



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: 0.6 linear feet (1 1/2 archival boxes)

Source: Gift, James Reese Europe, Jr, May 1997

Abstract: The 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 housed in the Manuscripts collection at LC), and excerpts from a biography, "James Reese Europe: A Life in Racetime" written by Reid Badger, in 1995.

Access: Advance notice required.

Preferred citation: James Reese Europe collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Creator History

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. 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 White, (a drummer in his band) who stabbed him in the neck and severed an artery.

Scope and Content Note

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Arrangement: 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

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

Europe, James Reese, 1881-1919
Badger, Reid
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