill Watts' book, *Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood*, adheres to the more typical structure of a biography while also providing context for McDaniel's work in entertainment throughout her

[5] Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* (Champaign, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

life, as well as the political implications of her performances and her personal activism.[6] In addition to these biographies, research about Baker and McDaniel in the context of Black women on stage or on screen has also provided additional texture to histories of their lives. Jayna Brown's *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* argues that the work of Black female stage performers, whether as actresses, dancers, or singers, contributed to the development of Black modernity and ideals of Black success during the 1910s and 1920s; Baker is one of many women she analyzes, within the context of a cadre of contemporary Black performers who emerged during the 1920s and gained international success.[7]

Since Baker, unlike McDaniel, rarely worked in American film or stage productions, English-language books interrogating her life, career, or media representations are less plentiful. For McDaniel, her significance to Black film history as the first African American woman to win an Academy Award ensured a broader scholarship dissecting her work, star image, and audience reception. Film historian Donald Bogle, in his foundational 1973 book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film* as well as in his 2009 book *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* covers the wider representation of African Americans on film as well as within the film industry, with McDaniel figuring in both works.[8] Studies of Black women on film in classical Hollywood also prominently include McDaniel's work, not only for her popularity and ubiquity, but also because of the highly stereotypical (and therefore representational) quality of her roles. Charlene B.

[6] Jills Watts, *Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
[7] Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
[8] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*, 5th ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 2009).

Regester's *African American Actresses: The Struggle for Visibility, 1900-1960* researches the film careers of popular Black actresses, among them Hattie McDaniel, and documents how they attained success within a white-dominated film industry, how they struggled within the same industry, and how their roles were perceived by both highly-critical Black fans as well as often-patronizing white fans.[9] Miriam J. Petty's *Stealing the Show: African American Performers and Audiences in 1930s Hollywood*, which discusses Black men and women on film, also devotes attention to McDaniel in her best-known film (*Gone With the Wind*) and argues that Black performers were forced to transform small, stereotyped roles into attention-grabbing performances which could ensure further roles and attention from the film industry, while also walking a tightrope of concerns over representation by Black audiences.[10] While uneven in treatment, Baker and McDaniel have both been the subjects of critical scholarly work on their lives and careers, as well as on broader issues of the representation, reception, and significance of Black female performers of the early 20th century.

This essay also draws upon studies of Black film audiences, as well as the Black press itself. These studies have focused on the Great Migration's role in creating large urban audiences for both films and newspapers. Newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Baltimore Afro-American* developed out of the growth in Black populations in their respective cities. Monographs such as Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson's *A History of the Black Press* provide a broad history of the development of the Black press both before and after the early 20th century.[11] Other scholars have examined various aspects

[9] Charlene B. Regester, *African-American Actresses: The Struggle for Visibility, 1900-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).
[10] Miriam J. Petty, *Stealing the Show: African American Performers and Audiences in 1930s Hollywood* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).
[11] Pride and Wilson.

of the Black press beyond the political and social coverage it is most associated with, including its coverage of topics related to entertainment, gender, and sexuality. Kim T. Gallon's *Pleasure in the News: African-American Readership and Sexuality in the Black Press*, as one example, chronicles the many ways the Black press articulated popular discourses on sexuality during the interwar period, and how it shaped views of modernity.[12] The particular relationship between the Black press and film reception is uncovered by Anna Everett in her 2001 work on Black film criticism, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949*. Everett argues that Black film criticism arose as soon as films began showing in Black-only theaters, while also discussing largely unstudied film writings in a variety of Black newspapers, which complicate the idea that Black film critics and film fans largely responded to developments in white news outlets rather than creating their own preferences, demands, and critiques independently.[13] Carrie Teresa's recent *Looking at the Stars: Black Celebrity Journalism in Jim Crow America,* published in 2016, complements Everett's research in its work on Black journalists and Black celebrity culture as an act of political and artistic protest, and in particular traces the various ways Black female celebrities were treated in the press.[14] Stepping outside the newspapers, others have written works which understand the development of Black urban spaces as leading to a growth in Black film audiences and Black newspaper journalists and readers. Scholars such as Davarian L. Baldwin and Clare Corbould have focused on the creation of Black urban life in northern cities such as Chicago and New York during the peak years of the Great Migration.[15]

[12] Kim T. Gallon, *Pleasure in the News: African-American Readership and Sexuality in the Black* Press (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).
[13] Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).
[14] Carrie Teresa, *Looking at the Stars: Black Celebrity Journalism in Jim Crow America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).
[15] Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Clare Corbould, *Becoming African American: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Other scholars have looked to the important ways that cinema, as one major source of entertainment, interacted with Black audiences in cities. Cara Caddoo and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart both locate Black modernity within the movie theater.[16] Intersecting these works with other research done on Black women as performers and in public spaces provides room for intervention in my research.

Finally, the work of scholars in African American and Black studies in creating a basis for understanding the many ways Black women engaged with the public, whether on film or stage, in the street, or in a newspaper article. Saidiya Hartman's book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* builds narratives out of late 19th and early 20th century Black life in cities like New York or Philadelphia, by exploring the various ways Black women chose to subvert, resist, or endure the gender and sexual boundaries enforced on them, as well as the ways their rebellions were squashed or neutered by those in positions of power.[17] Baker and McDaniel, as two women who were born, raised, and lived in cities and were in constant negotiations over their displays of proper (or not) gender and sexuality, allow for some comparisons to the women in Hartman's work. In addition, Samantha Pinto and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's books on early Black female celebrities, the racialized and fetishized natures of their bodies and public performances, and the long legacy of their lives can offer a fruitful point of analysis for perceptions of Baker and McDaniel.[18] In particular, the narratives of primitivism created around native Africans in the

[16] Cara Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).
[17] Hartman.
[18] Samantha Pinto, *Infamous Bodies: Early Black Women's Celebrity and the Afterlives of Rights* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

19th century would have an especially large effect on the stage work of Baker, and the manner in which her dancing and acting were received by both Black and white audiences. By using theories of Blackness and femininity, and the many ways it has been constructed and debated from these scholars and these fields, understanding the Black press and its complicated relationship with Josephine Baker and Hattie McDaniel can be seen as a continuation of earlier conflicts with Black women and celebrity.

CHAPTER 2: La Baker: Josephine Baker in the Black Press

Josephine Baker emerged as a figure covered by the Black press during the 1920s, first as a performer in popular all-Black theatrical productions in New York and then as a dancer and singer in French musical theater. Born in St. Louis in 1906, Baker became associated with New York, specifically Harlem, after performing in musicals such as *Shuffle Along* in 1922 and *Chocolate Dandies* in 1924. Baker was also a performer at the Plantation Club, a white-only nightclub featuring Black performers in the vein of the Cotton Club. Such productions represented a flowering of Black culture, from jazz to dances such as the Charleston, that developed alongside the Harlem Renaissance and created a new class of Black celebrities who represented racial uplift as well as modernity. Black female performers, including Baker, in particular represented "both racial aspirations and the public recognition of African American's modern presence," according to Jayna Brown.[19] Consequently, newspapers such as the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Baltimore Afro-American* began covering the travels, successes, and failures of women like Baker as a discourse on the role of Black women in public spaces. Baker's triumphs in Paris, where she became a star of the prestigious Folies Bergère cabaret, also represented an opportunity for journalists to make pointed commentary on the racial conditions of the United States in contrast to the exaggerated freedoms of Europe. Finally, Baker's performances, featuring partial nudity and a comedic depiction of primitivism and African dance, generated controversy not only among white audiences, but among the Black writers in America who covered her shows and tours. In this way, Baker's appearances in the Black press touched on three aspects of her identity: her racial identity (her performance of Blackness, her position as a representative of African American art abroad, and her success as a

[19] Brown, 194.

model for Black women); her gender identity (her displays of sexuality, in both her theatrical work and her personal life); and her role as an artist, which was viewed through the prism of her race and gender.

Baker's stage performances and appearances within mass media, including Black newspapers, drew from a longer historical legacy of sexualized Black femininity. Within the United States, where Baker's fame was considerable amongst Black audiences but a foreign curiosity to most white audiences, Baker's sexualized stage performances were interpreted along stereotypes originally created about enslaved African women. Deborah Gray White points to the two competing mythological constructions of Black womanhood under slavery: the Jezebel and the mammy.[20] While the mammy will be elaborated on with Hattie McDaniel and her most notable film performances, Baker's appearance and behavior, on- and off-stage, were often read as a modern Jezebel. The Black Jezebel was a construction of the white imagination, a Black woman who was "governed almost entirely by her libido," a sensual woman who shunned domesticity and religion and was sexually available to both Black and white men.[21] The Jezebel's influence can be seen in reports on Baker's relationships with white men, particularly her daring stage performance in 1936 where white men kissed her body, which scandalized both the Black and white press. Particularly within France, but also common in American views on her work, Baker was also depicted as a modern "Black Venus," an African woman who received projections of "prostitution, sexuality, and danger," as well as primitiveness, to reinforce the superiority of France and its imperial power.[22] This Black Venus narrative, like the Jezebel myth, originated in the white European imagination in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and by the

[20] Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 27-61.
[21] White, 29.
[22] Sharpley-Whiting, 7.

1920s continued to hold a fascination for French audiences.[23] In many ways, Baker's stage persona—as a comedic, uninhibited, "savage" African dressed only in a banana skirt—was created as a deliberate response to the Black Venus narrative. Despite this, both the Jezebel and Black Venus haunted the reception and coverage of Baker in the Black press almost as much as in the white press.

Baker's earliest appearances in newspapers came in 1924 and 1925, during her time performing in *Chocolate Dandies*. The show was the creation of Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, who had also created the vaudeville musical *Shuffle Along* in 1921, one of the first musicals by Black creators and featuring an all-Black cast. Baker had initially worked only as an understudy on *Shuffle Along*; Blake and Sissle dismissed her as "too small, too thin, too dark," as Baker later claimed.[24] However, after performing on a road tour of the musical, Blake and Sissle hired her for *Chocolate Dandies*, which generated critical attention and offers for future work, including at the Plantation Club. Baker, then only a teenager, was the subject of a laudatory article in the *New York Amsterdam News* as "A Chorus Girl Who Really Stood Out and Won Acclaim": "Miss Baker is tall, slight of figure and long of limb. She seems as pliable as a rubber band. Her gyrations are comic to the last degree," written alongside a portrait of Baker.[25] Such descriptions would continue to appear in articles about Baker throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Shortly after her role in *Chocolate Dandies*, Baker was hired to perform in Paris as part of *La Revue Nègre*, an all-Black, traveling theatrical troupe created to capitalize on the popularity of jazz and African

[23] Both Sharpley-Whiting, as well as Samantha Pinto, trace the Black Venus narrative to the reception of the tours and public displays of Sarah Baartman/Bartmann, a South African woman whose body became the object of white fascination during and after her life when she toured Europe from 1810 until her death in 1815. Baartman was known as the "Hottentot Venus" as well as the "Black Venus" and constituted a formative image of Black sexuality and femininity in the white European imagination through the 21st century.

