

## **Script for "Thriving in Crisis: The Chick Webb Orchestra and the Great Depression"**

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Adapted from Christopher J. Wells, "Go Harlem: Chick Webb and his Dancing Audience during the Great Depression," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014)

Hello everyone, on behalf of the Frankie Manning Foundation and myself I'd like to thank you for joining us. It's a real thrill and an honor for me to present this virtual seminar, especially for this wonderful organization. I'll tell you just a little about myself and how I came to this work. I became a lindy hop dancer in 2003 while I was attending Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina and about two or three months into my learning this dance, Frankie Manning came to Greensboro to give a workshop and he also showed old films and told us stories about the Savoy Ballroom, and as is a common story for a number of dancers, that was when I truly caught the bug and I've been hooked ever since. I ended up going to graduate school for musicology at the University of North Carolina and owing to my deep love of swing music and dance I did my doctoral dissertation on the Chick Webb Orchestra, because I really wanted to dig into the depth of their connection with lindy hop dancers, and as I did this research digging through the numerous mentions of the band in African American newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s, which very fortunately at the time I was doing this research were increasingly available digitally in text searchable databases, so I was really able to find quite a lot.

I also became so fascinated with the band's numerous forms of dynamic engagement with Harlem as a community and especially with the way they managed to not only survive the economic onslaught of the Great Depression but to really thrive and lay the foundation

in the early 1930s for a tremendous amount of success throughout the decade both locally and nationally before Webb's tragic passing in 1939. And when Mandi Gould and I were discussing me giving some kind of virtual talk for the foundation, this topic seemed very timely and very important. When I teach music history it's not just about celebrating the great music and the musicians who produced it, but I teach in a music school so it's also about helping working artists build a playbook of strategies for dealing with a range of different circumstances and challenges that may come up throughout their careers taking inspiration from the centuries of artists who've come before them and navigated all kinds of world-altering crises. So that's where the idea emerges for my talk today, as so many in our community, and especially full-time dancers and full-time musicians have really been rocked and devastated by this pandemic.

Before I get started a couple things I want to note to set some expectations for my talk today. The first is that, and this is a bit unusual for a music history talk, I'm not going to be playing any musical recordings during the talk itself. That's because the focus is more on the venues in which the band performed and the socioeconomic circumstances surrounding those performances but also more importantly because doing this kind of online talk is new territory for me and for us, and the last thing I'd want is to run afoul of some algorithm and get it taken down or muted or something like that. So what I'll do instead is link to a playlist of Chick Webb recordings that I think pair well with some themes and moments in the talk so that you can listen to those recordings on your own time.

The second thing is that rather than speaking off the cuff I'm going to be reading from a script, I'm actually reading from a script right now, and I'm doing it that way for a

couple of reasons. Reason A is that it's kind of standard practice in my field of musicology to give talks this way for better or worse and especially without a live audience to interact with it'll just kind of put me in a comfort zone, and reason B far more importantly is that I know we have a global audience and many people for whom English is a second language tuning in as well as possibly other people with different challenges or needs surrounding hearing and auditory processing, so I wanted to be able to give the Foundation an accurate transcript to post with the talk so that anyone who wants or needs that can follow along with written text or if anyone wants to translate for their home community it might be helpful to have that. I'll also add that the script I prepared is largely adapted from a chapter of my dissertation, which is freely publicly available. So I'll post a link to that as well for anyone who's interested in reading the more expansive research from which I've put this talk together. And after the talk itself, which I'm recording ahead of time to mitigate any potential internet connectivity issues on my end, I'll be available for some live Q&A, which I'm really looking forward to. So, without further ado, let's dive right in.

Chick Webb, was born and raised in Baltimore, and moved to Harlem in the mid-1920s, and it was in Harlem that the virtuoso drummer would emerge as one of the most significant bandleaders of the swing era and as the bandleader most closely associated with Harlem as a community and, most notably for the global lindy hop community, with the Savoy Ballroom. After moving to Harlem, Webb quickly made his mark, and his bands rapidly developed a reputation as among Harlem's finest. In 1929, however, the marketplace for musicians in Harlem, as was true both across the United States and globally, was abruptly and dramatically altered by a stock market crash that triggered the Great Depression, arguably the twentieth century's most significant economic crisis. While

many musicians began to feel the pinch, Webb expressed significant confidence publicly during the early years of the depression. He was one of several bandleaders interviewed by the *Chicago Defender* in late 1931 as worsening conditions impacted black people in all professions. Webb’s response highlighted his band’s attitude of perseverance.

The young musical hounds who constitute the Chicks are not at all frightened by the tenseness of the situation, especially in the orchestral field, and we are confident in our ability to weather the storm with perfect ease. That is a characteristic of ours, and we are by no means intending to be different now. We will blow our way to the top!<sup>1</sup>

While Webb’s boasting may have been more about publicity than substance—and we can’t confirm whether Webb actually said this or if it came from a manager or publicist—his confidence turned out to be prophetic. Webb’s popularity and his financial success did steadily increase throughout the 1930s as his band worked regularly at Harlem’s theaters and ballrooms, recorded prolifically for the Decca label, and was among the first African American dance bands with significant national radio exposure. He managed to achieve success during an economic crisis by adapting skillfully to shifting demands and conditions as the Great Depression’s specific impacts on Harlem restructured the institutional dynamics of public performance. By adapting to changing policies/politics, engaging new patronage systems, working within new labor structures, and seizing new performance opportunities, Webb’s band managed to thrive during the Depression. Their coverage and reception in the black press during this time highlights the band’s capability to adapt nimbly and respond creatively to its circumstances by immersing themselves even more thoroughly into the social life of Harlem’s community.

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<sup>1</sup> Chick Webb, quoted in Andy [no last name given], “Depression Does Not Worry Orchestra Men,” *Chicago Defender*, October 31, 1931.

