



# Exploring the Genesis of Ballroom Culture During the Harlem Renaissance

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## **Declaration of Originality**

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Design for Film. It is entirely the author's work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'C' followed by a long, horizontal stroke that tapers to the right. The signature is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Chloe Oppermann

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I want to thank my thesis supervisor Lynda Dunne who has helped me this entire time, The IADT Library staff, Student Learning Support, and my family and friends for all the help, specifically my dog Opal who with her cuteness has grounded me during this time

## **Abstract**

<A paragraph (300 words or so) telling what your thesis is about. This should demonstrate your main idea, contain your thesis statement, and show your point of view on the topic, as well as the methods of research and analysis you use.>

This thesis is about the beginning of the subculture that is the ballroom scene and the importance of the larger cultural movement that happened along side



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## Introduction

In this essay I will be discussing the Harlem Renaissance and its relation to the Genesis of the “Ballroom scene.” The Renaissance was a period of progressive explorations of so many creative sectors, this zeitgeist being in Harlem, New York, in a blossoming time of new real estate creating wealth and a middle-class status for one of the first times in history for the African American population, and with this economic growth led to a lot of culture and fashion being created. With this also, new progressive spaces were created, spaces for LGBTQIA+ people to exist and create art together. This is where the topic of these “balls” comes into play, the main topic.

I will discuss the important people and cultural and economic factors that allowed this cultural movement to even happen. A movement or subculture that was popularized in modern media by the famous documentary *Paris is Burning*, directed by Jennie Livingston in 1990, a documentary that explores the ballroom scene in New York in the 80s, the highs, and lows of the lives of the people who attended these balls, and why they are important to the lower-class queer people who attend, while the troubles in this era were the outbreak of AIDS in high volume, a disease incorrectly labeled as a gay disease, which added a layer of heartbreak to this documentary. I always enjoyed this documentary and the ballroom culture and the music, dance, and fashion that emerged from this scene. It helped root other subcultures, like “club kids,” mostly queer people and young people in the underground nightlife scene who are expressive and part of a secular society. From watching the popular TV reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, a drag reality show that began in 2009 with the host being the famous drag queen RuPaul, someone who also would have been involved in the 80s and 90s ballroom scene, so in the show, it referenced a good bit. In the year 2025, the LGBTQIA+ community has made such strides compared to the past but reading about this little progressive bubble in the 20s was so interesting to me and with my love of ballroom culture and the media that comes from it. I was always intrigued and wanted to discover where it started, what was the root of this expressive dance style and fashion categories, and the creation of community. Then I discovered the root or beginning, which led to me picking this topic in the 1920s in Harlem, New York, during this renaissance in these balls. When discussing all this, it's also important to look to the people that led to this moment: important figures and movements.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss the history of the Renaissance people and the important people who paved the way for this movement, the trailblazers, these being artists and businesspeople who flipped the script for what it meant to be African American living in America. I will also discuss the beginning of the balls. And club scene where queer people were creating space for themselves by dressing in drag in fancy dress balls and performing. I will discuss this through books articles and dissecting photos

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the importance of music in this movement to discuss the issues in American society in this era. Then I will get into an important figure of this movement. One of the first self-made Black millionaires of this era was Madam CJ

Walker a woman who really set positive change for young black women. I will talk about her life story and the importance of her wealth, prosperity, status, and business to this time in history and how her children went on to become important figures and patrons of the art in the Renaissance movement.

In chapter 3 I will discuss where America as a country lay politically at this time and how the experience for African Americans along with the existence of queer people in this era was the strides of progress made but also the parts with people like Dr. Alan Hart, a pioneer in the medical space but also living as a trans man, one of the first trans men to take hormones, and I also will look at one or two more newspaper articles concerning the Pansy craze (Chauncey, 2008). A moment in history where there was a fascination with queer people dressing in drag a quote coined by George Chauncey a Columbia University history professor. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* is his most well-known work.

## **Chapter One: The Renaissance an Introduction and the important people who built this movement**

The Harlem Renaissance is a moment in history marked by a burst of creativity within the African American community in the areas of art, music, and literature. Located within New York City's Harlem, this became an epicentre for artists to thrive. The Renaissance came about around the end of World War 1 in 1918 and the great war, and in this time, there was promised to end all wars. "Optimism defined the national mood," (Wall, 2016) and the Renaissance reflected the particular optimism of black Americans and continued until about the 1930's until the great depression in America these few years of excellence opulence and luxury for the new black metropolitan, black people were coming from rural settings into more urban settings becoming part of a new century of people leaving more rural areas after slavery in the great migration.

"Black Americans, like white Americans, were becoming an urban rather than a rural people. Large numbers of blacks had streamed into the northern cities in the first years of the new century, forced out by the poverty of southern agriculture and the mean brutality of southern racial bigotry" (Irvin, 2007)

The war had cut off immigration from Europe, and there were not enough white workers to fill the need, so northern employers sought out black laborers in the South giving black people for the first time higher paid positions which then created economic uprisings for the African American community. With the IRT (Interborough Rapid Transit Company) or Broadway subway being announced in 1890 developers began to build tenement buildings while not finishing until about the 1940's but this announcement set up gentrification in the Harlem area for all the residents. The new first class apartment houses were sought after for the first time, you could have working class people live at some distance from where they work creating the backdrop and means for this movement. In history this era was one of the first times in history African Americans were able to create a distinct style for themselves, as they reached a middle-class status, they had a lot more resources and "luxuries" than before" dignity and grace and style" (Albany Institute of history and Art, 2021) words that echoed through this era a first experience with unessential items for a lot of African Americans for the first time since.

This change is what I think allowed black artists to develop their artistry and express themselves in more accepting circumstances all created in this cultural epicenter. White people were enamored by this movement too "When the Negro was in vogue" and White Flocked to Harlem in droves" two quotes from famous writer of the time Langston Hughes a real figure head in the movements memoir and his memoir "The big sea" was a big piece of my research. He described scenes of integration on dance floors something pretty much unseen until this point. before I go further, I will discuss his earlier life to get a better idea of him as the contrast of his early life is important to the growth of his future. Langston Hughes or born as James Mercer Langston Hughes was born in 1901 in Joplin Missouri his parents being James Nathaniel Hughes and Carrie Langston Hughes a couple who divorced which led to him moving to Mexico where he lived with his Grandmother Mary Sampson Patterson Leary Langston, Hughes was introduced to literature through the stories and books his grandmother gave him. In his early years, books turned into a haven or a safe place for him.