[24] Josephine Baker and Jo Bouillon, *La Tribu arc-en-ciel* (Paris: Opera Mundi, 1957), quoted in Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* (Champaign, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 57.

[25] "A Chorus Girl Who Really Stood Out and Won Acclaim," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 13, 1925, 6.

art in France. Baker's appearances here, as well as in her time at the Folies Bergère, featured her in minimal clothing, usually with bare breasts and coverings such as a fur belt or a skirt made of bananas, invoking "the primitive, non-Western 'other' as a point of reference and a source of fantasy."[26] Baker performed as a modern African American woman playing a primitive, savage African girl in ways that both thrilled and disturbed the male journalists who covered her life and work for Black newspapers. This tension would pervade nearly all the journalistic attention devoted to her.

[26] Jules-Rosette, 49.

Baker as "Modern Cinderella" and Harlem Countess

The success of Baker in France, and later in her European tours, was initially seized upon by Black journalists as examples of the relative artistic freedoms available to Black artists in Europe. "Colored Artists Holding Sway and Being Treated Like Human Beings by the French," ran one subheading in the *New York Amsterdam News*, before continuing: "French craze for Negro entertainment shows no signs of abating…At the Folies Bergere, the best known of the music halls, the Negro dancer, Josephine Baker, continues to be the brightest of all the stars."[27] Another article, in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, declared that the popularity of white celebrities "has never even approached the height of acclaim given Josephine Baker and Florence Mills," noting that in London and Paris white women shopping in clothing stores asked for their "creamy brown silk stockings" in "the new Florence Mills shade" or "the new Josephine Baker shade."[28] While Baker was one of the most prominent Black performers to receive acclaim abroad, she should not be seen as a "distillation of Black creativity from this period [1920s] but as another artist within the transnational stage community," explains Jayna Brown, citing the careers of women such as Florence Mills, Adelaide Hall, and Valaida Snow, as well as men such as Paul Robeson, in creating a vibrant trans-Atlantic artistic circuit for Black stage performers.[29] The appearance of several Black performers, most notable among them Baker, in a benefit show for "sufferers of floods in England" was also positively reported upon, including a quote from a British writer about Baker's performance: "one of the most remarkable performances I have ever seen."[30] As seen by the comments on the shade of stockings, however, the appeal of Black

[27] "French Nation Carried Away by Entertainers in Paris Palaces," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 22, 1926, 7.
[28] "Shoppers Ask For 'Flo' Mills Shades," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 23, 1927, A16.
[29] Brown, 240.
[30] "London Taken by Storm by Our Own," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 22, 1928, 8.

performers to white audiences was often exoticized, and journalists frequently added descriptors of Baker's skin color to articles. One article describes her as "lithe brown" and a "former Harlem girl" who attained both marriage and fame in Paris[31]; a later article proclaims in the headline "Paris Likes Bronze Dancer in Beads" that Parisians, who crowned Baker "Queen of the Colonies," continued to enjoy her shows at the Casino de Paris where her "brown body, which is quite nude, save for a tiny triangle of rhinestones, seems almost perfect in its suppleness."[32] Baker's Blackness and sexuality, as will be seen later, were intertwined in her appeal for white European audiences; Black male journalists, as well as articles by white writers reprinted in Black newspapers, praised the alleged racial tolerance of Europe alongside language that objectified and fetishized the racial identities of Black women like Baker.

Despite the language used to describe Baker and her European fame, Black journalists continuously stressed themes of wealth, success, and racial uplift in Baker's career. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, articles mythologizing her rags-to-riches narrative as a modern Cinderella story appeared, particularly after her marriages to white European men. These articles, too, could be laced with condescending racial stereotypes, despite the race of both writers and their audience. One article attributed Baker's rapid rise to notoriety in Paris to her possession of "the great talisman, the rabbit's foot that conquered Paris," playing on the idea of Baker as superstitious and uneducated.[33] The *Chicago Defender* was one of several Black newspapers that chronicled Baker's life using fairy tale metaphors to romanticize the freedom and upward mobility possible in Europe; their introductory article in a series on her life described Baker as "the modern Cinderella" whose humble birth was "distinctly less promising" than Abraham

[31] "'Josie' Baker Weds Count," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 25, 1927, 1.
[32] "Paris Likes Bronze Dancer in Beads," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 28, 1931, 9.
[33] Carl de Vidal Hunt, "How an Up-to-Date Josephine Won Paris," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 12, 1927, 11.

Lincoln's log cabin birth, thus linking Baker's life with not just the fairy tale heroine but also the revered president.[34] These articles, usually replete with errors about Baker's early life (frequently inventing identities for her father, such as his alleged Spanish ancestry or career as a musician), emphasized her birth and difficult early life in St. Louis, her many years as a teenager striving for work in theater, and her time in musicals like *Chocolate Dandies,* before she finally achieved fame and enormous wealth in Paris.

Reports of Baker's success in Paris included owning her own cabaret, her years-long starring show at the Folies Bergère, European tours which drew both enormous crowds and controversy, and her apparent marriages to two white European men of (allegedly) high standing. Her relationship, later reported to be a marriage, with her manager Pepito di Albertini, was reported in the Black press as a genuine Cinderella story, with Albertini's rank upgraded to a wealthy Italian count and Baker as a countess. One article compared the possible marriage to that of white actresses Pola Negri and Gloria Swanson with titled European men.[35] Carrie Teresa characterizes the reaction towards the wedding, later revealed to be a publicity stunt, as a source of debate, as writers "wanted desperately to believe that Baker had become a countess—European royalty—as the ultimate proof that Europe was indeed more tolerant than the United States."[36] After skepticism sparked as to not just the marriage, but Albertini's career and aristocratic background, articles continued to defend Baker. One article included a supposed interview with Albertini's father who claimed, "We don't have any racial feeling over here or in Sicily. Besides, my daughter-in-law is no darker than many southern European women."[37]

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[34] "Joe Baker's Life Story Is Like Chapter of Fairy Tale," *Chicago Defender*, November 16, 1929, 7.
[35] "Josephine Baker, Stage Star, Becomes Countess," *Chicago Defender*, June 25, 1927, 1.
[36] Carrie Teresa, *Looking at the Stars: Black Celebrity Journalism in Jim Crow America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 125.
[37] "Count's Father Glad His Son Chose Josephine As Bride; Is Proud of Her," *Chicago Defender*, July 2, 1927, 1.

Another article dubbed Baker "The New Countess" whose illustrious marriage received no comments on race except on "the bride's talents, beauty and extraordinary success in Paris."[38] When the marriage was reported to be false, reporters criticized Baker for her deception; journalist J.A. Rogers reported that the entire event was created because "Miss Baker has been steadily losing vogue in Paris" and was desperate to hold the public's fascination.[39] While the event did hurt Baker's reputation temporarily, by the time of her real marriage to a French industrialist, Jean Lion, in 1937, journalists were once again eager to spin a fairy tale out of her wedding and continued fame abroad (despite Rogers' claims to the contrary.) The *Baltimore Afro-American*'s series repeated Baker's rise to fame, calling her not just a "Cinderella who wore only a bunch of bananas" but also "a Horatio Alger book come to life" and included photos detailing her career and tangible gains, such as her palatial mansion, glamorous clothing, and exotic pets.[40] The implication, once again, was that Baker attained the pinnacle of success for a Black woman, up to and including a wealthy husband who miscegenation laws would have barred to her in the United States. By relocating to Europe, Baker had surpassed what was deemed possible for Black women who lived and worked in America. With talent, beauty, and ambition, as well as the racial tolerance of Europe, Baker had, again and again, found her own fairy tale, and the Black press was eager to use her life as a model and example.

In 1936, Baker returned to New York to appear in the Ziegfeld Follies, a famous stage revue. In the previous decade, Baker had continually declined any offers to appear in stage shows in the United States, and her appearance as a featured performer in the Follies was

[38] "The New Countess," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 6, 1927, 20.
[39] J.A. Rogers, "Is Josephine Baker a Countess?," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 13, 1927, 1.
[40] "Ten Years Have Brought All The Things Women Strive For Save One To: A Cinderella Who Wore Only A Bunch Of Bananas," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 18, 1937, 11; "From Rags to Riches: Josephine Baker's Life History Is That Of Modern Cinderella," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 18, 1937, 5.

immediately seized on by the Black press. Charlene Regester notes that Baker received both praise and criticism from the press for her behavior, including hiring a white maid and performing with white men in her act. While journalists defended her hiring of a white maid as what Regester calls "a role reversal, rendering the white woman Other," they also believed she was "denying her Blackness by ingratiating herself with whites."[41] This ambivalent treatment from the Black press would continue throughout her stay in New York. The *Chicago Defender* disapprovingly noted the treatment Baker received from white performers, noting that when Baker attended a "swell Park Avenue party," she greeted actress Beatrice Lillie with a French accent while Lillie "returned the compliment in Negro dialect."[42] When rumors circulated that both Baker and Ethel Waters would be removed from their respective shows because of the complaints of white co-stars, journalists reported the rivalries as an effort to undermine Black talent on Broadway. While interviews with Baker and her white co-star, Jewish comedian Fanny Brice, led both women to deny any rivalry existed, the *New York Amsterdam News* reported that "Harlem observers feel that the increase in the number of Negro stars in mixed casts has resulted in a sinister attempt…to force Negro performers out of the spectacles—and, of course, out of the big money."[43]

The controversy generated by Baker's appearances with white male dancers, who kissed her body on stage, as well as the lukewarm-to-negative reviews she received from white theatrical critics, led to her decision to leave the Follies and return to Paris permanently. Journalist Roi Ottley defended Baker's behavior, castigating Harlem for dismissing her for

[41] Charlene B. Regester, "The Construction of an Image and the Deconstruction of a Star—Josephine Baker Racialized, Sexualized, and Politicized in the African-American Press, the Mainstream Press, and FBI Files," *Popular Music and Society* vol. 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 53-54.
[42] Floyd J. Calvin, "Back Stage Jealousy Hits Race Stars," *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1936, 8.
[43] "Now, What's the Rub in the Broadway Snub? Move to Force Negroes Out of Big Broadway Hits Seen in Rivalry in Mixed Casts," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 15, 1936, 8.

acting "white" when "Josephine is not trying to be white; she is merely attempting to live a normal life and prejudiced whites are trying to keep her from doing so." He also characterized her as "not merely a Negro artist, but an actress in any language or color," and stated "We should make her insults our insults…her discriminations and humiliations ours…Josephine Baker's problems are our problems."[44] For Baker, however, such shows of journalistic support were not enough. In an interview given to a London newspaper after leaving New York (and subsequently reprinted in the *New York Amsterdam News*), Baker named racial discrimination and a rejection by even Black audiences as her reasons for leaving the country: "I was not wanted either by New York or Harlem, by Black or white. What had I done to merit such treatment?"[45] Baker's time in New York demonstrated that, while the Black press may have had its own difficult relationship with her performances and behavior, it did not cease to use Baker's success in order to create critical narratives about the treatment of Black performers by white audiences and white peers, as well as the lack of creative freedom and economic opportunities available to Black artists in the United States when compared to Europe.