But to set the stage for this story, let’s back up to the 1920s with a topic that I thought, before the Coronavirus pandemic hit, was going to be more of a central focus for me when giving talks this year, and that’s how our image of the so-called “roaring ‘20s” full of economic prosperity and freewheeling prohibition-era revelry actually obscures the lived experiences of most African Americans, who were struggling tremendously. During the 1920s, Harlem became the largest African American community in the United States, the neighborhood’s black population mushrooming from 20,000 to over 200,000 over the course of the decade.<sup>2</sup> By 1930, Harlem housed eighty percent of Manhattan’s black population.<sup>3</sup> Harlem’s emergence as the United States’ largest and most condensed African American community resulted from a mass immigration of African American immigrants from the rural south and of African diasporic immigrants from the Caribbean and the West Indies among other places to northern cities, what’s come to be known as the “Great Migration,” coupled with a number of formal and informal segregation practices that consolidated and contained those populations in specific neighborhoods.

While black people moved to Harlem seeking opportunity and a chance to participate in the thriving industrial culture of metropolitan New York, they faced severely limited economic and vocational opportunities due to the harsh impacts of segregation. Most Harlem residents lived in overcrowded, substandard housing units, and those with jobs experienced very little job security and even less opportunity for advancement. As Cheryl Greenburg puts it in her very important study of Harlem *Or Does it Explode?*,

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Gill, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America* (New York: Grove Press, 2011), 282.

<sup>3</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenburg, *Or Does it Explode?: Black Harlem in the Great Depression*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15.

"Harlem crumbled into a slum while optimists noticed only advancement. It lived in depression before the Depression."<sup>4</sup> She argues that African Americans were, in economic terms, a not only a race but also a largely homogenous economic class at the bottom rung of New York City's economic ladder, "Blacks fared worse than any other group in the labor force. Opportunities for advancement were few and earnings low. Both employers and unions continued to maintain racial barriers to mobility."<sup>5</sup>

In Harlem's nightlife and entertainment industry, this meant having to navigate intense pressures to accommodate the exploitation of their culture by so-called "white slummers" who effectively wanted to enjoy all the fun and exciting parts of Harlem's nightlife and take little to no responsibility for the ways they benefited from the white supremacist system that yielded the conditions in which the residents who created and maintained that nightlife lived. As a young musician moving from Baltimore to Harlem in the mid-1920s, this is the environment that Webb found himself having to navigate.

As performance historian James F. Wilson described the white slumming phenomenon, "Harlem was perceived and advertised as a site that tempted visitors with possibilities of both social and sexual transgressions," and it promised a "pornographic playground" where adventurous socialites could "publicly enact their private fantasies."<sup>6</sup> White patrons enacted these fantasies within the segregated performance spaces that lined Harlem's main commercial thoroughfare in a series of nightclubs dubbed "jungle alley" for their emphasis on racist stereotypes of black people as more primitive and animalistic than

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<sup>4</sup> Greenburg, *Or Does it Explode?*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Greenburg, *Or Does it Explode?*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> James F. Wilson, *Boondoggles, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 25.

whites. In these spaces, black patrons were turned away by black bouncers to keep clear the distinction between white consumers and the black service workers. As tap dancer James Berry recalled in an interview with Mura Dehn, segregated clubs were vigorously guarded to ensure that wealthy whites from downtown experienced the thrill of apparent danger while receiving protection that kept them extremely safe. White visitors even booked local tour guides to give themselves a taste of "authentic" Harlem culture while still maintaining the distance between the consuming patron and the objects of their racial fantasy.<sup>7</sup> Tap dancer James Berry recalls this dynamic, claiming that "doormen, chauffeurs, guides used to get rich taking people around, mostly people from Europe. They were shown the spots and they came back all the time because they enjoyed themselves."<sup>8</sup> As an economic force, this "pornographic playground" image and the industry it supported traded upon harmful stereotypes as it also infused money into the neighborhood, leveraging the desire for subversive, clandestine bacchanalia brought on by the economic boom of the 1920s.

Webb's band had at least two steady jobs at these segregated Harlem clubs during the late 1920s. In mid-1929, Webb's band took over for Duke Ellington as the house band at the Cotton Club.<sup>9</sup> The Cotton Club, at Lennox Avenue and 142<sup>nd</sup> Street, was the most famous and iconic segregated venue in Harlem. In 1925, it adopted a similar whites-only policy to its chief competitor Connie's Inn, the club that initiated the practice of building Harlem nightclubs to appeal to downtown visitors. In taking over for Ellington at the Cotton Club,

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<sup>7</sup> Wilson, *Boondoggles, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies*, 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> James Berry and Mura Dehn, "Speakeasys," unpublished manuscript, n/d, Mura Dehn Papers on Afro-American Social Dance, Box 2, Folder 20, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Varlack, "Theatre Gossip," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 13, 1929, 5.

Webb stepped into the same role through which Ellington had launched his career with colorful, exotic compositions to accompany the club’s salacious floor shows.

As the Cotton Club is quite well-known and its history broadly available, however, I’m going to speak in more depth about a lesser-known venue where Webb played the prior year. In January 1928, the band began a regular engagement at the Rose-Danceland at 209 West 125<sup>th</sup> street near Seventh Avenue, and it became an important early venue for the band to build its reputation. The *Baltimore Afro-American* described the Rose-Danceland as “the wooziest of creep joints.”<sup>10</sup> The Rose-Danceland distinguished itself from its competition through its late hours—it was open until three a.m. where similar venues closed at one a.m.—and through its promise of attractive “taxi dancers,” women who charged a per-dance fee to dance with the white male patrons. The *Variety* report described the taxi dancing as “a tariff dance idea of a dozen crawls for a dollar with an army of ‘hostesses’ on hand to entertain the visiting fleet.”<sup>11</sup> The presence of taxi dancing facilitated mixed race social dancing without integrating the venue. Again, the practice of taxi dancing in this case maintained the distinction between white consumer and black service worker even on the dance floor. So long as black women’s bodies remained commodities to be rented for entertainment, this risqué, ostensibly dangerous, and subversive interracial contact posed no threat to the venue’s segregated dynamic nor to the broader white supremacist social order that maintained it.

According to the *Afro-American*, Webb’s band was featured regularly at the venue, and the white clientele considered his band a gem within an otherwise underwhelming

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<sup>10</sup> “Webb’s Orchestra is Mainstay of Rose Danceland,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 7, 1928, 7.