He moved back to the USA after living with his grandmother living out the rest of his school years eventually graduated from Central High School in Cleveland, Ohio, where he was named class poet and yearbook editor, after moving back to his mother in Lincoln, Illinois, following the death of his grandmother. He went to Columbia University in New York after high school, but he dropped out after just one year. He loved the community he discovered in Harlem, New York, but he did not enjoy his time at Columbia. During this period, he gained some national recognition when his poetry was first published in the NAACP journal *The Crisis*. Later, he took a trip as a crew member on the ship *SS Malone*, traveling to Africa and Europe. After living in Europe for a while, he returned to the United States and released his debut novel, *The Weary Blues*, in 1926. After graduating from Pennsylvania's Lincoln University a few years later, Hughes went back to New York to further his writing career. After this Langston went onto living in Europe for a while, he returned to the United States and released his debut novel, *The Weary Blues*, in 1926. After graduating from Pennsylvania's Lincoln University a few years later, Hughes went back to New York to further his writing career. And from here he went on to be a main player in the Movement in Harlem writing multiple plays. (www.nps.gov, 2022) Langston's work is so important to the movement that is the cultural renaissance.

The Movement that was happening in Harlem is hard to pin down to one person's work many hands make light work as the famous saying goes. But one thing that propelled this movement a catalyst to the beginning of this occurred approximately in 1925 with a man called Alain Locke, Locke was a well-known author, philosopher, educator, and art patron. Locke, who was tenured at Howard University and is renowned as the first African American Rhodes Scholar, established the "New Negro" movement, commonly known as the Harlem Renaissance, in 1907. His edited collection, *The New Negro*, a body of work published in 1925, (Smithsonian, n.d.) brought together and inspired authors and artists to keep creating a Black American aesthetic. Something unheard of until this point in history African Americans were getting their voice. This coming together in an issue of the magazine called the survey graphic a magazine in which all contributions at the time we about black people which gave it a new perspective to all the other non-inclusive media. Being based in Harlem it had people were interested both white and black people in this time wanting to see what's the newest show play singer they must see, black creatives were gaining power and status with the arts and the interest of the outsider. Another moment important in this Renaissance there was a musical called shuffle along which debuted in Harlem which brought a lot of white people down to Harlem to see the show and they were entranced by jazz." (Now This, 2021)

"From Whites coming to Harlem to see the show, and to become entranced by jazz. And wanting to venture to that wild side that was Harlem to experience sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Except rock and roll was Jazz." (Now This, 2021) this show broke so many boundaries as the first *Shuffle Along* is the first full-length musical written, directed, and performed by African Americans to become a major hit on Broadway The musical *shuffle along* was an important musical or revue in layman's terms a type of light theatrical entertainment that usually deals satirically with current concerns and consists of a number of short sketches, songs, and dances was

written by Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyle lyrics by Noble Sissel Eubie Blake. Shuffle Along toured across New Jersey and Pennsylvania in early 1921, but after paying for production and travel costs, there wasn't much money left over to pay the actors. However, when the show debuted on Broadway, everything changed. I put a photo below of the cast members of Shuffle Along. I love these photos you can see the opulence in the costume. We see 6 female cast members in a mix of styles of costumes to reflect their character and then we have Eubie Blake who was the lyrics of the Play sitting with the cast. The musical premiering on May 3, 1921, on 63<sup>rd</sup> street the musical changed the game for musicals it was a wild success causing traffic jams that changed the roads to accommodate the popularity. Subsequent renewed interest in black musical theatre ended a ten-year unofficial moratorium, broke colour barriers, and set the trend for the ensuing decade on Broadway. The music lived on In 1948, presidential nominee Harry S. Truman would go on to choose the production's most popular song "I'm Just Wild About Harry" for his campaign.



Fig. 1 (New York Public Library,1921)

The white populations fascination with Harlem at this time allowed the writing and culture to develop further as. People wanted to go to Harlem and be part of the

ambience created as it was a time where people weren't as shut in the controversiality was something people after the war. People craved to push the boundaries and they did this by going to see these live shows and experience. The arts that pushed these boundaries the 20's which was all happening in Harlem New York were a time with abstractionism art being a popular art movement post war.

After Shuffle Along's success there was a Broadway play called Lulu Belle which debuted in The Belasco theatre February 9<sup>th</sup> 1926 (Playbill, 2024) written by Charles MacArthur and Edward Sheldon a musical telling the story The play's honesty regarding sex and race, as well as its topic of miscegenation meaning mixed race relationships something very controversial at this time and with this the writers presented probably for one of the first realistic portrayal of black life and community in 1920s in Harlem. (Haugo and Magellsen, 2007). "In general, the white press disparaged the melodrama for its immorality, and the black press, while pleased that the production used so many black actors, regarded the sexually out-of-control title character (played by white actress Lenore Ulric) as a reminder to black women to remain pure for the sake of the race" (Wilson, 2010) reactions were mixed but people were definitely interested in the story, "Lulu Belle featured a large cast of over one hundred black actors and played successfully in mainstream theatres, running for 461 performances (Goat Alley lasted just a week in 1921)". (Haugo and Magellsen, 2007). After having a successful run after being staged on the Belasco theatre and produced by David Belasco this staging was quite problematic with actors in black face and black actors in supporting roles displays important to discuss and bring up as it's an important discussion on race and class and got people thinking about that topic. Minstrel shows were quite a popular practice in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century "Blackface minstrelsy was an established nineteenth-century theatrical practice, principally of the urban North, in which white men caricatured blacks for sport and profit" (Lott, 2013) A Practice that is understandably not accepted today. The controversy aside this play spoke to people so much that there was then a drag club named after this play Lulu Belle a drag club for black and white patrons. This is a play bill from the show

**Belasco Theatre**  
 West 44th Street, near Broadway  
 UNDER THE SOLE MANAGEMENT OF DAVID BELASCO

---

FIRE NOTICE: Look around NOW and choose the nearest  
 Exit to your seat. In case of fire, walk (not run) to THAT Exit.  
 Do not try to beat your neighbor to the street.  
 THOMAS J. DRENNAN, Fire Commissioner.

---

WEEK BEGINNING MONDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 22, 1926  
 Matinees Thursday and Saturday

---

DAVID BELASCO  
 Presents

**LENORE ULRIC**  
 —As—  
**LULU BELLE**

In a Play in Four Acts  
 By Edward Sheldon and Charles Mac Arthur  
 Supported by HENRY HULL  
 And an Exceptional Cast  
 Settings by Joseph Wickes' Studio

"Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime  
 Et si je t'aime . . . prends garde à toi!"

