G.I. Jazz: Music and Power in Liberation France
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As thousands of American GIs poured through the port cities of Le Havre and Marseille in the summer of 1944, they coaxed French cooperation with American politics not only through chocolate bars, cigarettes, and Coca-Cola, but with scores of new jazz hits performed in French cafés and on American military bases. This paper examines the performance and criticism of jazz in the liberation era of France, arguing that jazz both confronted the French with American dominance and provided inventionary resources through which they could resist.

French jazz critics writing in the popular periodical Jazz Hot, I argue, denied American claims to superiority by attacking the United States on cultural grounds. Highlighting the role of French musicians in legitimizing jazz worldwide and denouncing American racism, these critics worked to refute American claims to dominance by casting France as culturally and ethically superior. At once a sign of American opulence and strength and a source of immense French pride, jazz offered an ideal prism through which to refract the struggle over national dominance in the wake of France’s liberation from Nazi rule.