<sup>11</sup> “Webb’s Orchestra is Mainstay,” 7.

establishment. Though the venue received little press coverage, it is likely Webb's band was a mainstay throughout the late 1920s. In addition to the aforementioned 1928 account, a 1929 article by Maurice Dancer for the *Pittsburgh Courier* refers to Webb's Harlem Stompers as "regular favorites at Rose-Danceland."<sup>12</sup> The magazine *Variety* described this 11-piece iteration of Webb's group as "the best colored dance band in New York," effectively a single bright spot within an otherwise "common dance hall." *Variety's* critic praised Webb's band for "playing the colored man's jazz az iz[sic]. It's the Caucasian element that knows jazz as iz that has converted an impossible loft into a shrewd moneymaker."<sup>13</sup> So in this language, we see this idea of hip white intellectuals effectively dubbing themselves the arbiters of what real black music was.

However, the situation with these segregated 125<sup>th</sup> street nightclubs does not tell the whole story, because during the 1920s, African Americans also found ways to bypass segregated cultural spaces by constructing their own institutions, and it was out of this independent striving that the Savoy Ballroom was opened in 1926. The Savoy was to serve as a kind of uptown version of the segregated downtown venue the Roseland Ballroom that contested its counterpart's policies by offering a vision of utopian integration where people of all races and circumstances were welcomed. Early announcements in the *New York Amsterdam News* before the Savoy's March 1926 opening emphasized that the architects behind segregated downtown dance palaces like the Roseland and Arcadia were overseeing the new ballroom's construction and decoration and that "thousands of dollars have been

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<sup>12</sup> Maurice Dancer, "Webb's Harlem Stompers, Sterling New York Band, to Play in 'Dew Drop Inn,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 23, 1929, A3.

<sup>13</sup> "Webb's Orchestra is Mainstay," 7.

expended in interior decorations."<sup>14</sup> Despite such expenditures, the Savoy would charge the relatively low admittance fee of fifty cents.

The Savoy also gave black bands a space to play for integrated, though majority black, audiences in a respectable atmosphere. In its advertising, the Savoy emphasized that it would offer black patrons comparable entertainment to the white dance palaces in Harlem and downtown to which they did not have access.

Thousands have found enjoyment at the Savoy since it has been opened, and to the credit of the management be it said that they have always tried to please and hold their large patronage by offering things not to be found at any other place of its kind in the city catering to Negroes.<sup>15</sup>

The *Amsterdam News* hoped the ballroom would "fill a long-felt want and supply that something lacking elsewhere."<sup>16</sup>

Now, the *Amsterdam News* advocated intensely on the Savoy's behalf, encouraging its African American readership to actively support the Savoy and to validate their business model as an integrated venue. They noted that,

The Savoy is being run for the entertainment of colored people until such time when they fail to come out in large enough numbers to warrant the management discontinuing the laudable policy with which they started.<sup>17</sup>

Their support for the venue and their concern that it might be discontinued were by the specter of the segregated Connie's Inn, the segregated venue that inspired the Cotton Club. Their concern was well-founded, because while Connie's Inn is remembered today as Harlem's first major whites-only cabaret, it actually opened in 1923 as an integrated venue,

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<sup>14</sup> "New Savoy Throws Open its Doors to Public in March" *New York Amsterdam News*, February 24, 1926, 5.

<sup>15</sup> "New Savoy Throws Open," 5.

<sup>16</sup> "New Savoy Throws Open," 5.

<sup>17</sup> "Easter to Be Fittingly Celebrated at the Savoy," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 31, 1926, 5.

its advertisements in black papers emphasizing in capital letters that "ALL ARE WELCOME."<sup>18</sup> However, these ads disappeared only four months after Connie's opened, and its management ultimately found that segregation increased its appeal to wealthier downtown whites who could outspend Harlem's black residents and thus proved better for the club's financial bottom line.

Despite scant press coverage to that point, music columnist Eva Jessye reported in July that Webb's Harlem Stompers at the Savoy were "the hottest 8-piece band in the country."<sup>19</sup> Webb and his Harlem Stompers played the Savoy regularly during most of 1927 and returned in July 1928 after an eight-month absence, presumably while the band was in residence at Rose-Danceland.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the primitivist discourse surrounding the so-called "Jungle Music" at the Cotton Club and along Jungle Alley, the Savoy praised its dance bands as disciplined and orderly, offering audiences a chance to "trip the light fantastic to the melodious strains emanating from a highly trained orchestra."<sup>21</sup> The Savoy also boasted of its employee compensation, claiming it paid each married male employee no less than \$40 per week and that musicians averaged \$75 per week, close to \$600 and \$1100 in today's dollars respectively, and roughly three times the average salary for men in Harlem at the time.<sup>22</sup>

So, as Webb and his contemporaries were making a good living at the Savoy and at a range of other Harlem venues, the landscape around them shifted in late 1929 when a wave

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<sup>18</sup> Advertisements featuring this phrase ran weekly on page 5 of the *New York Amsterdam News* from August 5-September 26, 1923.

<sup>19</sup> Eva Jessye, "Around New York," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 2, 1927, 9.

<sup>20</sup> "Amateur Gives 'Kongo-King'," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 21, 1928, 9.

<sup>21</sup> "New Savoy Throws Open its Doors to Public in March," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 24, 1926, 5.