(Characters in the Order of Their Appearance)

GERANIUM MONROE	AL TOMAY JONES
STELLA LA VERGNE	JEAN WARD
LOVIE BOWTELLE	MILDRED HALL
MRS. BOWTELLE	ELIZABETH WILLIAMS
MRS. MONROE	NELLIE R. REYNOLDS
MRS. FRISBIE	FANNIE BELLE DeKNIGHT
BUTCH COOPER	JOHN HARRINGTON
SHORTY NOYES	TAMMANY YOUNG
MABEL DE WITT	OLLIE BURGOYNE
ADA MAY RAMSEY	LORAIN HUNTER
RUBY LEE	EVELYN PREER
IVY WHITESIDE	MARGUERITE WYATT
VALMA CUSTER	EDNA THOMAS
ROSCOE	W. S. BELL
LEW	JAMES JACKSON
HERMAN	EDWARD THOMPSON
ROYAL WILLIAMS	WILLIAM TALIAFERO

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PROGRAM CONTINUED ON SECOND PAGE FOLLOWING

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Fig .2 (Playbill, 2012)





**DOWN SOUTH..**  
 Down East, whichever way the tide of fashion flows, you'll find Gotham Gold Stripe Silk Stockings. They're everywhere because they wear. Prices from \$1.85 up.

**GOTHAM GOLD STRIPE**  
 Silk Stockings that Wear

PROGRAM CONTINUED

MRS. ROYAL WILLIAMS	EDNA THROWER
EUGENE FRISBIE	SMOTHERS WARD
MT. VERNON JACKSON	GEORGE CALLENDER
A BARTENDER	SAMUEL BOLEN
MRS. JACKSON	MATTIE V. WILKES
ELMER JACKSON	OSWALD EDINBOROUGH
GEORGE RANDALL	HENRY HULL
MRS. GEORGE RANDALL	SYBIL BRYANT
WALTER RANDALL	THOMAS TRISVAN
VIOLET RANDALL	MARGARET PETTY
CLARENCE DE VOB	SEIFERT FILE
BROTHER STALEY	J. LOUIS JOHNSON
SISTER SALLY	VIRGIE WINFIELD
SISTER BLOSSOM	ANNIE RHINELANDER
LULU BELLE	LENORE ULRIC
SKEETER	PERCIVAL VIVIAN
VANGIE BOWTBELLE	GOLDYE M. STIENER
POLICEMAN HEALY	EDWARD MANNERY
UNCLE GUSTUS	LAWRENCE EDDINGER
MRS. TRUMBULL	EVA BENTON
DR. J. WILBERFORCE WALKER	WILLIAM ST. JAMES
DUKE WEAVER	FRED MILLER
HAPPY	J. W. JACKSON
MOKE	ALLAN WAITHE

PROGRAM CONTINUED ON SECOND PAGE FOLLOWING

**HORTON'S ICE CREAM**  
 1851 *The Premier Ice Cream of America* 1926  
 For Seventy-five Years

Copyright © 2012 Playbill Inc. www.PlaybillVault.com

Fig. 3 (Playbill, 2012)

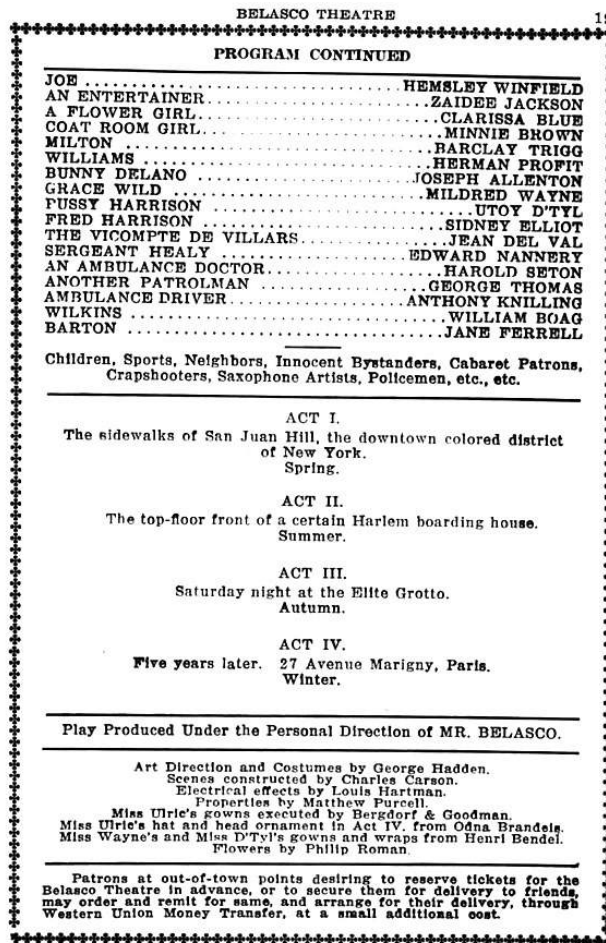


Fig. 4 (Playbill, 2012)

These are the Playbills for Lulu belle when it opened on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1926, we see in photo 2 its supported by famous Actor Henry Hull is most renowned for his 1935 performance in "Werewolf of London," which portrayed Dr. Glendon's post-full moon incarnation. So, there was some good name as backing this play with a topic that quite progressive within the political climate of America in the 1920's,

In the not as legal ventures, there was a big growth in clubs in Harlem breaking the prohibition laws serving people alcohol accompanied with these racy shows. To. The legal act behind the Prohibition era was the Volstead Act, "Representative Andrew Volstead of Minnesota. One faction, led by Wayne Bidwell Wheeler, who served as the league's general counsel after 1916, wanted the statute to follow some state laws and forbid the possession of liquor" (Fahey, 2018)

This in part was the reason for many illegal speakeasies being created —illegal saloons where people could enjoy whiskey and jazz music. This was a big part of the Renaissance as Harlem was a newer more cosmopolitan city, so they caused city the creation many of the queer spaces. These clubs were for up-and-coming artists all the important queer clubs were located on west 133rd street. provide a safe space for queer African Americans to express themselves and their sexuality and white American people there was a kind of unspoken allyship between queer African Americans and queer white Americans in these times.