[44] Roi Ottley, "Hectic Harlem: Because She Is a Negro," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 28, 1936, 13.
[45] "America 'Cold' To Miss Baker," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 20, 1936, 19.

Baker as Black Venus and "Brown Beauty"

The Black female performer of the 1920s, as Jayna Brown describes her, "embodied the pleasurable mobilities of the modern age."[46] Josephine Baker entered, and later came to represent, a theatrical world where the bodies of Black women symbolized both modernity and primitivism, of the upwardly mobile "New Negroes" who lived in growing urban spaces as well as the beautiful "native" African girl who performed Black sexuality for white audiences. Baker's own theatrical shows, which featured her in costumes such as a banana skirt or artfully-applied rhinestones, as well as her movies, where she usually played a mixed-race "native" girl who falls in love with a white man, reinforced and also subverted stereotypes of Black femininity and female sexuality. In the Black press, such performances could be exciting, titillating, or damning, and Baker was both praised and excoriated for her performances, her appearance, and her personal life. In addition, Baker joined a cohort of other Black female performers who similarly faced challenges of presenting Blackness and femininity to white audiences, and who were often compared to Baker herself; these women included fellow former chorus girls such as Florence Mills, Adelaide Hall, Valaida Snow, and Ethel Waters. To many in the 1920s, these women, as well as the many other Black chorus girls, dancers, singers, and actresses who sometimes performed alongside them, "were important figures of hopeful migratory movement, urban ebullience, and promise. Moving in sinuous unstoppable unison, Black chorus girls' agile mobility became the triumphant and pleasure-filled affirmation of opportunities gained."[47] In the Black press, Baker was interpreted as one of the most visible and significant Black performers of the 1920s and 1930s. Her expressions or refusal of gender norms, her sexuality, and the contrast

[46] Brown, 190.
[47] Brown, 191.

between her and fellow female performers, all became pivots on which conceptions of the gender and sexuality of Black women in public spaces were debated and interrogated.

From the beginning of her career in France, Baker's performances encountered a range of reactions in the Black press, almost always from male journalists. Reprintings of stories from other newspapers was not uncommon in the Black press, even if such stories were from white newspapers. A reprint of an article by E.E. Cummings describes her as a "tall, vital, incomparably fluid nightmare…It may seem preposterous that this terrifying nightmare should have become the most beautiful (and beautiful is what we mean) of the Parisian stage. Yet such is the case," while the *Baltimore Afro-American* commented that "Mr. Cummings describes Miss Baker's 'get up' as consisting of 'a few bananas and not too much jewelry."[48] Baker's beauty (or occasionally lack thereof), her scanty costumes, and her dancing styles were most frequently the subject of articles about her performances. Another article in the *Baltimore Afro-American* from 1927 grouped Baker's Folies Bergère show in with other "sex plays" and nude or nearly-nude shows found in Montmartre in Paris. The writer lists "Josephine Baker, dressed in two tiny tufts of red and yellow feathers, back and front"—an outfit which "took the place of three or four bananas, which looked as if they would fall off any moment"—alongside other attractions like "a Black girl of such matchless figure and bust (what I really mean to say is, breasts) that the audience applauds when she appears" in the Casino de Paris and female performers at "the Folies-Bergere, the Moulin Rouge, and the Casino de Paris" where "scores of ladies throng their stages, some with figures eclipsing that of the Venus de Milo, and almost eclipsing in the matter of clothing or lack of it."[49] The article ultimately makes the point that the repression of open sexuality in New York entertainment, in contrast to the freedom of Paris (which not only

[48] "Josephine Baker Hit In Paris," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 4, 1926, 3.
[49] "Paris Music Hall Girls Dance Nude," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 23, 1927, A8.

includes more-provocative shows but also features many more Black performers in them), has stagnated one city and led to a flourishing of culture in the other. The connection between Black femininity and sexuality is again reinforced by his comment that, "Imagine in the Congo, where the women go nude, some Congo [Florenz] Ziegfeld, putting on a nude show," with the implication that nudity is omnipresent and therefore too commonplace for entertainment in the Congo.[50] In a 1928 article on Baker's memoirs (which were actually written by a French male journalist), sensational details about Baker's life, such as her instructions to "sleep stark naked" to aid beauty, rested alongside descriptions of her appeal to France, who admire her for "her exoticness" and "bronze beauty." Author James W. Ivy writes that Baker has "magnificent pear-shaped breasts" which French papers "are always talking about," and insinuates that Baker's talents are confined to her nudity: "No competent judge of Terpsichore has ever called her a dancer."[51] This kind of reporting, combining sexualization of Baker and her performances with a disdain for her as a legitimate performer, continued to appear in further articles about her. In this environment, Baker's performances, where she performed a *danse sauvage* and portrayed African women as wild, untamed, and naked, were often interpreted by male journalists as representing a kind of sexual freedom unique to Black women, instead of the artistic decisions of a Black artist and performer expressing complicated attitudes towards Black femininity and sexuality. Baker's performances, which existed as a response to and playful subversion of the Black Venus narrative, symbolized to male journalists that exact narrative, which they then articulated in their coverage of her.

In contrast to their depictions of Europe as more equitable and racially-tolerant than the United States when it came to Black artists, Black newspapers frequently reported on the

[50] Ibid.
[51] James W. Ivy, "Sleep Naked is 'Jo' Baker's Beauty Secret," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 14, 1928, 9.

negative reaction to Baker's stage performances from conservative forces in Europe and other international cities. By both defending Baker against accusations her performances were immoral and offensive because of their nudity, and indulging in the same sexualization that foreign critics did when condemning her, the Black press again exposed their ambivalent attitudes towards Baker's displays of gender and sexuality. While within France Baker's performances as the "sexualized savage" could symbolize "freedom and experimentation for the French artistic avant-garde," according to Jules-Rosette, not every audience outside Paris saw her as artistically important but instead as "primitivism to be feared by the West."[52] Baker's tours of Europe, and later non-European countries like Argentina, in 1928 and 1929 were frequently met with both riotous approval by crowds and protests by conservative forces at her public appearances, as well as in governmental bodies. In Vienna, a leader of the Clerical Party (possibly related to the Christian Social Party, a nationalist right-wing party) protested her appearances in the Austrian National Parliament, claiming "her dances are devoid of any real art" and that it was "scandalous that we are asked to pay 100,000 shillings to see nudity"; the article ended with a sarcastic reply by the leading Social Democrats, who defended Baker against the claims.[53] However, another article from the same day reported that Baker had departed Vienna for Berlin after Austrian authorities refused to let her perform; the article quotes a French journalist, who reports that the authorities decided "the black peril must be fought" (he qualifies this peril as "really coffee and milk," again focusing on Baker's skin color) and that censors told Baker "Hide those breasts that we cannot bear to look at."[54] An identical article from the *Baltimore Afro-American* a few days later gave it the subheading "Paris Paper Says Censors Barred Most Celebrated Legs in Paris,"

[52] Jules-Rosette, 129.
[53] "Josephine Baker Becomes Parliamentary Subject," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 29, 1928, 1.
[54] "Josephine Baker Reported In Berlin After Being Barred," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 29, 1928, 8.

emphasizing Baker's body as the focal point of her shows just as European censors and politicians did the same.[55] Over a year later, Baker's appearance in Buenos Aires led to outcries in Argentina, with similar responses from the Black press. The *Baltimore Afro-American* reported that the president of Argentina was "horrified by the reports of her nudity" and ordered Baker "to wear more clothes when appearing in the country"; the article describes Baker herself as a "wriggle dancer of Harlem" whose "unadorned figure has caused more trouble in Europe than boundary disputes in the last few years" and whose South American tour commenced only after "being barred from nearly every Amusement Center in Europe."[56] While sympathetic to the discrimination Baker encountered on her tours (and aware that much of it was rooted in racism rather than merely prudishness at her nudity), the Black press continued to repeat the same objectifying and sexualizing rhetoric that met Baker herself in Vienna and Buenos Aires, unable to see her as an artist more than a nude figure of brazen sexuality.

Discussions of Baker's public displays of Black femininity and sexuality also coincided with debates within Black audiences about her success in comparison to that of contemporary Black female performers. In her article on Florence Mills, Zakiya R. Adair dubs Mills a "respectable vamp" who was "forgiven for her less-than-respectable performances because of her international success and her outspoken commitments to racial equality."[57] Such consideration was not always extended to Baker. In fact, Mills, and other women such as Adelaide Hall, were often used as the respectable, talented rival to Baker, who was characterized as successful less for her talent and more for her willingness to perform nude and play the

[55] "Austria Feared Jo Baker's Nudity," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 3, 1928, 8.
[56] "Argentine Republic in Turmoil Over 'Jo' Baker," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 22, 1929, 8.
[57] Zakiya R. Adair, "Respectable Vamp: A Black Feminist Analysis of Florence Mills' Career in Early Vaudeville Theater," *Journal of African American Studies* vol. 17, no. 1 (March 2013): 10. Mills was noted for her commitment to financially supporting charities in Harlem, as well as donating her time to volunteering.

Jezebel. Such reviews of Baker were common in even flattering articles of the 1920s and 1930s.[58] In 1926, Baker received praise in contrast to Mills, which instead criticized Mills for a "wiggly dance" her white manager insisted she perform; Baker, by contrast, was approvingly noted because "at no time does she attempt a cooch [dance]."[59] Nonetheless, the manufactured rivalry between the two women was established before Mills' untimely death at age 32 in 1927. In 1928 it was reported that Baker was contacted about starring in the 1929 edition of *Blackbirds*, an all-Black revue which had previously starred Mills. *Blackbirds* manager Lew Leslie (the white manager who was criticized for Mills' dance in 1926), however, expressed reservations over Baker's ability to lead the show, with the article claiming that "Having won acclaim abroad because of her sensational dances and scanty costumes, there is no assurance of a similar ovation being given her here, he [Leslie] believes."[60] In 1930, Ralph Matthews of the *Baltimore Afro-American* praised Black producers and performers for bucking a trend in white theater to rely on "sex appeal alone"; he wrote, however, that Baker represented just such a performer, "who…was carried to her lofty plane by a pair of shapely limbs, a lack of modesty, and a knowledge of how to display other parts of her svelte lissom figure" and who succeeded in Paris because "[Paris] prefers eye appeal to ear, brain, or heart." Unlike Baker, Matthews notes, Mills "is remembered for her modesty, which almost approached the puritanical, both on and off the stage."[61]

[58] Criticisms of Baker's talent were not limited to contemporaries: in historian Thomas Cripps' pioneering survey of Black representation on film, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), he refers to Baker as "Long on "star quality" and short on talent…Negro Americans were proud of her reputation but found her films hard to take" (211.)
[59] "Miss Baker Is Keen Rival Of Miss Mills," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 18, 1926, 6.
[60] "Slates 'Jo' Baker For 'Blackbirds'," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 9, 1928, 9.
[61] Ralph Matthews, "Sex Appeal Not Needed to Be a Stage Success," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 27, 1930, A8.