<sup>22</sup> "Savoy Takes Over New Alhambra Ballroom," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 14, 1929, A3.

of stock speculation finally crested bursting a bubble of roaring 20s optimism and sparking the Great Depression, the most severe financial crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The onset of the Great Depression hit communities throughout the United States hard, but it hit Harlem and other black neighborhoods even harder. Compared with 10% unemployment nationwide and roughly 17% in New York City, Harlem's unemployment lingered around 25% in 1930 and doubled to an astounding 50% by 1933.<sup>23</sup> Those residents lucky enough to find work generally found positions well below their levels of experience or education and were earning only 50-80% of white salaries for similar positions and were working significantly longer work weeks.<sup>24</sup> Frustration and desperation made Harlem a much more dangerous place to live as its already high murder rate more than tripled. Harlem was still better off than many black communities nationwide, yet this further compounded the neighborhood's overpopulation problem as still more desperate migrants flooded the area. The increasing demand for housing causing a further spike in rental prices for what were still substandard dwellings.<sup>25</sup>

For all the damage the depression wrought on Harlem's African American population, it did force the entertainment industry to refocus their efforts on black audiences. The economic impact on middle- and upper-class whites prompted a change in social behavior as former Harlem "slummers" saw their budgets for leisure spending evaporate. Since black Harlem suffered economically to a more significant extent than the rest of the city, one would assume their patronage of lavish nightspots like the Savoy and

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<sup>23</sup> Greenburg, *Or Does it Explode?*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Gill, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America* (New York: Grove Press, 2011), 283, 292.

<sup>25</sup> Gill, *Harlem*, 284-5.

the Lafayette would similarly drop off. However, the reverse actually seems to have been true as the venues that survived actually bolstered the role of black patronage in their business models.

So, why was this the case? I'll suggest two explanations for this phenomenon. First, while Harlem's black population suffered disproportionate impacts economically, the shift in their circumstances was one of degree rather than of kind. Again, as Cheryl Greenburg articulates, Harlem like most black communities experienced a "depression before the Depression." Essentially nightlife and entertainment targeting black audiences had already thrived in an atmosphere of high unemployment and low wages throughout the 1920s. While the 1929 crash radically altered the life circumstances, outlooks and spending patterns of those who had prospered during the "roaring 20s," as Frankie Manning himself put it, the depression years "didn't make that much difference to my family since we were poor anyway."<sup>26</sup> Or, as the housekeeper of sociologist E. Franklin Frazier reportedly said, "I don't know nothin' 'bout no Depression, I ain't seen nuthin' but hard times all my life."<sup>27</sup>

So, the Savoy Ballroom thus continued drawing robust crowds, for as Manning elaborates, "dancing was an outlet for people because there wasn't much else they could do. We all stayed in Harlem, but you could find someplace to step out every night of the week. Going to a ballroom became our social life."<sup>28</sup> While the depression may have killed the trend of exotic slumming for wealthy whites, for them Harlem nightlife was a subversive luxury good. For black Harlem residents, ballrooms and entertainment venues

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<sup>26</sup> Frankie Manning and Cynthia Millman, *Frankie Manning: Ambassador of Lindy Hop* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008), 67.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Gill, *Harlem*, 282.

<sup>28</sup> Manning and Millman, *Ambassador of Lindy Hop*, 67.

were a necessity, a vital element of public culture and community life.

Ballrooms like the actually became increasingly important as need community increased during the depression. In response to government indifference, African Americans in Harlem continued the practice of creating the public and social infrastructure denied them by a city government relatively unconcerned with Harlem's significant needs. Social services were routed through churches and fraternities, which provided aid to residents. In response to the Depression, social clubs took on an even more active role in sponsoring dances and other events in the 1930s, and Webb's band performed much more frequently at dances sponsored by different types of Harlem clubs.

We can see the importance of this phenomenon and the Webb band's crucial role in it by taking a close look at the Alhambra Ballroom, where Webb and his orchestra were in residence 1930 for the bulk of the year 1930. The Alhambra's central focus at this time was to host dances sponsored by the many clubs that were so central to Harlem's social culture at the time. The Alhambra Owned by the Keith-Albee Vaudeville monopoly, and it was originally called the Million Dollar Ballroom until it was renamed and reopened in 1928 after a significant refurbishing and rebranding to model itself after the Savoy when that ballroom saw early success. It functioned largely as a venue for society functions and basketball games, though it closed its doors within a year. In July 1929, however, the Savoy Ballroom's management leased the Alhambra from Keith-Albee and reopened it as a venue that exclusively courted business from social clubs.<sup>29</sup> The Savoy's management took out weekly ads claiming the Alhambra "is destined to be the pronounced favorite of the

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<sup>29</sup> "Savoy Management Takes Over Alhambra Ballroom," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 24, 1929, 13.

Smartest and most Exclusive clubs and fraternal organizations."<sup>30</sup> When they came on board in January 1930, Webb's band was included as part of a rental package for society parties and social functions.<sup>31</sup>

Groups often held these functions annually, and some with much greater frequency, as a core piece of their contribution to social life in Harlem. While some of these events were simply formal or informal dances, others took the form of "gala" spectacles complete with floorshows and elaborate decorations. For example, one of Webb's earliest gigs at the Alhambra was a dance given by the Debutante Club, described as "one of New York's exclusive younger girls clubs," at which invited guests wore formal evening gowns and members performed classical ballet at intermission.<sup>32</sup> Featuring Webb at their formal "dance and sip" event, the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity covered the ballroom in streamers representing their club colors, and "an avalanche of balloons-Sigma colors also, and autographed by the frat, rained down on the dancers."<sup>33</sup> The all-male Alwyns Club, for their spring dance, brought in E. Ronald Eason, a decorator from Chicago to elaborately transform the ballroom. Per the *Amsterdam News*,

The entire scheme of decoration was that of a beautiful English garden and was built around a beautiful fountain topped by a marble faun. A profusion of palms and shrubbery, with garden seats here and there, together with the aid of soft, shimmering lights, made the illusion complete.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to Webb's music, the affair included an interpretive dancer and a performance

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<sup>30</sup> Advertisement, *New York Amsterdam News* July 31, 1929, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Advertisements for this arrangement ran weekly in the *New York Amsterdam News* on page 9 from September 17-October 1, 1930 and on page 11 on October 8, 1930.

<sup>32</sup> "Tid-Bits of New York Society," *Chicago Defender*, January 18, 1930, 5; "New York," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 25, 1930, 5.

<sup>33</sup> "Jerry," "The Social Whirl," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 3, 1930, 7.

<sup>34</sup> "Alwyns Club Sponsors Dance: E.R. Eason Supervises Unique Decoration of Ballroom," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 30, 1930, 6.

by students from the Ann Johnson Dancing School.