In relation to the importance of clubs .I choose this picture series from American Photographers Aaron Siskinds book “Harlem: photographs 1932-1940” a book where Aaron photographers to different parts of Harlem New York from the 30’s to the 40’s he beautifully captures the ups and downs the hustle and bustle of the cosmopolitan city I choose this part of the photo series called Show girl in which Aaron interviews a part called show girl who has big ambitions of making it big knows she says “I’m black, and I knows black folks has gotta go a long ways before they arrive. But I got one thing in the back a this head a mine, and that is: "Color Can't Conquer Courage." She discusses how she wants to be like Florence mills the famous Cabaret Singer whose voice was noted as beautiful and birdlike and Florence got her big break in the debut in the Broadway musical which I discussed put Harlem on the map “Shuffle along” and broke boundaries with her musical talent and beautiful voice, the white interest was opening doors and getting Black Americans in doors where they couldn’t get in before “Lawd, am I hopin that one at these nights some a them white folks who come to Harlem lookin for talent will see something in me an give me a chance” (Siskind and Banks, 1981) the dancer from this series hopes shes spotted or chosen as creativity and talent was helping blind white people from prejudice white people were using their privilege to open doors for black Americans,



Fig. 5 (Siskind and Banks, 1981)

This photo by Aaron Siskind a famous American photographer His art emphasizes the importance simplistic objects owned by people, presenting them as flat surfaces to produce a fresh vision that is unrelated to the original subject. He styles read as a very documentarian type while looking at his work. A real focus on people as the center of his creative universe so his work translates well as research for this type of project of his work .This photo is from his book the Harlem Document it's a series of Photos in which he documented the life of people in Harlem beginning in 1932 ending the series in 1940 .Taken in a club of various performers not much is said in regards to what exactly these performers are singing but these photos paint a very clear picture of people being entertained .We see various performers showing off their talents from burlesque to music by the looks of it to dancing we see people talked into the corners at their tables taking in the show, by the look of the audience they are wealthy white people, as I discussed before this was becoming a new normal in these Avant Garde club spaces



6 ([www.nyclgbtsites.org](http://www.nyclgbtsites.org), n.d.)

Like the last photo by Aaron Siskind, I have another photo in a club to discuss. This is a photo from a drag ball in Webster Hall. Webster Hall, one of New York's most historically and culturally significant huge 19th-century assembly halls, served as the site of numerous gatherings, including conventions and political and union demonstrations, especially for the Lower East Side's working-class and immigrant communities. It gained notoriety for its carefree masquerade balls in the 1910s and 1920s.

“Webster Hall’s bohemian years began in the mid-teens, when the *Masses* magazine and the Liberal Club threw fabulous dances there. Seeing the potential, others jumped in— some for the money, others for the fun, and still others to make a place that they could call their own. By the early 1920s, says the historian George Chauncey, “the Village’s Webster Hall was the site of an annual gay and lesbian drag ball as well as numerous other masquerades attended by homosexuals.” Webster Hall stayed a favourite location, for balls, masquerades and Halloween affairs, or parties with outlandish themes of any sort. “Nudity became something of a trend,” writes the author Terry Miller” (Reaven and Zeitlin, 2006)

You can see the onlookers taking in the show something they’ve probably never seen in their lives wanting to be a part of the almost rebellious scene in Harlem It was important because it served as a meeting spot for the city's gay and lesbian population in the early 20th century. By the 1920s, they had sponsored their events and felt comfortable attending the balls in drag. During this time, writers Djuna Barnes and artist Charles Demuth were among the many LGBT celebrities who attended events held here, Djuna Barnes was a famous LGBT writer “Although there were many former journalists among the crowd of expatriate American women writers living in Paris during the storied 1920s and 1930s, by the time she arrived in 1921, Djuna Barnes, the author of the much-acclaimed modernist novel *Nightwood*

(1936), had had a particularly dramatic career. Like several of her contemporaries, Barnes had written for magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *Theatre Guild*, and the *New Yorker* before leaving the United States and continued to do so from abroad.” (Biers, 2013 ) Djuna Barnes enchanted everyone with her witty banter, arrogant demeanor, and breathtaking beauty. However, her terrible upbringing influenced her writing and caused her to feel alienated. She used her imagination to create dark, avant-garde plays, novels, and poems. She humorously parodied the lesbian women in her social milieu in *Ladies Almanack* (1928). Her 1936 book *Nightwood*, a lesbian love story told in exciting and of the words of others modernist language, set a new standard. “



Fig. 7 (Berenice Abbott, *Portrait of Djuna Barnes*, 1926, printed 1982, gelatin silver print. Clark Art Institute, gift of A&M Penn Photography Foundation by Arthur Stephen Penn and Paul Katz, 2007.2.260)

Alongside other quite famously queer club like the cotton club “The Cotton Club was Harlem’s premier nightclub in the 1920s and 1930s “the Cotton Club was open seven nights a week, and there were two shows, 11:00 P.M. and 2:00 A.M.” (Howard Eugene Johnson and Johnson, 2014). The club featured many of the greatest African American entertainers of the era, including Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Nat King Cole, Billie Holiday, and Ethel Waters. However, while the performers were black, the club only permitted white audiences

which didn't stop people from secretly integrating. Clubs were also very important to the queer community in this time. The most important date in the calendar for a queer people to express themselves would be the masquerade ball is thrown the most notable one in the Hamilton Lodge and Rockland palace this is where some of the most famous drag balls were thrown in attendance was famously gay writer Langston Hughes who I brought up earlier in the essay but he is important as I found his work so descriptive in relation to the feel and look of these balls. Known as a leader for the moment describes the scene in his collection of work *Big Sea* in the section "Spectacles in Color" (Hughes and McLaren, 2002)

"Strangest and gaudiest of all Harlem spectacles in the '20's, and still the strangest and gaudiest, is the annual Hamilton Club Lodge Ball at Rockland Palace Casino. I once attended as a guest of A'Lelia Walker. It is the ball where men dress as women and women dress as men. During the height of the New Negro era and the tourist invasion of Harlem, it was fashionable for the intelligentsia and social leaders of both Harlem and the downtown area to occupy boxes at this ball and look down from above at the queerly assorted throng on the dancing floor, males in flowing gowns and feathered headdresses and females in tuxedos and box-back suits" (Hughes and McLaren, 2002)

. He goes on to describe the layout of these balls including a fashion parade including white and black attendees "whites and Negroes who, powdered, wigged, and rouged, mingle and compete for the awards." (Hughes and McLaren, 2002)

Like the musical shuffle along described in the last slide and the club scene in the 20s in Harlem it brought a lot of integration of black and white people in these creative spaces, but the black creatives were the leaders and face of these movements. He goes on to describe the drag on show sating that most looked beautiful from far away but up close "up, most of them look as if they need a shave, and some of their evening gowns, cut too low, show hair on the chest