After Mills' death, the Madonna to Baker's Whore—a comparison Carrie Teresa makes in her analysis of competing media coverage of the two women[62]—moved to upcoming stars such as Adelaide Hall and Ruth Bayton. In 1928, Bayton, a former chorus girl like Baker who was now appearing in a music hall in Paris, was reported by J.A. Rogers to "dance much better than Miss Baker" who was in fact "a very poor dancer" whose "shapely body" helped her achieve fame; by contrast, the talented but beautiful Bayton is said to be supplanting Baker with her "Tall, gracefully, aye, voluptuously, built [body]…and with a face as beautiful to match, all of a soft brownness that makes it difficult for us to keep from waxing poetic."[63] In 1929, Adelaide Hall became Baker's rival in the Black press, as journalists—particularly Rogers—reported favorably on Hall in direct contrast to what was seen as Baker's waning vogue and loss of novelty. When the 1929 *Blackbirds* was performed, without Baker in a role, the *New York Amsterdam News* listed Hall amongst its cast with the remark "new Josephine Baker, with more talent."[64] When *Blackbirds* played in Paris, coverage once more focused on comparisons between Hall and Baker. Rogers, again writing for the *Amsterdam News*, described Baker's success as coming at a time when "the Negro dancer was still a novelty in Paris and her wild primitiveness, her sparkling good nature, and her supple, superb body flashing nude swept her into fame." By contrast, to Rogers, Hall is "vivacious, fascinating, very good-natured and unaffected—the sign of the real artist she is" and Baker "as a dancer or an artist…simply cannot be mentioned in the same breath with Adelaide Hall."[65] In a separate article on the reception to *Blackbirds* among French critics, Rogers reported on a French writer who described Baker's

[62] Teresa, 121-129.
[63] J.A. Rogers, "Rogers, Our European Correspondent, Waxes Enthusiastic Over Ruth Bayton," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 2, 1928, 6.
[64] "'Blackbirds' Have Flown," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 3, 1929, 12.
[65] J.A. Rogers, "The 'Blackbirds' Hold Their Own," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 31, 1929, 12.

"nude naivette and her primitive seductiveness, and which later brought her excessive success," while Rogers noted appreciatively that, unlike other Parisian shows which demand their dancers dressed "rather a la Congo," *Blackbirds* did not allow its stars to perform nude or nearly-nude.[66] The association of primitiveness, nudity, and uninhibited, "native" sexuality with Baker provides grounds for dismissal of her talents and her success—and provided male journalists a Jezebel who, in contrast to the talents of other women such as Mills, Bayton, and Hall, must rely on her overt sexuality to achieve fame. While the Black press was willing to support Baker, and use her as an example of the modern Black woman and her accomplishments, they were unwilling to fully support her performances of gender and sexuality, and instead sought out women who conformed more carefully to modes of proper femininity and sexuality to use as womanly role models.

In the 1930s, reflections on Baker's career as she broadened her performing style, began appearing on film, and distanced herself from her earlier appearances, reiterated many of the same discourses on her sexuality. In 1937, the newly-married Baker was profiled by William N. Jones in the *Baltimore Afro-American* about her recent appearances on stage in New York and London. Jones mentioned that Americans "turned somewhat of a cold shoulder to Josephine's stage love-scenes with white males," and that her recent show in London was also coolly-received, despite Baker "donn[ing] the famous banana costume," as "the less Josephine wears the more divine she is."[67] As Baker began adopting sophisticated, luxurious gowns and other fashion in her shows, critics sometimes complained about her dropping costumes such as the banana skirt from her performances. While paying compliments to her shows and noting

[66] J.A. Rogers, 'Rogers Tells of "Blackbirds'," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 10, 1929, 13.
[67] William N. Jones, "Josephine Baker Is Sensitive To Public Sentiment, Editor Finds," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 25, 1937, 11.

improvements in her singing and dancing, male journalists began to seriously accept her artistic credibility even as they continued to sexualize her in print, and desired a return to her earlier performances as the Black Venus. In response to the popularity of white burlesque dancers in Broadway productions, the *New York Amsterdam News* pointed to Baker as the origin of the craze, as a "voluptuous sepia charmer" who "dance[d] with a banana and a ham-sandwich [and] is credited paving the way for our current shake dance and strip tease stars."[68] In December 1939, Baker opened a new show at the Casino de Paris, where she wore a "cloud of white lace" with "immense diamond earrings and her hair is in large lustrous rolled curls." The writer, however, preferred the ""first" Josephine": "Many of us now prefer her in those new legendary gold banana leaves and wild dances."[69] Even though the article also mentioned that her show included colonial themes, staying close to the themes of her earliest performances, the change in Baker's stage persona, away from the overt sexuality that characterized her in the 1920s and early 1930s, continued to garner mixed reactions from the Black press.

However, this change did not end criticism aimed at Baker's displays of Black femininity and sexuality. In 1938, one of the few female writers to comment on Baker, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, contributed a negative article to the *Baltimore Afro-American*. Brown, an educator and president of the Palmer Memorial Institute, a school for Black students, was responding to another article by Lillian Johnson which claimed Brown expressed dismay at watching Baker dance nude beside clothed white female dancers. While Brown concedes that Baker's body is "an object of beauty perfectly formed," she expresses her displeasure that "had she [Baker] been a white woman of the same form and beauty she might not have appeared so attractive" and that Brown hoped "that colored girls will think twice before giving nude dancing orgies in Harlem

[68] First Nighter, "Hip-Tossers Take Spotlight on Broadway," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 2, 1939, 17.
[69] "Jo Baker in Revue," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 30, 1939, 12.

night clubs."[70] Once again, the contradictions in Baker's reception emerges in the Black press. While Baker's success is undeniable to journalists, the manner of her success troubles them. Her dancing and her style of costume (or lack of costume) on stage appears, to the Black press, to support stereotypes of Black women as the Jezebel, as an unwholesome model for young Black women to emulate. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the tension between the praise Baker received, the criticism she endured, and the objectification she was subjected to demonstrated the same divisions within modernity, as Black audiences debated and argued the same questions of race, gender, sexuality, and success in their own lives.

Josephine Baker's representations within the Black press reflect the ambiguities that troubled the coverage of Black women in the public sphere. Baker, who became a successful stage performer in France based off her daring dancing and singing, which played against conventional notions of Black femininity and sexuality, was interpreted by mainly male journalists through both her Blackness—her life as a story of uplift and triumph, the racial discrimination she encountered while in the United States as well as Europe—and her gender—her performance of Black womanhood, on- and off-stage. Baker's life and career allowed reporters to create claims, such as the glorification of a racially tolerant Europe and the condemnation of the rigid discrimination that faced Black entertainers in the United States, which served political ends. As well, Baker's sexuality—her frequent on-stage nudity, her romances with white men—made her the target of sexualization within the press, and earned censure from journalists who regarded her as a degrading image of the modern Black woman. Through the representations of Baker in the Black press, discourses about race, gender, and

[70] Charlotte Hawkins Brown, "I Hope Our Girls Won't Dance," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 12, 1938, 9.

sexuality were articulated for predominantly urban Black audiences, enforcing and reinforcing the correct ideals for Black women in the early 20th century.

CHAPTER 3: High-Hat Hattie: Hattie McDaniel in the Black Press

Unlike Josephine Baker, who was part of a cohort of Black theatrical performers who came to prominence in the 1920s, Hattie McDaniel represented the participation of Black actors in the American film industry during the 1930s and 1940s. Black representation in Hollywood, on- and off-screen, was relatively minimal before the end of the silent era in the late 1920s, when the arrival of sound film led to an increase in Black roles on film as well as, briefly, a series of all-Black musicals.[71] McDaniel, along with peers such as Paul Robeson, Clarence Muse, Louise Beavers, and others, attained a level of recognition among film audiences, Black or white, that was impossible during the 1910s or 1920s, albeit in small roles as servants, slaves, or comedic relief. The films that these performers appeared in represent, according to film historian Donald Bogle, the "blackface fixation," where Black actors "present for mass consumption black life as seen through the eyes of white artists."[72] These stereotyped roles, the lack of leading or major supporting parts for Black actors, and the lack of Black artists behind the camera created debates within the Black press: how important were the gains of Black actors? Were the financial rewards these actors reaped a model of success for other Black artists—or shallow prizes for demeaning themselves, and all African Americans, for the pleasure of white audiences? McDaniel, who throughout the late 1930s and into the 1940s became one of the most successful and visible Black actresses in film, was a subject of both praise and scorn in the Black press. Representations of McDaniel within the Black press, as with Baker, interpret her along two different axes: one, her performance of Blackness on film as well as in her personal life,

[71] Both Donald Bogle, in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*, and Thomas Cripps agree that 1927 onwards marks an increase in Black presence in mainstream American film, as opposed to the near-invisibility of Black actors in silent films aside from "race" films made by independent Black film producers for Black audiences.

[72] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 27.

particularly focused on her role as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), her Academy Award win, and her involvement with Black organizations; and second, her visibility as a successful Black woman, especially regarding her physical appearance, her personal life (marriage and motherhood), and how contrast to other Black actresses such as Lena Horne shaped her reception among Black audiences. As will be seen, these two strains of coverage on McDaniel were not completely separate: her performance of Blackness informed her performance of womanhood and sexuality, and vice versa.

Just as Josephine Baker's stage performances and representations within press coverage conformed to the Jezebel stereotype, McDaniel was aligned with what Deborah Gray White refers to as the other major stereotype of enslaved Black women: the mammy. It is not coincidental that McDaniel's most famous and acclaimed role was literally called Mammy, and enacted the many characteristics supposedly attributed to the "real" mammies of antebellum, slaveholding American society. As White explains, the mammy was a figure of post-Civil War memoirs of former slaveholders, who created a woman who was "completely dedicated to the white family, especially to the children of the family. She was the house servant who was given complete charge of domestic management. She served also as friend and advisor…in short, [a] surrogate mistress and mother."[73] Beyond this, the mammy was typically characterized as middle-aged or older, sexless and maternal, unlike the beautiful but promiscuous Jezebel. Both stereotypes explained the sexual and physical abuse experienced by enslaved women from white men and women, the Jezebel by justifying it, the mammy by offering a rebuttal. Moving from the memoirs and literature of former slaveowners, the mammy became a much more recognizable figure on film than the Jezebel, and McDaniel, whose age and appearance was seen by

[73] White, 49.