The Alhambra provided a strong venue for these sorts of affairs as its infrastructure, which the Savoy reportedly spent \$50,000 renovating, lent itself to both social dancing and the performance of high society galas.<sup>35</sup> It was decorated in gold and Nile green and had palm trees lining the entrance to the dance floor.<sup>36</sup> For most of these dances, one could purchase admission for a dollar, but one could also pay five dollars for one of the "reserve boxes" that ran in a ring around the dance floor from the ballroom's mezzanine level. Along with an evening of social dancing, the affairs often included a group sing-a-long of the club's anthem and a grand march or waltz reserved for the club's members to parade with their escorts before hundreds or thousands of guests. Clubs thus leveraged the aristocratic associations of European ballroom dancing to craft public spectacles wholly different from the floorshows of Jungle Alley nightclubs.

The Alhambra's management, again the same team that ran the Savoy, facilitated the venue's transition into a space for social club culture to flourish by offering a safe and attractive financial incentive to social clubs for whom it was increasingly important to minimize expenditures given the challenging financial climate. Under the management of Charles Buchanan's protégé Harold Parker, the Alhambra ran advertisements in the *New York Amsterdam News* throughout 1930 offering Webb's band as one part of a money-saving package for social clubs, who could use these events as profitable fundraisers either for their own sustaining funds or for charitable causes. As it was under the same management, the Alhambra's arrangements with clubs were likely modeled on the Savoy's

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<sup>35</sup> "Alhambra Now Open for Booking," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 21, 1929, 8.

<sup>36</sup> "Alhambra Ballroom has Grand Opening," *Chicago Defender*, September 21, 1929, 11.

innovative financial guarantee. The Savoy had appealed to society clubs essentially since the day it opened by guaranteeing financial returns and protecting club members from financial risk. A 1926 bulletin spelled out the Savoy's new program.

[Clubs] find it unnecessary (due to our unique profit sharing plan) to worry about what music to engage, or the various other complications required to prepare an evening's entertainment for a large crowd. We have systematized the entire procedure so that members of your organization can concentrate their entire time and attention on whatever means are employed to draw a large attendance for the dance. Above all-no one is compelled to obligate themselves with guarantees-you have that feeling of relief knowing that you have no bills to meet for music, rentals, advertising, etc. IN FACT-ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TELL YOUR FRIENDS YOU ARE CONDUCTING A DANCE AT THE SAVOY-URGE THEM TO COME-AND WHEN THE DANCE IS OVER COME INTO OUR BUSINESS OFFICE AND COLLECT YOUR SHARE OF THE RECEIPTS.<sup>37</sup>

Pretty sweet deal, right? With the onset of the depression, the Savoy's ability to absorb financial risk made its arrangements even more popular with society clubs.

After he left the Alhambra, Webb began a consistent residence at the Savoy that would define his career throughout the mid- and late 1930s when he became the Savoy's most famous "house band." Throughout his time at the Savoy, Webb performed hot music for social dancing and for lindy hop competitions, the stuff we're all more familiar with, but the band also continued performing for the types of society functions for which he had performed at the Alhambra. A 1933 report in the *New York Amsterdam News* indicates the Savoy diversified its offerings by adding "hot floor shows" like the Lafayette and by continuing and extending its business with social clubs.

Fighting against the wave of depression that has carried other places of its kind under, the Savoy has instituted an elastic policy, which will permit clubs, especially the long established organizations, to secure the place without the least chance of losing in the arrangement of their affairs.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Savoy Ballroom, "A Message to All Members," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 19, 1936, 3.

<sup>38</sup> "Revues Topped at Dance Hall," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 17, 1933, 8.

In 1935, the band played alongside Fess Williams' orchestra for the formal spring dances of the Brooklyn Phi Beta Sigma chapter and the Happy Hour Social Club.<sup>39</sup> The following year, the group played for a spike of spring club events. The Polyana club insisted on a strict black and white dress code for their invite-only affair, and the Savoy's bouncers both scrutinized invitations and turned away anyone otherwise attired.<sup>40</sup> These parties included the "syncopated dance music" Webb's band enshrined on record, but also a wider variety of music for two-steps and waltzes. Indeed, most club dances included at least one "featured waltz" exclusively for club members and their dates.<sup>41</sup>

This history also helps explain the band's musical range and flexibility. Webb is most often remembered and celebrated for his hard-driving swing arrangements, owing of course to its catalogue of recordings and its reputation as the hottest band in the land from its famous battles against the Goodman and Basie orchestra in the late '30s. However, black newspapers indicate that Webb's band, especially in the early '30s also had a strong reputation for playing "sweet music": softer, sentimental popular arrangements that were far more broadly commercially popular than hot swing music was at the time. During a visit to the Savoy in 1930, *Baltimore Afro-American* reporter George Tyler noted that while Andy Kirk's band supplied the "dizzying" hot music for lindy hoppers, Webb's band offered a much softer vibe. "Soft lights over head, on the side lines of the walls, and at our feet, behind the orchestra floats grey clouds, the moon is in evidence, there is the soft tantalizing waltz strains by Chick Webb and his Chicks, to add a breath of romance to the evening."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "700 Members at Spring Formal," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 18, 1935, 6.

<sup>40</sup> "Polyana Club Has Black and White Formal," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 16, 1936, 6.

<sup>41</sup> For one example of this format, see "Papillons Stage Savoy Dansante," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 9, 1936, 6.

<sup>42</sup> George D. Tyler, "Harlem Rambles: Tyler Gets Lowdown on Savoy Hostesses," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 6, 1930, 9.