With money creating spaces clubs and important musicals I think it's important to discuss the patrons or supporters of the arts specifically black artists. Currently, one being famously A'Lelia Walker a businesswoman and philanthropist and lover of the arts daughter to CJ Madam Walker the first recorded self-made black millionaire. Walker had a thriving hair business despite Jim Crow oppression ruling over in the beginning of her business. She was able to help hundreds African American women gain financial independence. She was bringing African Americans into a new echelon of society. The Renaissance was all about progress and as much as the creative end was moving people up in society I think it's important to highlight a woman who made important progression in this time era, money is power and with mass production in high gear Madam CJ Walker was able to get power with her hair business, She was not born into wealth she was born Sarah Breedlove on December 23, 1867, on a plantation in Delta, Louisiana, one of six children of Owen and Minerva Anderson Breedlove. A child of former slaves and then orphaned at a very young age. At the very young age of 14, Walker married Moses McWilliams. And then sadly her husband died in 1887, Walker became a single parent of a two-year-old daughter A'Lelia this time she was losing hair working as a laundress barely making a dollar an hour then she joined Poro college a college set up by another black entrepreneur (Michals, 2015), Annie Turnbo Malone opened the cosmetology school's in 1918, it was 3 acres big a big achievement for a

woman in these times but this college wasn't just a business it was so much more than that. Beyond St. Louis, Poro served as a hub. They employed 150 local employees and 25,000 agents in 1918, The Malone's hair care enterprise employed 300 individuals locally and 75,000 agents nationwide by 1920. The majority of Poro's students were Black women Ranging in ages from 16 to 80, (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.) were trained to market her unique products and apply the "Poro system" of scalp cleaning and hair nourishing. Over the company's life span, there were tens of thousands of women and men sold Poro items over the world. including Madam C.J. Walker, who would go on to become a beauty care entrepreneur Poro gave its pupils more economic options by teaching them how to take care of their hair, make hair accessories, and give massages and manicures. For its agents who sold Poro hair care products as independent contractors, it offered a 10-day review course (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.). The Poro brand and teaching methodology expanded throughout the United States and even overseas through franchising. The growth of this business is important to note that all of this created lucrative jobs for Black women. Malone became wealthy and gave generously to help people in need within Black communities and Madam C. J. Walker, whose hair-care career followed a similar trajectory, began as a Poro agent.

While working she then developed her hair-growing product which, in her, says she was delivered the formula one night in a dream. After Developing that she worked hard and built herself an empire with her famous products she was a strong-willed woman who once said "I had to make my living and my opportunity. But I made it! Don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them" (Madam C. J. Walker, 2002). Pictured in Fig. 8 is a photo of Madam CJ walkers self-formulated hair product which was her miracle hair grower in which she made her millions.

Unfortunately, walker died in 1919 and was outlived by Her beloved daughter A'Lelia who inherited her wealth. A'Lelia who was famous for the luxury penthouse apartment she owned in Harlem referred to as her Dark Tower during this time was known to throw parties in her lush apartment described by Langston Hughes as "And when the parties of A'Lelia Walker, the Negro heiress, were filled with guests whose names would turn any Nordic social climber green with envy". (Hughes, Langston, 2002) It truly was the place to be at the time a cultural hotspot for artist to express themselves. Her "dark tower" located on West 136<sup>th</sup> Street many people inspired. By their experiences in the dark tower through their work one being From the Dark Tower by Countee Cullen (Foundation, 2012). Countee another great writer of the renaissance he was also a novelist, children's writer, and playwright but was mostly known for his poetry during the Renaissance who was given the space to create at these parties in the famous dark tower





Fig. 8 (Smithsonian Madam C.J. Walker, Hair Product Tin, 1925)



## **Chapter Two :The Intersection of Music and America's Economic Development Journey**

After discussing the famous first self-made black millionaire Madam CJ Walker and her self-made empire. In chapter one. It's important to look at the economic and social progression of America. The 1920s were a prosperous and a time of great opportunity as this was an era post-World War I. The middle class were enjoying a greater level of living as the economy flourished. As mass production of items began in this time while once things were used until broken in these times America where leaders in mass production like one of the richest men Henry Ford cited in his autobiography "Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants so long as it is black". (Shepley, N 2011). His mass production of his cars Model Ts cracked the code on mass production his techniques were then applied to the production other companies America was producing high levels of not just cars, but fridges clocks clothes America had cracked the code on production lines which allowed high quantities churned out of these factories. It was a stage in industrialization that the middle-class Americans were to dramatically benefit from, this created a different relationship to money than the people had before them.

Another important part of the 1920's and society's progression happened when the 19th Amendment became law on August 26, 1920, 26 million adult female Americans were nominally eligible to vote "After another 50 years, suffragettes eventually won the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. But burdensome laws, written and passed mostly by men, continue to oppress women to this day. These include voter suppression laws that hit women particularly hard in Republican-controlled states." (Hartmann, 2020) .When American women were granted the right to vote, many young women felt empowered for the first time in this though this didn't allow this privilege for all women the law didn't, address the other discriminations in America at this time that everyday many American women faced, this affected women from marginalized communities were excluded on voting on the basis of gender and race. Native American, Asian American, Latinx and African American suffragists had to fight for their own suffrage long after the 19th Amendment was put in place. As an example, Native American people were not looked at as citizens in the 1920's (National Archives, 2022). which meant they could not vote so as much as progress was made there still was a way to go but in saying that. Women in this time were more liberated than before this could be seen through the clothing of women in the 1920's For women in these times there was a lot of liberation as for the first time women would have permission to work office jobs to go dancing alone and this was reflected in their clothing with silhouette of clothing being looser and more revealing women were cutting their hair shorter as a sign of new found independence ,Fashion and the changing of appearance became a key way for women to express and experience their freedom in the years following suffrage, Mary Alden Hopkins noted, that women found clothes important as self-expression in relation to their sexuality .because her clothes are her "second self." (Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, 2021)

Young women in the 1920s made their clothing a visible representation of their shifting political and social standing, the liberties they were starting to assert, and the new moral ideals they supported by demanding to be able to celebrate their sexuality without fear of punishment and by insisting on wearing comfortable clothing that permitted them to move around freely. This can be seen in the shifting styles from

my Fig 9 10 11. I found this fabulous video on YouTube of A black Fashion Show from Harlem from 1929 a Fashion show showing of the newest and chicest outfits of the 20's we see the outfits almost go from day to Night beginning with longer sleeved loose fitted gowns accompanied with cardigans to the strappy long gown worn by the last model. Even the fabrics mentioned the second models dress is a chiffon velvet that being a fabric on the pricey end this was a show of the time it was in a time of economic flourish for the African American Community.