Hollywood casting directors and producers as suitable for such roles, was one of the most notable performers of the mammy in film. As biographer Jill Watts explains, Hollywood cast Black actors for "types," favoring actors with darker complexions and "large women" for maid and mammy roles, which allowed McDaniel, whose dark skin and "generous figure" fit such a "type," to be easily cast in films of the 1930s and 1940s.[74] Before *Gone with the Wind* associated McDaniel with the character of Mammy, the mythical creation of white slaveholders had already become associated with her as an actor and public figure.

[74] Jill Watts, *Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 83.

McDaniel as Mammy and Best Supporting Actress

Hattie McDaniel was born in 1893 in Wichita, Kansas, to parents who had been formerly enslaved; her father, Henry McDaniel, was a Civil War veteran. At the age of five, McDaniel's family moved to Denver, Colorado, where she lived until adulthood. McDaniel performed on stage and worked as a blues singer during the 1910s and 1920s, before moving to California in 1931 to begin working in film. She joined siblings Sam and Etta McDaniel in Los Angeles, and all three would work as actors. It would be several years until the Black press took notice of McDaniel's work, as she competed with actresses such as Louise Beavers for the limited roles available to Black women. While Carrie Teresa argues that McDaniel, and other Black actors, were superseded in media coverage by other Black celebrities such as Joe Louis during the 1930s, McDaniel received notices throughout the late 1930s and became an increasingly prominent entertainment figure after 1939, during the production and release of *Gone with the Wind*.[75]

McDaniel's appearance in *Judge Priest*, a 1934 comedy starring Will Rogers and directed by John Ford, earned her one of her earliest notices in the *Baltimore Afro-American*. The film, set in a post-Reconstruction Kentucky, also co-starred Stepin Fetchit, the Black comedian who, like McDaniel later in her career, was accused of performing demeaning, stereotypical roles to boost his career at the expense of ordinary Black Americans. Watts refers to this film as McDaniel's "first real professional recognition within white Hollywood," but the Black press took notice of her performance as well.[76] In language that would continue to fill articles on

[75] Teresa, 136. Teresa's specific claim—"Her [McDaniel's] achievement received little press; only a handful of newspapers covered the win, and even fewer treated it as front-page material"—cannot be fully refuted considering the small scope of this paper; however, as will be seen, the coverage of McDaniel's Oscar winner and subsequent career in the newspapers surveyed here was not miniscule nor insignificant.
[76] Watts, 103.

McDaniel, journalist Bernice Patton described the actress as "glittering on the horizon of cinema stardom" who is also a "typical Southern type." Emphasizing McDaniel's appearance as "the buxom comedienne" and later as "Although Hattie is large, she is a very fashionable dresser," Patton stresses her southern heritage—"the artist's parents are natives of the deep South"—and quotes McDaniel as saying, "'I think colored 'mammies' have been great characters in the life of early America…when I saw sweet little Shirley Temple on the screen, I longed to play a mammy part with her.'"[77] (McDaniel's next film, *The Little Colonel*, starred Temple.) Later that year, production of a film adaptation of the Broadway musical *Show Boat* caused speculation as to the casting of the role of Queenie, alongside Paul Robeson. Joan Jackson in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, calling the character "lovable" and "portly," claims McDaniel, misspelled as "McDaniels," is in competition with actress Ada Brown for the coveted spot; she also writes that McDaniel "has been getting more and more of the parts which formerly kept Louise Beavers busy," as a result of the other actress's increase in pay.[78] The success of *Show Boat* earned much acclaim for Robeson, but McDaniel benefited as well. The *Chicago Defender* praised the film, particularly the work of Robeson and McDaniel, and once again emphasized not just McDaniel's talent, but her appearance and apparent suitability to playing a mammy: "Hattie McDaniel is representative of the 'mammy' cook of several generations ago, and in portions of the South, still existent. Buxom and genial, faithful, trustworth [sic] and bossy. She is always admirably cast and does well with any role, large or small."[79] Appearances such as those in *Judge Priest* and *Show Boat*, as well as small turns in films such as *China Seas* (1935) and *Saratoga* (1937) (with Jean Harlow and Clark Gable) and *Alice Adams* (1935) (with Katharine Hepburn), helped raise

[77] Bernice Patton, "Hollywood Tintype: Hattie McDaniel," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 26, 1935, 8.
[78] Joan Jackson, "Role of Queenie in Film 'Show Boat' Dangling," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 28, 1935, 8.
[79] Tommy Berry, "Paul Robeson Makes Film 'Showboat' One of Finest," *Chicago Defender*, August 8, 1936, 18.

McDaniel's profile as an actress and arguably cemented her as one of the most successful Black actors in Hollywood. In recognition of such success, the *Baltimore Afro-American* named her as one of their "Women of the Year" for 1936, featuring a photograph of McDaniel in costume as Queenie alongside their other winners, including fellow actresses Etta Moten and Lena Horne, two Olympic athletes named to the American team at the 1936 Olympics, and the wives of Jesse Owens and Joe Louis.[80] McDaniel's appearances within the Black press, while often clouded by comments on her weight and hinging on her ability to perform mammy or maid roles, signaled an acceptance by Black audiences and journalists, which would become crucial as the production of *Gone with the Wind* created controversy over her role and its portrayal of Black characters.

From the beginning of its production, *Gone with the Wind* proved troubling to the Black press, as its idyllic depiction of antebellum southern plantation life rent asunder by the Civil War once more relied on stereotypes of Black life under slavery which paid little resemblance to historical reality. Charlene Regester refers to *Gone with the Wind*, along with the 1927 adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), as "an extremely vicious attack on African American personhood," which, like *Imitation of Life* (1934), received a mixed response which alternatively praised and harshly criticized the actors involved for the "images their characters projected."[81] The film, based on a best-selling novel by Margaret Mitchell, a white southern woman, was scrutinized intensely by the Black press, particularly in its search for actors to play the roles of Black characters such as Mammy, Prissy, Pork, and Sam. Producer David O. Selznick launched a nationwide talent search for many of the major roles, most notably

[80] "Women of the Year," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 2, 1937, 2.

[81] Charlene B. Regester, *African American Actresses: The Struggle for Visibility, 1900-1960* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 131. *Imitation of Life*, featuring Louise Beavers and Fredi Washington as a Black mother and daughter, deals with issues of "passing" between a dark-skinned mother and light-skinned daughter. It was criticized in the Black press, and by Washington herself, as a white fantasy about the lives of Black women.

lead Scarlett O'Hara (eventually given to British actress Vivien Leigh) but Mammy as well, seeking "the perfect fit" for each character; while Watts describes it as "to some extent, a publicity stunt," the search for an actress to play Mammy was indeed a serious undertaking, not only by Selznick, but by various Black journalists and members of Black Hollywood.[82] Initially, while McDaniel was one actress floated as a potential pick for Mammy, her history of comedic roles was seen as weighing against her. Although McDaniel lobbied hard for the role, as late as December 1938 it was still unclear whether she would play Mammy; a successful screen test opposite Leigh helped secure her the part, and in January 1939 McDaniel was hired for the film and signed a potentially renewable contract with Selznick.[83] The *Baltimore Afro-American* reported that McDaniel had been selected "for the coveted role of 'Mammy' in the Margaret Mitchel [sic] sensational best-seller" over many other "sepia actresses," and that "studio officials insisted that the role be interpreted with dignity and earnestness as the mammy…is more than a servant."[84] In February, the *Chicago Defender* attacked not only the film, but the Black actors who were newly-cast in it as well, particularly based on early reports that the film would contain racial slurs. Earl J. Morris referred to the actors, including McDaniel, as "selfish Race motion picture actors who would sell their self-respect for a paltry few dollars," and commented that, "Race actors and actresses should vie for roles that will permit them to display dramatic ability and run the gamut of emotions instead of consistently seeking to portray grinning flunkeys and cotton pickers."[85] This divide—over whether to support the actors who took roles in films like *Gone with the Wind*, or castigate them for accepting such demeaning parts—would continue to

[82] Watts, 150-151.
[83] Watts, 152.
[84] "'Gone with Wind' Role to Miss McDaniel," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 21, 1939, 10.
[85] Earl J. Morris, "Race Actors Flayed For 'Gone With The Wind' Parts," *Chicago Defender*, February 11, 1939, 19.

follow McDaniel in particular, as she became one of the most notable members of the cast and, therefore, one of the most notable Black actors in film.

As production proceeded on *Gone with the Wind*, McDaniel took to the pages of the Black press to explain and justify her decision to not only accept, but embrace, the role of Mammy. Miriam J. Petty refers to this attempt by McDaniel to control the discourse around her character as McDaniel trying to "reimagine the character along ideological lines that reflected notions of respectability as articulated by African American church- and clubwomen who wanted to claim autonomy over their own lives and public images."[86] By articulating her defense in such a manner, McDaniel appealed to the Black press along historical grounds—emphasizing her descent from hard-working enslaved women, and her fondness for Black artists such as poet Paul Laurence Dunbar—and on grounds of racial uplift, imploring the newspapers to support her work and dedication to creating a space for Black performers in Hollywood. At least initially, such overtures were accepted. In March 1939, the *New York Amsterdam News* linked McDaniel with her grandmother, who it claimed "lived and worked on such plantations as the Tara described in Margaret Mitchell's best-seller novel of the Civil War South. She might well have been of the kindly, fiercely possessive type whose loyalty to her white mistress never wavered. She would be proud, were she alive today, to see her grand-daughter become the servant of 'quality folks' on the motion picture screen."[87] By tying McDaniel's performance on-screen of a "servant" to the real experiences of enslaved women before and during the Civil War, the newspaper—and McDaniel's own public relations campaign, controlled by her friend and manager Ruby Berkley Goodwin—attempted to justify not only the portrayal of Black characters in *Gone with the Wind*, but McDaniel's acquiescence to playing Mammy. Later in the article, the

[86] Petty, 29.
[87] "Hard Work Brings Success to Hattie," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 18, 1939, 21.

author dwelled on McDaniel's appearance ("Her round, beaming face, her 290 pound bulk, her expressive eyes") and sketched a brief biographical picture of her life and career, concluding with her appreciation for the poetry of Dunbar and her pride at being a member of *Gone with the Wind*.[88]