While some clubs used gala events to raise funds for their own club functions, others used them to advance agendas of economic empowerment, social uplift, and charitable giving. In 1930, Webb played for an Alhambra function sponsored by the students at Harlem's Lincoln Secretarial School. The dance was a platform for the trade school's white President, Gilby Robinson, to announce plans to open a department store "as a means of combating the discrimination of race as it is practiced by the leading white concerns."<sup>43</sup> The Webb band's involvement in charitable work was especially pronounced during the Christmas season. Webb returned to the Lafayette Theatre for a midnight benefit show sponsored by the local Elks Lodge (Imperial Lodge no. 127) alongside the cast of the revue from Small's Paradise to bolster "the Imperial Lodge's efforts to obtain funds for feeding as many as apply on Christmas Day at the home."<sup>44</sup> Webb also joined an interracial fundraiser at the Roseland Ballroom where his was one of 22 bands, among them Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington, that joined MC Rudee Valee for a Christmas relief benefit.<sup>45</sup>

Webb's involvement with both charitable and political fundraisers continued throughout the early and mid-1930s. In early 1932, the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee's Harlem division staged a "Jobless Benefit" at the Lafayette, which featured a plethora of bands and dance acts including Don Redman and Cab Calloway's bands and eccentric dancer Earl "Snakehips" Tucker; the Lenox Club, Small's Paradise, Connie's Inn, and the Cotton Club all lent out their current bands and variety show casts to contribute.<sup>46</sup> In 1934, he played for the black members of the Knott Hotel Employees Benevolent

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<sup>43</sup> "Club Sponsors Informal Dance," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 16, 1930, 7.

<sup>44</sup> "Imperial Lodge Benefit Next Week a Big One," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 10, 1930, 5.

<sup>45</sup> "Gulf Coast Four Stopping in City," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 20, 1930, 1.

<sup>46</sup> "Posner to Stage Jobless Benefit," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 30, 1931, 10.

Association and also joined Al Jolson, Bill Robinson, Ethel Waters, and Willie Bryant's Orchestra at the Apollo Theater for a summer benefit for the Harlem Children's Fresh Air Fund, through which the Mahopac Democratic Club sought to "send many of the Harlem youngsters to camp during the hot weather."<sup>47</sup>

In 1935, his band furnished the music for a Savoy Ballroom fundraiser for the defendants of the Scottsboro Trial, which was sponsored by the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners.<sup>48</sup> Also at the Savoy, they joined Duke Ellington and Claude Hopkins' orchestras along with dance acts including Buck and Bubbles and the Mills Brothers to help the Frederick Douglass chapter of the John Brown Memorial Association raise funds to erect a statue in Harlem of John Brown, a famous nineteenth century advocate for the abolition of slavery. Local churches were also asked to hold special sermons and direct parishioners to the event.<sup>49</sup> This type of charitable engagement became a pattern for Webb, who in 1936 donated personal funds to flood relief and offered to play for any function nationwide benefitting victims of widespread flooding.<sup>50</sup>

Webb's enthusiasm for charity work and benefit gigs extended his reach and visibility with white audiences including the upper reaches of New York society. He appeared on stage at the Metropolitan Opera House in April 1935 as a surprise act for the Met's annual fundraiser benefitting its maintenance fund. Webb's participation received significant coverage in the black press, for, as the *New York Amsterdam News* put it, "the fact that Chick Webb of Harlem stepped out in such famous company made this section of

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<sup>47</sup> "Many Stars Carded for Apollo Benefit Show," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 30, 1934, 6.

<sup>48</sup> "Huey Master of Ceremonies at Savoy Scottsboro Ball," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 2, 1935, 10.

<sup>49</sup> "John Brown League to Present Benefit," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 29, 1934, 13.

<sup>50</sup> "Offers Aid to Flood Victims," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 25, 1936, 1.

the community raise its eyebrows.”<sup>51</sup> With this event, Webb’s group became the first African American band to ever perform at the Metropolitan Opera House.<sup>52</sup> Shortly following his appearance at the Met, Webb’s band was tapped by the musician’s union for a city-wide benefit where orchestras toured through ballrooms all over the New York City. The one-night circuit included other prominent black bands such as Claude Hopkins’ and Don Redman’s, but it also included the most prominent white orchestras at the time—Paul Whiteman’s and Guy Lombardo’s bands.<sup>53</sup>

So finally, I’d like to revisit the Rose-Danceland, the segregated Jungle Alley taxi dancing club, I discussed earlier in this talk, to show what a difference just a few years can make, and because it’s strange history is very broadly instructive regarding some of the most important social and economic forces at play in Harlem’s ballrooms scene during this time period. In March of 1933, Webb left the Savoy management’s umbrella to take up residence at the new Dixie Ballroom. The Dixie was a grand reimagining, effectively a re-branding of the segregated Rose-Danceland: the segregated “creep joint” where Webb had played regularly in 1928, which was now re-designed as an upscale integrated ballroom to rival the Savoy. Now this Dixie Ballroom residency is really no more than a minor blip on the radar of Webb’s storied career. Within a month, Webb’s band left the Dixie after management repeatedly failed to compensate them.<sup>54</sup> By May, Webb’s band was back at the Savoy playing opposite Fess Williams.<sup>55</sup> So by any reasonable measure, the Dixie Ballroom

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<sup>51</sup> “Chick Webb Gets Spot on the Metropolitan Benefit,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 6, 1935, 10. This story ran concurrently in the *Chicago Defender*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, and *Atlanta Daily World*.

<sup>52</sup> Rollo S. Vest, “The Lowdown,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 9, 1935, 3.

<sup>53</sup> “Chick Webb Continues to Hold the Spotlight,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 20, 1935, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Maurice Dancer, “Harlem By Night,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 25, 1933, A9.

<sup>55</sup> Advertisement, *New York Amsterdam News*, May 3, 1933, 8.

was a complete flop, yet the circumstances and rhetoric surrounding its brief life reveal crucial shifts in the social, economic, and racial dynamics of Harlem’s nightlife that had far-reaching impacts throughout the 1930s on Webb’s career and on Harlem’s cultural and political life more broadly. Specifically, the Dixie Ballroom offers a window into a moment in time that truly underscores the erosion of white “slumming” culture and a resultant push for more integration as well as a crescendo of anger and frustration surrounding the persistent, racially-driven economic oppression along Harlem’s main commercial thoroughfare of 125<sup>th</sup> street.