Fig.9 (Historic Films Stock Footage Archive, 2018)



Fig. 10 (Historic Films Stock Footage Archive, 2018)



Fig. 11 (Historic Films Stock Footage Archive, 2018)

In this era Much less is known about female homosexuality than male homosexuality since lesbianism had not received as much research attention. There are numerous

explanations for the lack of research on this as the male counterpart. One of the most evident is that many of the sexuality researchers of the past were men, making them unable to conduct thorough research on the subject without possible bias and they just wouldn't understand the topic as much. An alternative reason is that lesbians have been less likely to attract the attention of authorities since they have never faced the same kind of legal persecution as their male counterparts. Oral-genital interactions and other nonprocreative sex practices were only inadvertently covered by many of the laws prohibiting deviant sexual activity, which were primarily focused on penetration which in that time meant lesbians were exempt "two women who allegedly engaged in lesbian activities in Plymouth colony in 1649 were charged with lewd conduct and one of them was found guilty, (Nancy F. Cott, *Walter de Gruyter GmbH*, 1993.) The art from the queer women of the renaissance was as compelling as the male counterparts lots of the women expressing their queer identities through music

Scholar Henry Louis Gates once said that the Harlem Renaissance was "certainly as gay as it was Black." (Lewis, 2022) The homosexual underground scene in Harlem was well-known at the beginning of the 20th century. Blues singers who publicly sang about same-sex female yearning included Ma Rainey and Lucille Bogan Ma's lyrics included clever wordplay which nodded to her queer lifestyle with statements like "Went out last night with a crowd of my friends. They must've been women, 'because I don't like no men." From her song "Prove It on Me Blues" (1928) the cheeky nod to a possible attraction to women, Cheeky is the best word I feel like as a lot of the extremely Sex Positive lyricism of her song and other artist songs of this time were given the space in a way of artistic expression. Another song titled "Shave 'Em Dry" her clever song writing allowed her promiscuous to feel like a tasteful nod to the title itself being a reference to foreplay-less, aggressive sex for a woman to write about this kind of sexual expression is something that could've only happened in the space of the renaissance because of the moment of liberation for women. "Here's one thing I don't understand, why a good-looking woman likes a workin' man, Hey, hey, hey, daddy, let me shave 'em dry." (Rainey Ma, Bogan Lucille ,1928)

Music throughout history has always been a change-maker and it was massive in this movement gender and sexuality were also being explored lyrically in spaces outside these circles in Irving Kaufman's *Masculine Women... Feminine Men...* In a song released in 1926 the leeway in "Sister is busy learning to shave Brother just loves his permanent wave It's hard to tell 'em. apart today Hey, Hey! Girls were girls and boys were boys when I was a tot," (Kaufmann Irving ,1926) .These lyrics are almost reeling on the times of when Irving was a Tot and the societal normal was happening and Harlem wasn't a hotspot for drag more lyrics like "Knickers and trousers baggy and wide, Nobody knows who's walking inside Those Masculine Women and Feminine Men " (Kaufmann Irving ,1926) these clubs brought all people together under one roof. I loved this newspaper article from *The New York Age* on 1930 22nd of February 1930 discussing a man going to the ball apprehensive at first usually watched and making a standing joke, but as the article goes on and he says "It was difficult to distinguish sexes scores of males pronounced effeminate

traits” and goes on to use words like graceful and describing the gowns they were in as beautifully goes on to describe women in masculine gear and I was amazed reading this to think this was written in the 30’s its shows the progressive space this palace was and the importance of the Hamilton lodge balls. The Hamilton Lodge was the most coveted ball at this time Alongside other quite famously queer clubs like the cotton club the most important date in the calendar for the queer community to express themselves would be the masquerade ball is thrown the most notable one the Hamilton Lodge and Rockland palace, This is where some of the most famous drag balls were thrown everyone who was anyone in the community could be found either watching or participating in these balls. A very popular writer and frequent attendee of these events was gay writer Langston Hughes known as a leader in this movement describes the scene of these balls so beautifully in his collection of works *Big Sea* in the section “Spectacles in Colour” (Hughes L) “Strangest and Gaudiest of all Harlem spectacles in the ’ 20 ’s, (Hughes L) and still the strangest and gaudiest, is the annual Hamilton Club Lodge Ball at Rockland Palace Casino. I once attended as a guest of A’Lelia Walker. It is the ball where men dress as women and women dress as men. During the height of the New “Negro” era and the tourist invasion of Harlem, it was fashionable for the intelligentsia and social leaders of both Harlem and the downtown area to occupy boxes at this ball and “look down from above at the queerly assorted throng on the dancing floor, males in flowing gowns and feathered headdresses and females in tuxedos and box-back suits”.), (Hughes L) He goes on to describe the layout of these balls including a fashion parade including white and black attendees “whites and Negroes who, powdered, wigged, and rouged, mingle and compete for the awards.” (Hughes L)

## HAMILTON LODGE BALL IS SCENE OF SPLENDOR

### Rockland Palace Is Ren- dezvous For the Frail and Freakish Gang

"This is my first time to attend this affair."

When friends and acquaintances met Friday evening, February 14, at the annual masquerade ball of Hamilton Lodge, No. 710, Inc., Grand United Order of Oddfellows, staged this year at Rockland Palace, 155th street and Eighth avenue, the foregoing statement was usually made by at least of the sightseers. So often was it heard that it became a standing joke.

Whether it was one's first or twelfth time to have been present at Hamilton Lodge's widely-advertised and long established spectacular event, the opinion was voiced by all that it was the most extraordinary masquerade of its kind ever witnessed in New York. It is doubtful if a similar show could be pulled off anywhere in the United States.

Rockland was packed to suffocation with participants and spectators. Hundreds of white couples looking for a thrill elbowed, pushed and shoved with colored onlookers and got an eyeful.

It was difficult to distinguish sexes. Scores of males of pronounced effeminate traits gracefully disported themselves in beautiful evening gowns. They might have been mistaken anywhere for fascinating shebas.

#### Many Types Present.

Some wore wigs. Others resembled the mesmerizing maiden of bobbed hair type. Not a few looked like delicate, painted dolls.

White "girls" appeared to be in the majority. It is reported a number came from as far distant as Chicago. Many of the costumes worn were gorgeous, while in several instances the masqueraders walked and danced about displaying shapely limbs, wearing just enough to be within the law.

There were also females rigged up in masculine attire. They too, were often mistaken for real sheiks.

On the ballroom floor it was difficult to tell who was who.

Fig.12 (The New York Age 1930 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1930)





**Chapter Three :Exploring Social Advancements for LGBT Individuals During the Harlem Renaissance** In the last chapter I discussed the Economic progression and the social progression and, in this chapter, I'm discussing what was the life of LGBTQIA+ people in America and further

I wanted to just look a little bit outside of Harlem for a moment just to see what progress and Stagnation in other eras of America its going. Even though there was a lot of progressive spaces in Harlem it still was illegal to exist as a queer person in America it was only legalized in 1962, beginning with Illinois, states began to decriminalize same-sex sexual activity, and in 2003, through Lawrence v. Texas, all remaining laws against same-sex sexual activity were invalidated.