Similar articles were released throughout 1939, defending McDaniel's career choices and *Gone with the Wind* itself. In one article subsequently reprinted in several Black newspapers (including the *Chicago Defender*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, and the *New York Amsterdam News*), McDaniel offers an extended argument supporting her decision to work in *Gone with the Wind*. "When I read the book 'Gone With the Wind,' I was fascinated by the role of 'Mammy,' and like everyone in a position to give it professional consideration, I naturally felt I could create in it something distinctive and unique," McDaniel claimed, before continuing by stressing that her wish to play the role was not motivated by crass financial need (as insinuated by Earl J. Morris): "My desire for the part wasn't entirely inspired by selfishness, however, as during 1938 I had my share of good roles." McDaniel expressed her visualization of her performance in the role—"sticking my finger in every pie cooked on Tara plantation"—and later explains that she was considered "a 'natural' for the part—like Mr. Clark Gable for the role of Rhett Butler," drawing comparisons between her work and the publicized casting for Mammy with that of her white co-stars. Finally, McDaniel makes the plea that her performance of Mammy "is an opportunity to glorify Race womanhood," but of the past, not the present or future, of Black women: "Not the modern, streamlined type of Race woman, who attends teas and concerts in furs and silks, but the type of woman of the period that gave us Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Charity Still. The brave, efficient type of womanhood which, building a race,

[88] Ibid.

mothered Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Robert Moton and Mary McLeod Bethune."[89] When the film first premiered in December 1939, the favorable press McDaniel cultivated continued to follow her, as her performance received wide acclaim from the Black press. In the *Chicago Defender*, a report of McDaniel's performance claimed that critics who saw early previews "were unanimous in naming Hattie McDaniel's performance of outstanding merit" and "her ability as an actress would give the world a greater estimation of the Negro race"; the article then mentioned that despite McDaniel's absence from the official premiere in Atlanta (in reality, because of segregation which forbade McDaniel and the other Black members of the cast from appearing on equal terms with their white peers), "she was by no means forgotten."[90] As *Gone with the Wind* was released, McDaniel's appearances within the pages of Black newspapers ensured that criticisms of her work were, for the moment, muted, and that her performance and prominent position within the film were highlighted as significant moments of progress for Black artists.

As reviews for *Gone with the Wind* arrived in newspapers throughout early 1940, critics invariably mentioned McDaniel's performance in detail, despite their misgivings with the film itself. Dan Burley, in the *New York Amsterdam News*, harshly criticized the film, calling it "Sugar-coated in technicolored brilliance…anti-Negro propaganda" and referred to its racial politics as emblematic of contemporary racial discrimination: "When one sees 'Gone With The Wind' he understands more clearly…why the State of Alabama persists in holding in shackles the remnants of the nine Scottsboro Boys; and why the urge to don the white hood and robe of the Ku Klux Klan throbs in the breasts of Miss [Margaret] Mitchell's Gallant Knights of the Old South." While Burley is complimentary towards McDaniel, describing her performance as

[89] Hattie McDaniel, "'I Like Part In Play,' Says Coast Star," *Chicago Defender*, May 13, 1939, 21.
[90] "Hattie McDaniel Praised In 'Gone With Wind'," *Chicago Defender*, December 23, 1939, 8.

"brilliant" and "'steal[ing]' with consummate ease nearly every scene she is shown in," the other Black characters, such as Butterfly McQueen's Prissy, and the use of racial epithets, he decried as insults against Black Americans which ignores the accomplishments of figures such as Joe Louis, Marian Anderson, Booker T. Washington, and Jesse Owens.[91] The *Chicago Defender* was no less critical of the film, similarly seeing its use of Black talent as little compensation for the stereotypes and ideology promoted by both the book and film. Acutely aware of the international political atmosphere, the reviewer at the *Defender* condemns *Gone with the Wind* as "propaganda, pure propaganda, crude propaganda. It is anti-Negro propaganda of the most vicious character. It is un-American propaganda," and flatly compared the film's politics with fascism: "The black man is becoming in America the victim of a Hitlerian campaign of a savage nature."[92] No mention is made in this review of the work of any of the Black actors in the cast; however, the explicitly politicized review, with its open comparisons between anti-Black violence and the atrocities being committed by Nazi Germany, reflected one strand of reception amongst Black audiences towards the film, one which would grow ever more persistent towards McDaniel in particular. Not all critics felt so strongly about the film's potential for harm: Harry B. Webber, in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, argued that the film did not promote an anti-Black agenda, instead stating, "People of all races weep copiously in the huge audiences. And Hattie McDaniel makes as many weep as does Scarlett and the others."[93] With the film's enormous success opening the door for pointed commentary on Black actors in a white Hollywood, Jimmie Lunceford critiqued the opportunities available, referring to roles available for Black characters as "dull, stereotyped, and offer[ing] little opportunity for serious creative acting"; even for the

[91] Dan Burley, "'Gone With The Wind': Subtle Propaganda Of Anti Negro Film Told By Reviewer," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 6, 1940, 16.
[92] "'Gone With The Wind'," *Chicago Defender*, January 13, 1940, 14.
[93] Harry B. Webber, "'Gone with the Wind' Has Some Good Points," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 20, 1940, 13.

biggest stars, among them McDaniel, "there is none of the bizarre, spotlighted shenanigans that an adulatory, glamor-starved public expects of its white gods and goddesses. Their marriages and divorces, their likes and dislikes are not good copy for screen magazines. Their professional pride must be subordinated to prejudice."[94] Even as *Gone with the Wind* became a financial and critical hit with white audiences, and McDaniel's peers recognized her work in the form of a nomination for Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, Black journalists and audiences, were divided on the merits of the film—and of McDaniel's work in diversifying Hollywood.

McDaniel's nomination and subsequent win for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, as well her signing of a new contract with producer David O. Selznick, continued the divide between embracing or rejecting what her win meant for African Americans. For some journalists, the win was worthy of praise, and McDaniel's appearances in films like *Maryland* (1940), albeit as a Black cook in a comedic supporting role, heralded a continued Black presence in American film. For others, however, while not negligent, McDaniel's win signified that the predominantly-white film industry was willing to extend recognition only inasmuch as performers did not demand better pay or better roles. After all, some articles speculated, McDaniel won for a mammy role and continued to receive maid and mammy roles rather than the more complex, starring roles usually given to Oscar winners. After McDaniel's award win, in March 1940, Lillian Johnson of the *Baltimore Afro-American* wrote, "The fact that Miss McDaniel, of minority race, had won the honor over some very worthy representatives of another race was hailed as a symbol of American democracy and a blow at Hitlerism," before continuing by defending McDaniel's decision to play a mammy: "Truly, Miss McDaniel has found that sometimes one conquers by stooping or that one succeeds by yielding."[95] For Johnson,

[94] Jimmie Lunceford, "Behind the Movie 8-Ball," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 15, 1940, 20.
[95] Lillian Johnson, "A Woman Talks," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 9, 1940, 4.

McDaniel's win was so important in its symbolism that the fact she had won it for playing a much-criticized character was of no importance. Other articles stressed the win as a major accomplishment for a Black artist. Another *Afro-American* article described McDaniel as "ma[king] theater history…when she became the first person of her race to win one of the coveted Oscars" and as the "darling" of the banquet. Further, McDaniel had proved "it is possible to overcome barriers that seem insurmountable," particularly in light of winning over four white actresses, including her own co-star, Olivia de Havilland.[96] Another congratulatory article appeared in the *New York Amsterdam News*, which showcased a photo of McDaniel reading the announcement of her win in the same newspaper, along with a caption mentioning she "regularly" received the paper despite living in Los Angeles. Within the article, Oscar A. Doob, an employee of Loew's theater chain who worked to book *Gone with the Wind* in Harlem theaters, called McDaniel's win a representation of "how liberal and broad-minded the American people are becoming toward one another in these trying times when races, religions and political beliefs are being lined up against each other," and that, "Ten years ago no one would have dared to think about giving a colored person such a high honor. Today—it's a matter of merit and merit alone." Doob also dismissed criticism of the film, claiming that, "The picture treats both races on an equal plane…I'm really glad that 'Gone With the Wind' is coming to Harlem. The people up there will get a chance to judge for themselves just what the picture is about and…nine out of every ten who go to the Victoria [theater] will come away raving."[97]

The photos which were used of McDaniel to illustrate her nomination and win also bolstered the narrative that her win was significant and largely embraced by Black audiences. Prior to her win, the *Baltimore Afro-American* ran a photo of her in-character as Mammy with

[96] "Actress Called 'Darling' of Motion Picture Arts Banquet," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 9, 1940, 14.
[97] "McDaniel Award Shows Temper of Modern Times," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 23, 1940, 20.

the heading "Best of the Year: She's on the Ballot." Beneath the image of McDaniel in period costume looking stern (an image which cropped out her proximity to Vivien Leigh in the same scene from the film), the caption described McDaniel's nomination as "the first time that a member of her race has ever been mentioned for such an honor."[98] A week later, following her win, another photo of McDaniel appeared in the same newspaper, this time with the heading "Best Supporting Actress." In this image, McDaniel appears as herself, smiling in modern clothing while she points to her statue beside her.[99] While this caption makes no mention of the symbolic importance of her win, the contrast between the two images created its own narrative. When simply a nominee, the monumental nature of her nomination is stressed, and she is depicted as Mammy, highly-recognizable and in-character from a scene from the film. After the win is secured, the newspaper instead drops the costumes and allows McDaniel to appear as herself, a confident, modern woman who poses proudly with her award; no emphasis beyond stating the fact of her win is necessary for readers to understand the value of it beyond the photo. In one way, the superseding of the "real" McDaniel over the fictional Mammy she played allows for what Charlene Regester calls her "transformation of the subservient (subordinate, dehumanized, and devalued) into the dominant (defiant and directing)" to reenact itself within the pages of the newspaper.[100] The *Chicago Defender* similarly printed a photo of McDaniel in April 1940, depicting her beside a giant telegram, wearing a modern dress and jewelry as she observes the telegram with a smile. The caption informed the reader that McDaniel received the telegram "signed by 5,000 fans" after meeting the "hearty approval of film lovers."[101] No longer confined to playing Mammy, appearances such as these within the Black press allowed

[98] "Best of the Year: She's on the Ballot," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 2, 1940, 14.
[99] "Best Supporting Actress," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 9, 1940, 14.
[100] Regester, *African-American Actresses*, 131.
[101] "A Telegram For Miss McDaniel," *Chicago Defender*, April 20, 1940, 20.

McDaniel to be presented as herself, and as an artist who was not only creating opportunities for other Black performers, but also receiving the overdue recognition owed to Black artists in the film industry.