Owing to the Savoy’s continuing success, which it enjoyed for the numerous reasons I’ve outlined, other venues turned their attention towards young black clientele. In early 1933, the Rose-Danceland, the “creep joint” where Webb played in 1928, dropped its segregated policies and completely recast itself as an integrated dance palace to rival the Savoy. Seeking to capitalize on and replicate the Savoy’s successful operations, they brought in Harold Parker as ballroom manager, a longtime Savoy assistant who had managed the Savoy for a year in Charles Buchannan’s absence. Parker oversaw a complete refurbishing and redecoration of the dance hall in an effort to rival the splash made by the Savoy’s opening seven years prior.<sup>56</sup> In early press releases about the change, Parker announced that Webb’s orchestra would serve as the ballroom’s stable house band as they had come off a successful run in this capacity at the Savoy during 1932 and at the Savoy-run Alhambra in 1930 when Parker was manager there. The *Chicago Defender* reported that the “news of the new pleasure palace has caused great comment from the younger set in Harlem. Up to now the Savoy has held the attention of the hopping crowd. Now it is

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<sup>56</sup> “Dixie Ballroom in Splendid Bow,” *New York Amsterdam News*, March 8, 1933, 5.

expected that the floors of the Dixie will rebound to the leaping of the sheiks and the ladies."<sup>57</sup> Early press announcements routinely referred to the Savoy as the Dixie's model, and Parker's strategy seems to have been to set admission price points even below the Savoy's already low fees. This advertisement shows a Savoy breakfast dance billed at 85¢ and immediately below it an ad for the Dixie Ballroom, featuring Teddy Hill and Chick Webb, for 35¢ men and 25¢ women. The ballroom's opening placed pressure on the Savoy to lower its prices, and the *Amsterdam News* alluded they were feeling the pressure, reporting that "the opening of the new place has already brought about competition in Harlem Ballrooms, and prices have been lowered at one of the older places."<sup>58</sup>

As the *Chicago Defender* noted, the new dance palace was especially promising given its location on 125<sup>th</sup> street and Seventh Avenue. As this street was both Harlem's most segregated and symbolically important thoroughfare, the Dixie powerfully represented "the first step taken by Negroes to occupy space on West 125<sup>th</sup> street." As the *Defender* further observed in celebrating the Dixie's opening, "More employment is offered. Race people and the community rejoices."<sup>59</sup> The ballroom thus marked racial progress against both cultural and economic segregation as it represented a push into Harlem's central thoroughfare, a street whose segregated spaces would drive the frustration behind race riots only two years later. Indeed, according to 1931 figures, African Americans owned less than 20% of Central Harlem businesses.<sup>60</sup> The *Pittsburgh Courier* emphasized the event's potential significance, underscoring that,

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<sup>57</sup> "Roseland Dance Hall is Harlem's Latest Fun Place," *Chicago Defender*, March 4, 1933, 5.

<sup>58</sup> "Parker Manager of New Dixie Ballroom," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 1, 1933, 8.

<sup>59</sup> "Dixie Ballroom in Splendid Bow," 5.

<sup>60</sup> Greenburg, *Or Does it Explode?*, 61.

Whites have long resisted the Negro's invasion of 125<sup>th</sup> street. Some years ago the Alhambra theatre, 126<sup>th</sup> street and Seventh Avenue, had a policy of segregation which finally resulted in the house going colored. Next it was Loew's Victoria on 125<sup>th</sup> street just around the corner from the Alhambra, but the depression caused all theaters in the neighborhood to let down the color bar.<sup>61</sup>

The Dixie Ballroom's opening night was promising; it featured three bands led by Chick Webb, Teddy Hill, and Claude Hopkins and included a slate of VIP guests from Harlem's entertainment industry including Kaiser Marshall, Lillian Cowan, and other "stars from Connie's Inn, the Radium Club, and other Harlem hot spots."<sup>62</sup> The opening night crowd reportedly numbered over 2,000 and packed the ballroom to its capacity. Maurice Dancer gave an account of the scene for his "Harlem By Night" column in the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

Thursday nite, one of the largest crowds we've witnessed of late trying to gain entrance to the lately turned from white to colored Dixie Ballroom...smuggled through the rear door, we find Harold Parker, former manager of the Savoy Ballroom, actually turning them away...packed like sardines on the dance floor, they attempt to shuffle to those Teddy Hill and Chick Webb hot tunes.<sup>63</sup>

Noting the array of young patrons dancing the lindy hop and the waltz, the *New York Amsterdam News* encouragingly projected tremendous success for the ballroom, offering the following assessment: "Most artistically arranged, one of America's finest ballrooms will continue to present, as it did on its opening night, entertainment, music and sizzling programs that will thrill you."<sup>64</sup>

The *Amsterdam News*' hopeful prediction, however, never came to fruition. Despite the hopes of replicating or surpassing the Savoy's success on 125<sup>th</sup> Street, the ballroom closed after only two months, citing lagging attendance and a resultant inability to pay its

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<sup>61</sup> "Harlemites Invading 125<sup>th</sup> st.," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 11, 1933, 2.

<sup>62</sup> "Dixie Ballroom in Splendid Bow," 5.

<sup>63</sup> Dancer, "Harlem By Night," March 11, 1933, A6.

<sup>64</sup> "Dixie Ballroom in Splendid Bow," 5.

musicians. The Dixie switched from a two-band to single band format featuring Kaiser Marshall, yet still failed to draw a sufficient audience to sustain the business.<sup>65</sup> Though the Dixie's opening was met with optimistic, uplift-driven rhetoric, only two months later the *Amsterdam News* offered a more cynical view of the motivations behind its efforts. "Despite the growth of Negro families in the community, the Dixie [as Rose-Danceland] continued to cater to whites only until forced by changing conditions to make an appeal for the darker trade. ...the Dixie installed the Savoy policy, but business never picked up."<sup>66</sup> So, while the Dixie failed, its attempt to survive in the new environment helps bolster an observation I made earlier: that the depression's erosion of white slummers' leisure budgets had clearly made formerly successful segregated venues in Harlem, as the Rose-Danceland had once been, no longer viable. Harlem venues that did not wish to integrate for ideological reasons were being forced to for economic ones. Now, although Charles Buchanan claimed the Dixie's run had no impact on the Savoy, they did adjust their already low prices further downwards. An advertisement that ran on the same newspaper page as the aforementioned article about the Dixie's closure advertised the Savoy's new reduced entry fees for Saturday evenings at 65¢ for men and 35¢ for women and Sunday matinees for 50¢.