The same would apply to trans people at this time it was a taboo topic in these groups of people who were known but not accepted one of the first recorded cases of an openly trans person was Dr. Alan L. Hart who was assigned female at birth (AFAB) as Alberta Lucille Hart, and was among the first transgender individuals in the United States to get a hysterectomy and use synthetic testosterone to Live as authentically male as he could in these times,(Morgan, 2024)

in his book he discusses his early life with having an attraction to more boyish things and gravitating and feeling more comfortable with the idea of masculinity. Outside of his queer identity Dr Alan was one the people who was very involved in tackling public-health initiatives to counter tuberculosis. And who was a Publisher on 4 important medical journals he was able to thrive as a medical professional in this era not meaning he did not get no objections in this News Paper article below refers to Alan as Woman posing as a man this led to Alan.

**GIRL POSES AS  
MALE DOCTOR  
IN HOSPITAL**

**"Dr. Allen Hart," Who Served as  
Interne in City Institution  
for Month, Is Unmasked**

**SHE DISAPPEARS OVERNIGHT**

**Recognized by Another Physi-  
cian as Former Co-Ed in Stan-  
ford, Miss A. Lucille Hart**

Dr. Allen Hart, a young interne at the San Francisco Hospital, has been discovered as Miss A. Lucille Hart, a former student at Stanford University and a graduate of the University of Oregon, according to the word of Dr. Robert A. Jones, resident physician of the hospital, who last night announced the sudden departure of the interne.

**Fig.13 (San Francisco Examiner, February 5, 1918, Courtesy Chronicling America Library of Congress)**

This era in history was a time when queer performers had a platform more than ever there was a popular phenomenon in this time coined as the “pansy Craze” ( George Chauncey ,1994) This was a term coined to reference those who partook in these drag balls as performers was a time referred to as a golden era of drag where these performers were called “pansies” and it was written about and attended by people high up in society there was a fascination with this art form having high volumes of attendees to these events, I’m going to include some interesting articles from the articles from the “Baltimore Afro American” a Baltimore, Maryland-based African-American weekly newspaper. Founded in 1892, it is the flagship publication of the Afro-American group and the oldest African American family-owned daily in the US. In where they discuss the balls, I think it’s too important to note as much as they do transgender performers and probably don’t use the correct and respectful language to refer to these people it needs to be remembered that these were written by outsiders to this community and as much as this was a very progressive moment in history it wasn’t all the way there in a sense

The first article titled “Margo Pansy, tells of love, woes, and jealousies of the third sex” Before I read this article I felt it important to explain What the third sex it’s something that kept showing up in my research on this topic I discovered that a German lawyer named Karl Heinrich Ulrichs became a vocal supporter of homosexuality in the 1860s after developing a novel theory of its origin that viewed it as neither a sin nor a disease. This essay explains the idea, contextualizes it within Ulrich’s’ life, and demonstrates why, although revolutionary at the time, it was ultimately dropped.

At the beginning of this article, we meet the performer referred to as Margo who by description by the author is “clad in a long blonde wig” with “inch long eyelashes” an evening gown of “old roses” and silk-clad legs with rhinestone studded sandals this cinematic description of this person meant I could almost see the person saying these words in all their beauty, as you get into the article it sets the scene of their character with Margo saying “pity me” “save you tears honey” about the author's sympathy for Margo and people like her and people like them but she assures that “my life is not miserable by any means” which I love as this was truly a time of queer joy and pride. This article is an I wouldn’t say heated but not placid conversation by any means, with questions on why Margo these dresses in female clothes and goes to these balls again she bites back with “It isn’t women that they want to be. No there exists an antagonism between us and all females”, and then a quote that stuck out to me was when they were asked about love and they discuss their friends “Tommy and Bobby who are madly in love and have never had eyes for anyone else then Margo says “ We love deeper than women because society drives us closer together we build up around ourselves a defense wall of devotion because the world is against us” I just loved this quote even for this to be unedited in a newspaper for people to its so interesting to read conversations in this progressive

era while the whole interview isn't perfect when the author asks what could be deemed as offensive but

The next article I looked at starts with a very strong statement that is "Are pansies people?" as below in Fig. 11. A very strong question or could be looked at as a loaded statement as in this era not all people dress in drag or existing as in non-assigned at birth identities were intriguing and enjoyed this is another article I found in the discussion and discourse of this almost subculture of the queer people called pansies, in this they use the word Neuter Gender meaning neither female or male almost giving these people the treatment of a noun in grammar referring to something as neither female or male this article was one of the more this is how the larger population looked at people performing in drag in these clubs. The harsh or venomous quotes I came across commenting on the ball goes looks referring to them as men tripping around in 4 inch heels trying to devalue the art time and dedication that would've been put into these outfits to wear to the balls. The book "Bulldaggers, Pansies and Chocolate Babies" a book about performance race and sexuality discusses "Fiery Debates" (James F. Wilson, 2016) When numbers of eligible member dwindled, on the queer people who are expressing themselves during these times it has a lot of detail even about what the prizes were for these balls for example including an excerpt from the New York age magazine from February 20, 1926 stating the prize for winning one of the balls would be "\$30 in gold cash prizes given away and it goes as follows " first prize \$15 in gold second prize \$10 in gold third prize \$5 in gold will be given to persons wearing the most artistic masquerade costumes"

# Are Pansies People?

AGE-OLD CONTROVERSY RAGES HERE ANEW AS MEN DANCE WITH MEN(?) AT ANNUAL BALL FROM WHICH ALL WOMEN ARE STRICTLY BARRED

## Scientists are Still Baffled as Fag Balls Increase

Neuter Gender Flooding America, Warns New York Magazine. Inverts of Both Sexes Growing Bolder, is Claim.

By RALPH MATTHEWS

Are pansies really people?

This age-old question flared up this week when the neuter gender held their annual promenade at the Elks' Auditorium Friday night, following closely upon the heels of a similar demonstration in New York.

How men can, with apparent ease, convert themselves into women and feel "more comfortable that way," as one of the gay masqueraders explained as he tripped around in pumps with heels four inches high, has always been a problem for speculation by both psychologists and laymen.

The key to this transformation that is as much physical as it is mental has probably been discovered by Dr. Emil Novak, white, gynecologist, who, while the local degenerates were dancing, was explaining to the Baltimore City Medical Society how experiments had proved that a change in the activity of certain glands could change the sex.