However, the controversy over *Gone with the Wind* itself, and the attendant criticism it brought on McDaniel as its most prominent Black cast member, also colored other articles about McDaniel and her Oscar win and continuing film success. While such criticism would grow only more intense in the years afterwards, in 1940 not everyone who commented on McDaniel's career was laudatory. Sometimes this was through juxtaposition: in one *Baltimore Afro-American* article on *Gone with the Wind*'s reception in the United Kingdom, it noted that despite the presence of British actress Vivien Leigh, "it was not Miss Leigh, but Hattie McDaniel who got the plaudits of English critics."[102] Despite this, just beneath this short notice was another article on the premiere, which presented a very different picture of reception of McDaniel's performance by Black Britons and other people of color. This article mentioned that the "Colored People's Protective Association" was protesting screenings of the film because their members, including "Indians, Egyptians, and West Indians living in England," believed the film was harmful and "an 'insult to the colored community.'"[103] Journalist Ralph Matthews, in a column entitled "Why I Hate Hollywood," took direct aim at the representation of Black characters in film, opening with his assessment of McDaniel's performance as Mammy. While conceding her win was indeed notable— "Any person of color who is able to surmount the obstacles of race and enjoy even temporary fame and distinction in America's prejudice-ridden industries deserves all the credit he or she can get"—he was nonetheless highly critical of her performance, believing her win was symptomatic of white Hollywood's propensity for awarding

[102] "Hattie McDaniel, Not Leigh Get Plaudits of Britons," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 4, 1940, 13.
[103] Ibid.

Black actors who agreed to play stereotypical roles. "The white man exalts only those who please his fancy and fit into his own conception of what he would like us to be," Matthews wrote, continuing: "Miss McDaniel was given the Academy Award because she played well the role of Mammy…the role of Mammy cannot be played well for the simple reason that the more perfect the performance, the more deadly it is as propaganda against our escape from the slave psychology in which whites like to keep us."[104] Matthews's complaints are reminiscent of earlier criticisms that *Gone with the Wind* acted as anti-Black propaganda, but here advanced to include McDaniel's performance and Oscar win as well. To Matthews, and other Black critics, McDaniel's win could only symbolize how well a white film industry felt she performed the limited roles allowed for Black women, not as a broader statement on overcoming prejudice and stereotypes within Hollywood. In two columns from the *Baltimore Afro-American* in July and August 1940, journalist Clarence Toliver echoed some of Matthews's arguments and advanced his own cynicism about the meanings of McDaniel's success. In his July article, Toliver responded to a recent radio appearance of McDaniel, where she claimed that "'there's still room at the top'" for other Black actors, and reiterated her earlier defenses of Mammy as a tribute to older generations of enslaved Black women who became the mothers of notable Black leaders. "I am sorry my cynicism will not let accept all the star said about her success, her part in G.W.T.W. and the mothers of some of our leaders," Toliver acidly replied in print, before adding that McDaniel's role "gave Hollywood a chance to give the country, notably the South and its wandering sons and daughters, the idea of that 'place' we are supposed to have stay in."[105] The following month, Toliver again touched on the same topic, this time in response to complaints he received about belittling McDaniel's work and standing within Hollywood. Standing by his

[104] Ralph Matthews, "Watching The Big Parade: Why I Hate Hollywood," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 1, 1940, 4.
[105] Clarence Toliver, "The Point Is This: 'A Sign So Disgraceful'," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 20, 1940, 15.

initial judgments, Toliver wrote, "I had no attempt to belittle the work of Miss McDaniel. I merely do not see that her achievement means anything to anyone except herself, the producers of the picture and the bourbons of the South and their fellow travelers to whom Miss McDaniel typifies the 'place' of the colored woman in the American scene."[106] The divide between approval and censure of McDaniel, as an actress, an Oscar winner, and a representative of Black actors in a white industry, would only grow stronger as the United States entered World War II and political debates over civil rights and racial representation in the media changed the landscape of the Black press.

As the United States entered World War II in December 1941, the discourse in the Black press surrounding Hattie McDaniel, her career, and her personal life began to change as the political mood for Black Americans changed. "Double V—victory at home and victory abroad—became the battle cry for the Black community" as the nation entered the war, writes Watts, as the Office of War Information (OWI) began rallying Black Americans behind the war effort through the promotion of the appearance of racial equality.[107] Organizations, notably the NAACP, led by Walter White, used this opportunity to push for greater racial representation in the media, particularly in Hollywood, which became a subject of coverage in the Black press as well as a source of trouble for McDaniel herself. 1941 had begun favorably for McDaniel, however, as her March wedding to Lloyd Crawford was reported in the press. The *Chicago Defender* covered the wedding in several articles, describing Crawford as a "handsome musician" and McDaniel as the "statuesque movie queen"; in a later article, the newspaper included a photo of the newlyweds beneath the headline "Wedding Bells Ring For Famed Movie

[106] Clarence Toliver, "The Point Is This: Criticism And Stuff," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 10, 1940, 11.
[107] Watts, 208-209.

Star."[108] The *Baltimore Afro-American* also ran articles on the wedding, as well as a follow-up from April describing McDaniel's visit to an orphanage for Black children, revealing that "she intended to adopt a child of her own soon, referring to it as a modern Hollywood custom."[109] These articles functioned as a response to Jimmie Lunceford's earlier claims that Black actors did not receive the same gossipy, glowing coverage of their personal lives as white stars, at least within white fan magazines and newspapers. Demonstrating the stature McDaniel held among Black entertainers, her personal life was now on display for audiences in a way which followed her white peers—a comparison McDaniel occasionally made herself.[110] After the declaration of war in December, McDaniel, already eagerly joining the war effort, was pictured with two Black soldiers at a segregated camp in California, after she had presented them donated furniture from the Red Cross and given a speech she "confessed" was helped by her husband, "a veteran of World War I."[111] While McDaniel's career in film continued, much of what the Black press reported about her during the war would be concerned less with her career strides and more with the political implications of her work, both as an actress and as an activist for the war effort.

Like many of her peers, Black and white, McDaniel was heavily involved in the war effort, which allowed her a chance to advocate on behalf of Black soldiers and Black workers within Hollywood. In May, a group of actors, producers, directors, and other Hollywood personnel began the Hollywood Victory Committee, an organization dedicated to assisting the war effort. In addition to McDaniel, the committee was largely composed of white members,

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[108] Billy K.C. Smith, "Hattie McDaniel Elopes To Arizona With Musician," *Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1941, 20; "Wedding Bells Ring For Famed Movie Star," *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1941, 20.
[109] "Star of 'Wind' to Adopt Child," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 19, 1941, 14.
[110] In addition to the remark about the "modern Hollywood custom" of adopting in the *Afro-American*, Watts reports an interview with columnist Louella Parsons where McDaniel compares her desire to have a baby with white actresses: "Betty Grable, Lana Turner, Maureen O'Hara, Gene Tierney, and the rest of those glamour girls have nothing on me," in Watts, 233.
[111] "'Oscar' Winner Visits the Boys," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 20, 1941, 15.

including Jack L. Warner, the president of Warner Bros., and actors such as Bette Davis and James Cagney. McDaniel's friend, writer Ruby Berkley Goodwin, reported that McDaniel had been selected after the Screen Actors' Guild recommended "the appointment of one colored person to the original committee," as well as a sub-committee of Black members to be formed by the original member, and that McDaniel was "hard at work selecting her committee."[112] Two additional articles written by Goodwin, for the *Baltimore Afro-American* and *Chicago Defender*, underscored the importance of McDaniel's work and insinuated that her inclusion on the committee—as well as her separate sub-committee—was a result of increased tolerance among Hollywood. Insisting that the sub-committee was not just a "lightweight organization to give off a lot of publicity and to put a few names on an important looking letter head," Goodwin reported on the meeting—at McDaniel's home—where the sub-committee "point[ed] out to the Hollywood Victory Committee the unfairness of segregated camps which deprive colored soldiers of practically all entertainment."[113] This emphasis on McDaniel as a leader and activist for the greater participation of Black entertainers in Hollywood's war effort would come under strain as she faced opposition from the NAACP, Walter White, and, to McDaniel's mind, their desire for a light-skinned, younger Black woman to represent Black womanhood in film—namely, women like Lena Horne. When White visited Los Angeles in 1942, he met with studio heads and producers who agreed to broaden the scope of roles offered to Black performers and to further their commitment to better representation on film. Many established Black actors, such as McDaniel, perceived White's approach—working around, rather than with, them—as an attack on their livelihoods and the roles they played. The fact that White was accompanied by Lena Horne, a newcomer who was "thin, light-skinned, and extraordinarily beautiful," and who had

[112] Ruby Berkley Goodwin, "More Laurels Come to Hattie McDaniel," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 9, 1942, 15.
[113] Goodwin, "Prejudice Revealed to Hollywood 'V' Groups," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 30, 1942, 13.

already become a favorite of the NAACP as a "cover girl" of *The Crisis*, appeared to be a rebuke to the portrayals of Black womanhood embodied by actors like McDaniel.[114]

In January 1943, McDaniel was one of several actors who criticized the NAACP's initiative as hindering rather than helping the problem of racial inequality in Hollywood. In a statement, McDaniel began by insisting, "I have no quarrel with the NAACP or colored fans who object to the roles some of us play," but that she was annoyed by being left out of NAACP negotiations despite working "for eleven years to open up opportunities for our group and the industry and have tried to reflect credit upon my race, in exemplary conduct both on and off screen." Voicing her displeasure at Horne's presence— "You can imagine my chagrin when the only person called to the platform was a young woman from New York who had just arrived in Hollywood and had not yet made her first picture"—she continued by stressing the need for patience in eventual progress, comparing the fight to the struggle for women's suffrage. Again using the language of racial uplift, McDaniel listed the amenities offered to her as a major actor, including her own dressing room and attendants, and concluded with, "I carry myself in such a way that I can let my light shine for others to follow, and believe we will get what we want through ability and merit."[115] The animosity by McDaniel towards Horne, exacerbated by outside forces, would only become more newsworthy when the biggest racial debacle of McDaniel's career occurred in April 1944. While at the First Annual Motion Picture Award Assembly, a NAACP event to honor Hollywood figures who worked towards interracial unity, McDaniel

[114] Watts, 214-219; Megan E. Williams, "The *Crisis* Cover Girl: Lena Horne, the NAACP, and Representations of African American Femininity, 1941-1945," *American Periodicals* 16, no. 2 (2006): 201. Of the 38 women who appeared on the cover of *The Crisis* between 1941 and 1945, Horne was the only woman to appear twice, and like Horne, the vast majority of women featured were well-dressed, conventionally attractive, and light-skinned. It is worth contrasting the trends discussed by Williams with McDaniel's own appearance on the cover in April 1940.
[115] Ralph Matthews and Hattie McDaniel, "The Truth About Hollywood And The Race Issue From The Actors' Viewpoint: Hattie McDaniel," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 9, 1943, 11.

mistakenly referred to Horne as "a representative of the new type of n----r womanhood," which stunned the audience of over 3,000 and resulted in the immediate correction, "I said Negro womanhood."[116] Regardless of whether McDaniel's slip was intentional or an unintentional misstep, coming on the heels of unfavorable coverage which posited McDaniel as the past and Horne as the future, the article's embarrassment at the faux pas was telling. The Black press, alternately the defender and critic of McDaniel's life and career, was increasingly seeing her screen image as outdated and even offensive, and negative appearances in the press would only increase throughout 1945.

