



The New York Public Library  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**James Reese Europe collection**

1847-1996

Sc MG 616

## Summary

**Creator:** Europe, James Reese, 1881-1919

**Title:** James Reese Europe collection

**Date:** 1847-1996

**Size:** 0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)

**Source:** Gift of James Reese Europe, Jr., May 1997.

**Abstract:** James Reese Europe was an accomplished musician, composer, conductor, organizer, and recording artist. The collection primarily consists of photocopied secondary sources, newspaper clippings, and programs collected by James R. Europe, Jr. to document his father's accomplishments.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], James Reese Europe collection, Sc MG 616, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Accessioned by P. Williams, August 1997.

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the General Research and Reference Division: various books and periodicals

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

**Related Materials:**

James Reese Europe, Jr. papers, Sc MG 629, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

## Creator History

James Reese Europe was an accomplished musician, composer, conductor, organizer, and recording artist. In 1902, at the age of twenty-one, he relocated to New York City and shortly thereafter organized the Clef Club, a union of black musicians and booking agency, as well as a fraternal-like group. In 1912, the Clef Club Orchestra, under the direction of Europe, held a concert in Carnegie Hall that gained the recognition and respect of a primarily white elite audience. From 1914 to 1916, Europe's Society Orchestra toured throughout the United States and overseas with Vernon and Irene Castle, a husband and wife dance team.

During World War I, Europe enlisted in the armed services as a private, passed an officer's exam, and became a lieutenant. As an officer he was assigned to the New York 15th Infantry in Harlem and was told to form a band. On New Year's day 1918, Europe and the band traveled to France and were assigned combat duty under French command. Europe thus became the first African-American officer to lead combat troops into battle. The New York 15th Infantry was later renamed the 369th Infantry, also known as the Harlem Hellfighters. The French also credited Europe with introducing a form of music that later became known as jazz. After World War I ended, Europe returned to the U.S. where he died in 1919, after a backstage altercation with Herbert Wright, (a drummer in his band) who stabbed him in the neck and severed an artery.

## Scope and Content Note

This collection primarily consists of photocopied secondary sources, newspaper clippings, and programs collected by James R. Europe, Jr., to document his father's accomplishments. The contents also include bibliographies; magazine articles; a chronology of the Europe family from 1847 to 1947; a folder of WWI records, with Europe's military discharge records; a certified copy of the incorporation of the Clef Club of New York City; the *Memoirs of Lieutenant Jim Europe*, by Noble Sissle, 1920, (which are actually reminiscences about Europe by Sissle); and excerpts from a biography, *James Reese Europe: A Life in Racetime*, written by Reid Badger in 1995.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American conductors (Music)  
African American entertainers  
African American musicians -- New York (State) -- Societies, etc  
African American soldiers  
African Americans -- Music  
Popular music -- United States -- 1911-1920  
World War, 1914-1918 -- Participation, African American

### Names

Badger, Reid  
Europe, James Reese, 1881-1919  
Sissle, Noble, 1889-1975  
Europe's Society Orchestra  
Jim Europe's 369th Infantry Band  
Jim Europe's Four Harmony Kings  
Jim Europe's Singing Serenaders  
United States. Army

## Container List

### Family

- b. 1 f. 1 J. R. Europe family chronology 1847-1947
- b. 1 f. 2 Europe, Henry J. (Rev.) 1873
- b. 1 f. 3 Europe, Lorraine Saxon 1937
- b. 1 f. 4 Europe, Willie A 1930
- b. 1 f. 5 Europe, Mary Lorraine 1902-1947

### Biographical

- b. 1 f. 6 Estate and memorial service
- b. 1 f. 7 Europe and Blacks, 369th U.S. Infantry 1916-1983
- b. 1 f. 8 *Sissle, Noble. Memoirs of Lieutenant Jim Europe*
- b. 1 f. 9 *James Reese Europe: A Life In Ragtime excerpts*

### Musical career

- b. 1 f. 10-11 List of compositions 1852-1974  
Includes bibliography.
- b. 1 f. 12 Programs and sheet music (reproductions) 1915-1919
- b. 1 f. 14 Clef Club Symphony Orchestra ca. 1910-1919
- b. 1 f. 15 Programs
- b. 1 f. 16 Europe, James Reese, Jr., and Bessie Simms

### European tributes

- b. 1 f. 17 University of Alabama 1986-1993
- b. 1 f. 18 Alabama Music Hall of Fame and Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame 1988-1990
- b. 1 f. 19 *Carnegie Hall News excerpts* 1989
- b. 1 f. 20 Nassau County and U.S. Merchant Marine Academy

### Printed matter

- b. 2 f. 1 1938
- b. 2 f. 2 1969-1975
- b. 2 f. 3 1982-1997
- b. 2 f. 4 Wright, Herbert