The scientist related how he had made a study of a hen, the mother of chicks, that had later been changed into a rooster and became the father of a lot more chicks. An autopsy, said the speaker, revealed that one of the fowl's ductless glands had been destroyed by tuberculosis, releasing the pent-up activity in another part of the hen's glandular system that otherwise would have remained dormant.

Scientists in the university of Chicago report similar experiments in the laboratory of that institution, which show that the superseding of sex works either way.

From these researches it is revealed that in spite of contentions that complete hermaphrodites do not exist in the higher division of animal life, the arresting of one group of tendencies can place an individual on the border line of what we commonly call the "neuter gender."

### Woman, Turning into Man, Saved

Johns Hopkins Hospital authorities report the case of a woman who, after reaching an age of maturity in a perfectly normal female development, suddenly began to grow hair on her chest and develop hard masculine muscles. At the hospital it was discovered that a tumor had partially destroyed certain glands and their activity was arrested. An operation saved her by restoring the productivity of the original glands.



"LADY BALTIMORE"

Swiss scientists cite the instance of a man turned into a woman following an operation. The man, an artist, was rendered deathly ill, periodically, his condition growing more painful with each recurrence of the intermittent attacks. Doctors decided to operate, and the result was that he developed into a perfectly normal woman. His wife, also an artist, continued to be friendly with him, but as a mere companion. Both have their male friends.

The experiment was cited under the caption "A Man Changes His Sex" in an article published in a scientific magazine.

### Third Sex Flooding the Country

That the number of persons afflicted with a lack of sex determination is on the increase in both races is evidenced by an article published

in a current issue of Broadway Brevities, which says:

The third sex is flooding America. It is no longer confined to side streets and obscure corners. Queer people, both men and women, who do not love or feel like ordinary men and women, are increasing. They have their own restaurants. Some bath houses cater to them. An intricate social system built up outside society is dominated by them.

Dances are their big social events. These affairs are held in every large city of the country. Some towns confine the celebrations to private houses. Other cities have cheap halls where the queer people assemble furtively for their revels.

### Europe Had First Public Orgies

Years ago travelers told weird tales of the masked balls of Europe. They swore that men passed themselves off as women and women aped the manners of men so well that they even made love to other females. Americans heard these tales and laughed. They did not believe them. They were sure that nothing existed in their country which was at all comparable.

Only last week, however, New Yorkers saw a display of brazen sexual oddity that cannot be equalled anywhere in the country. It is doubtful whether it can be surpassed in Europe. The affair was the 64th Maskerade and Civic Ball, held at Rockland Palace, 155th Street and Eighth Avenue. It is notorious all over the country and sponsors of the affair say that people from over 25 states were in attendance.

A mob of over 6,000 men, women and oddities attended.

### Women, Also, Love Each Other

That men are not alone in this queer exchange is also pointed out by Broadway Brevities, which says:

The drags are attended by the queens and their sweethearts. Men escort other so-called men who are attired as beautiful women. Women dressed as men escort other women. The dances are gyrations of twisted sex which frequently have their endings in dark corners of the halls.

In the near north side, the masculine women are very conspicuous. One band of about fifteen travels around to all affairs. It is headed by one husky girl who wears overalls rolled up beneath her tweed skirt. When she gets indoors she discards the skirt and swaggers around in the masculine apparel. This particular group is always accompanied by a former pugilist who is paid to protect them from molesting males.

This group preys upon inexperienced girls. Its members tempt the girls with clothing, marijuana and liquor and if successful add their victims to the group. All of the husky-voiced women are well-to-do and most of them possess automobiles in which they take their girl friends on trips to the night spots of the city.

Fig. 14- Afro-American (1893-1988); Apr 2, 1932; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American pg. 3



Fig. 15 ('Pansies' Stage Colourful Ball," published by Baltimore Afro-American on March 21, 1931)

(Fig 15) another photo from the balls from page 10 of "'Pansies' Stage Colourful Ball," published by Baltimore Afro-Americans on March 21, 1931, contains the picture above. "A swarm of men who attended the annual 'art' ball last Friday night at the Monumental Elks' Home, dressed as women," is the original caption. From left to right: Edgard Allen in orchid taffeta; J. Carberry in black faille silk; Alden Garrison in egg-shell satin; and "Sophie" Tucker in ivory satin, I love this picture as in the article above some of the comments of "men" tripping around in 4-inch heels I felt

was disingenuous of the performers who paved the way and were real pioneers of glamour and the glamour they bring in this pictures I see glamorous performers in beautiful gowns holding themselves in glammers poses in beautifully constructed dresses, I see fur I see satin I can almost feel the richness of these garments. Even when people didn't have money, they somehow found a way to construct beautiful trend garments.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, The Ballroom Scene and its popularity wasn't born yesterday or even just in the late '80s and '90s when it first came to the surface of pop culture with Madonna's Vogue (1990) her iconic dance track based on the movements of the dancers created within the ballroom subculture, Madonna is a big was a turning point for the popularisation of ballroom culture as there is a lot of discourse about her relation to the ballroom scene but it's sad to miss it at the end of the day when we think of those iconic hand movements and very particular style of dance 90% of people think of Madonna's Vogue that's another part of why I wanted to write this thesis as I've always been very interested in this culture specifically the 80s and the 90s but always wondered where did this begin.

Within the last couple of years where we saw fiction and reality shows based around this subculture with Tv Shows like Pose (2018) Legendary (2020) Pose being a drama series on fox based off the lives of people partaking in ballroom and culture versus Legendary a reality show competition in which people compete in said categories for the prize but

this subculture didn't develop out of thin air it came it actually was piggy backed by a bigger movement being the Harlem Renaissance in which because of black Americans moving up the breadline and for the first time in years moving from more southern states and finding themselves in bigger cities even though slavery had ended in 1865 this was the first time the black Americans were reaching that middle-class status which allowed people to create space for artists to create new and interesting culture meaning music poetry art which hadn't been able to be done before which then allowed queer people in this Time to create spaces in which they could express themselves but because of how beautiful and expressive these balls where they were able to pull in people outside of the circle. It's something so interesting at points reading I felt we now are moving backward while the people in the 20's were moving forward.

I loved learning about the queer people who came before me and paved the way with their art and self-expression. I enjoyed looking at the important people of this movement as a cultural movement is nothing without extraordinary people steering it like Madam CJ Walker, especially she's someone whom I'd love to research more as she was such an interesting woman who created a whole empire for herself, another element that I would like to explore more would have been the music of this time as the musical is so important in the Renaissance it's the thing that kept the clubs open and it's the very thing that through crowds in reading about the musical is born in this time was so interesting to see that musicals like shuffle along are still being performed today.





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