In 1944 and 1945, McDaniel had reached a low point personally and professionally. While she appeared in several films in 1944, among them *Since You Went Away* which reunited her with *Gone with the Wind* producer David O. Selznick, and *Three Is a Family*, she was once again confined to play small maid roles, and in late 1944 through 1945 did not appear in a film at all. In 1945, a surprise announcement of a pregnancy ended abruptly in what was likely a false pregnancy, and later that year she separated from her husband Lloyd Crawford.[117] The reception to *Three Is a Family*, in particular, was intensely negative, and along with previous criticisms aimed at McDaniel and her recent public struggles, led her to receive most negative coverage to date from the Black press. While Al Monroe at the *Chicago Defender* believed that her performance was not deserving of "all of the criticism being heaped upon it by some of the writing gentry," his defense of her career choices rested less on the character and film and more on McDaniel "simply being herself in character at a high and well deserved rate of pay."[118] However, it was not only journalists and critics who had become tired of McDaniel and other

[116] J. Robert Smith, "Miss McDaniel Accused of Using Offensive Epithet," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 29, 1944, 6.
[117] Watts, 233-236.
[118] Al Monroe, "Critic Defends Hattie McDaniel's Film Acting," *Chicago Defender*, February 17, 1945, 13.

actors' stereotyped roles. Both the *Chicago Defender* and *Baltimore Afro-American* published letters from readers in early 1945 which accused McDaniel of becoming an "Uncle Tom." One letter, from Thelma Thomas of Chicago, wrote that no progress could be made in better Hollywood representation if actors "continue[d] to accept parts like that of Hattie McDaniel in 'Three Is a Family'" and in the modern struggle for equality, "it is our greatest ambition to eliminate this type of acting. It is neither necessary nor entertaining." Referencing the "soldiers and sailors overseas" who "surely do not appreciate these pictures," Thomas applauded actors such as Horne and Paul Robeson "who refuse to take low for a few dollars, actors who strive to abolish this Uncle Tomism on the screen…The other type of acting only abuses the intelligence of our Negro people as a whole."[119] Another letter, and response from Ralph Matthews, again attacked McDaniel and other Black actors as "eye-bucking 'Mammy' and 'Uncle Tom' types," and that the discrimination within Hollywood amounted to "the type of bigoted thinking on which Nazism was built."[120]

Overseas, Black soldiers also began protesting against the movies which featured McDaniel in comedic maid roles. Wartime propaganda, which preached racial equality and the ability of Black soldiers to prove themselves in combat, could not rest easily beside depictions of Black characters which portrayed Black Americans as superstitious, comedic, unintelligent, or forever employed in menial labor for white Americans. In June 1945, a group of "forty-three colored marines" alleged that Hollywood films "poisoned" Pacific Islanders towards Black Americans and demanded in an open letter that Black actors refuse "'Uncle Tom' film roles," singling out McDaniel's maid role in *Hi, Beautiful* as emblematic of roles which "should never have been accepted by a colored person" and praising Horne as "one of the most auspicious and

[119] Thelma L. Thomas, "Assails Uncle Tom Roles In Movies," *Chicago Defender*, February 24, 1945, 10.
[120] Ralph Matthews, "Watching the Big Parade," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 3, 1945, 4.

outstanding colored celebrities in Hollywood" in direct contrast.[121] Later that month, McDaniel's film *Three Is a Family* was banned from GI theaters in New Guinea. Calling her role "uncomplimentary," another article described the negative reaction from Black servicemen and -women: "The picture aroused such resentment among service men and women to the extent that large numbers of them walked out of the theater during its presentation."[122] Such open resentment towards Black actors, chief among them McDaniel, was not reserved for Black soldiers, though the war and their collective complaints undoubtedly helped accelerate the criticism. Perhaps most damningly, in July the *Baltimore Afro-American* included McDaniel, and a photograph of her, among a list of actors "designated for the chopping block." Under the subheading "Flayed for 'Mammy' Roles," the article described McDaniel as "roundly criticized because she plays 'mammy' parts in the movies, and because she portrays roles many feel are highly objectionable to the welfare and standing of the colored people."[123] The coverage of McDaniel's "Uncle Tom" roles and the disapproval her films received from Black audiences, by contrast, shut out her personal civil rights victory over restrictive housing covenants in December 1945, where she prevailed over housing laws denying Black homeowners houses in white neighborhoods in Los Angeles.[124] By the end of World War II, McDaniel's film career had largely come to an end, and the Black press, far from lamenting her lack of roles or championing her as their Oscar winner, had rejected her as a symbol of oppression and outdated stereotypes,

[121] "Uncle Tom Films Poisoning Islanders' Minds—Marines," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 9, 1945, 15.
[122] "Hattie McDaniel's Film Is Barred," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 30, 1945, 1.
[123] Don De Leighbur, "Rochester Heads List of Theatre, Radio Players We Can Do Without," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 7, 1945, 8.
[124] "Film Stars Win Covenant Test," *Chicago Defender*, December 15, 1945, 2. McDaniel is mentioned, but her participation in this case is not emphasized or dwelled on in contrast to the many articles criticizing her acting roles.

whose accomplishments were seen as not only unpraiseworthy, but harmful to racial progress and equality.

Like Josephine Baker, Hattie McDaniel's representation within the Black press reflected the varying ways Black women in public were interpreted. McDaniel, and many other Black actors of her generation, saw their constrained success within Hollywood as beneficial to racial equality, as slowly making space for future performers to enlarge the roles given to Black performers. Throughout the 1930s, and into the early 1940s, many writers in the Black press, and many in the film audience, agreed with her. For McDaniel, and these supporters, her win for Best Supporting Actress at the Academy Awards in 1940 symbolized a great stride forward and a win not just for McDaniel, but for Black Americans in general. However, McDaniel's suitability as one major representation of Black femininity onscreen, and the outbreak of World War II drastically changing the political landscape, led to a desire for change, one which targeted McDaniel as a reminder of all that was wrong with Hollywood and Black womanhood on film. By the end of World War II, McDaniel, to the Black press, was forever tied to Mammy, the character she had played to award-winning success, but one which was caught in a past of slavery, racial inequality, and racial stereotypes. For the Black press, women such as Lena Horne, Hazel Scott, and Dorothy Dandridge pointed the way forward; McDaniel had become a regression, and the Black press became one arena where her portrayals of Black womanhood could be condemned and rejected.

CHAPTER 4: The Struggles of Race Womanhood and Conclusion

Josephine Baker and Hattie McDaniel both attained prominence and notoriety within the Black press during a period of profound change in Black public life and political activity. The period after World War I and the beginning of the Great Migration represented the birth of what Alain Locke called the "New Negro," a figure of Black modernity and racial expression who cast off the shackles of slavery and the struggles of the Civil War and Reconstruction to "[become] a conscious collaborator…and participant in American civilization."[125] The New Negro was a product of the Great Migration and changing social and political conditions, particularly the development of Black newspapers and political movements such as Garveyism, and existed in opposition to the Old Negro. The Old Negro, according to Locke, was a figure of the 19th century, of "popular melodrama," and predicted that "The day of 'aunties,' 'uncles' and 'mammies' is equally gone. Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on," superseded by the New Negro.[126] Baker and McDaniel were interpreted in the Black press as not just New Negroes, but also as "race women." Race men and women were part of the post-Reconstruction emphasis on political activism and racial uplift, a generation who included such diverse members as Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Anna J. Cooper, and many other notable political and social figures. Race women responded not simply to the "race question," but also to the "woman question": how could Black women work to uplift Black public life, to help build public institutions such as schools, and to be committed to the social and moral character of Black life without confining themselves to domestic spaces, physically and intellectually?[127] The

[125] Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, Inc., 1925), 15.
[126] Locke, 5.
[127] Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 11-14.

solutions were different for women of McDaniel's generation than for Baker's. While Baker, while not immune to criticism, seemed to embody Black modernity and a racial uplift more akin to the New, rather than Old, Negro, McDaniel's appearances in the Black press represented the generational divide. As her biographer Watts explains, "Black Hollywood stars like Hattie McDaniel…were caught in a generational shift. [Some stars] still subscribed to Booker T. Washington's philosophy of accommodating racism and striving for economic success. In their opinion, there was nothing incompatible between their careers as players in white films and their commitment to uplifting the race."[128] As the meanings of race womanhood and the Old and New Negro were reinterpreted and interrogated throughout the peak periods of Baker and McDaniel's careers, where each woman fell in the Black press relied on how well they could perform these roles, alternatively thrust upon and intentionally sought out. Baker could represent both the modern promise of race womanhood and Black female success as well as act as a cautionary tale for other women who flouted proper moral and social codes on their way to fame; McDaniel, to many, had by 1945 represented a dead end for race womanhood, an unsettling reminder of the continued power of the Old Negro in the era of the New.

In his seminal text on star studies, Richard Dyer describes celebrities as enacting "the business of being an individual," as "embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives…categories of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on."[129] If we take this to be true, then the representations of Josephine Baker and Hattie McDaniel within the Black press articulated for their readers what it meant to be Black, to be a woman, and to live in the 20th century. Onto the

[128] Watts, 138-139. McDaniel's associations with Washington went further than endorsing, implicitly, his politics; she was also close with his nephew, Roscoe Conkling Simmons.
[129] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 16.

bodies of these women, the Black press, largely but not exclusively male writers, inscribed ideas of racial uplift, political equality, proper gender and sexual roles, and the place of Black women in public life. Through Baker, the old figure of the Jezebel was reinterpreted as the modern Black woman, as writers debated the meanings behind the sexuality in her performances and personal life, and the ways Baker encountered—or occasionally did not encounter—racial discrimination throughout her career. For McDaniel, her ability to succeed within the narrow range allowed by a white Hollywood, and flourish enough to win an Academy Award, seemed to posit her as a model of Black female triumph; and yet, the messages behind her Mammy and maid roles became increasingly odious to the Black press, who then began castigating her as the antithesis of the modern Black woman. As much as the fan magazines and white newspapers of the early 20th century, the Black press used visible, famous women like Baker and McDaniel to express complicated relationships with race, gender, sexuality, and political progress, and to explore what it meant to live as a Black American in the interwar and World War II eras.

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