While the Dixie Ballroom was clearly a failed effort that never had a significant impact on the Harlem ballroom scene, the logic and strategies behind its creation as well as the newspaper rhetoric surrounding its brief run at the Savoy yield important information about the ballroom landscape in Harlem and the Depression's impact on it. Emphasis on the Dixie's efforts to ape the Savoy Ballroom's upscale décor and integrated format bolster

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<sup>65</sup> "Lack of Patronage Forces Dance Hall to Close," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 3, 1933, 8.

<sup>66</sup> "Lack of Patronage," 8.

the evidence that the Savoy was uniquely able to sustain its business amid the shifting economic landscape. The Dixie's attempts, however, to challenge the Savoy validate the exceptional nature of its business model yet also suggest that other ballrooms failed to generate sufficient demand to expand it, which makes it all the more important for Webb's relative success during the 1930s that he maintained a positive relationship with the Savoy Ballroom's management and a steady gig there as leader of the house band.

One final point I'd like to underscore is Webb's active involvement with several organizations supporting African American musicians. His prolific appearances in stage and nightclub reviews, for example were likely linked to his membership in the Rhythm Club, an organization that aided black bandleaders finding work. Founded in 1927 by Chicago musician Bert Hall on 132<sup>nd</sup> street, the Rhythm Club functioned as a nightclub and musicians' hangout but more importantly as a collective self-help organization for black musicians. Hall's club was part of a wave of similar organizations that sought to combat structural discrimination through mutual aid and organized collective advocacy. For example, in 1930, Harlem grocers founded the Colored Merchants Association to negotiate collectively with wholesalers and otherwise improve their business models through cooperative initiatives.<sup>67</sup> The Harlem Business Men's Club formed due to segregated policies that excluded black business owners from the Harlem Board of Commerce.<sup>68</sup>

Hall also had a strong model for this type of organization for musicians specifically within Harlem's history as James Reese Europe's Clef Club had similarly organized black musicians two decades prior and had expanded their placement at theaters and ballrooms

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<sup>67</sup> Greenburg, *Or Does it Explode?*, 61.

<sup>68</sup> "Harlemites Invading 125<sup>th</sup> St.," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 11, 1933, 2.

through the organization’s collective reputation for professionalism and excellence. By 1933, the Rhythm Club had over 1,500 members and boasted on its rolls “the names of most of the leading Negro artists in America.”<sup>69</sup> In addition to its President Teddy Hill—who would later famously manage Minton’s Playhouse—the Rhythm Club counted among its members Webb, Fletcher Henderson, “Fess” Williams, and Claude Hopkins, all of whom were featured regularly in both ballrooms and large reviews.<sup>70</sup> Before his death in 1933, Bert Hall had used his successful efforts with the Rhythm Club to expand black participation in the musicians’ union, Local 802 for whom Webb did fundraising and benefit work as I discussed earlier. Webb’s band also became represented by Associated Colored Orchestras management, who helped him secure bookings both locally and nationally. Most major black bands in New York aligned themselves with the ACO including Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Fess Williams, Vernon Andrade, and Mills Blue Rhythm Boys. The ACO also succeeded at increasing black bands’ access to the radio airwaves, and Webb took particularly strong advantage of this opportunity.

By 1931, ACO bands were featured regularly on two radio stations: WMCA and WPCH. These stations were owned by Donald Flamm, the press agent and publisher behind the *Theatre Guide* magazine that promoted Broadway entertainment, and he was a strong proponent of featuring black entertainment on his stations.<sup>71</sup> Their vision fit the demands of radio as a medium, which sought both to fill massive amounts of airtime with programming and to diversify that program to reach as many demographics of listeners as possible. As the *Pittsburgh Courier* explained the medium’s potential:

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<sup>69</sup> “Bert Hall Rhythm Club Has Memorial,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 25, 1933, 8.

<sup>70</sup> “Shrine to Musicians Erected,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 18, 1933, A6.

<sup>71</sup> “New York is Home of Big Time Radio Acts,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 3, 1931.

In view of the fact that radio has universalized its programs with a view to catering to every group, class, and variety of its gigantic audience, the Negro has played his rightful part in every parity or significant designation.<sup>72</sup>

While other orchestras made only periodic appearances, Webb proved to have significant staying power on the airwaves. The same month as the aforementioned piece ran in the *Courier*, the *Chicago Defender* reported that Webb "is the only leader whose band can be heard over the radio nightly. Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Blue Rhythm and the rest have all ceased playing over the air, but Webb remains."<sup>73</sup> Webb's band in fact became omnipresent on the radio during the early 1930s, ultimately receiving a sustaining program, three times weekly on WNBC, and he was one of the first if not the first African American bandleaders to do so. By integrating his band into the realms of institutional advocacy and benevolent fundraising, Webb participated actively in the growing culture of local institution building through which Harlemites responded to the declining economy and to relative indifference from the official engines of public relief.

Ultimately I think there are a number of important lessons to learn here for working artists and really for everyone, during this terrible pandemic we're all facing, regarding resilience, flexibility, seeing the possibilities of new media technologies, in Webb's case radio, but I think most importantly the value of serving and working within one's community and through community-based structures of mutual support as a meaningful pathway to multiple kinds of success. And in addition to being a virtuoso drummer, I think this kind of community engagement with his local fanbase in Harlem is central to Chick Webb's success and really the thing I've always found most fascinating

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<sup>72</sup> "New York is Home"

<sup>73</sup> "Keeps Place on Radio," *Chicago Defender*, October 24, 1931, 5.

about this band. So normally I would put a bow on this sort of a talk with some very profoundly worded conclusion, but under these circumstances, and in the spirit of this idea of centering the community, I'm hoping we can use the Q&A period to build that conclusion together. I want to hear from you all about what you're doing in your communities, where and how this talk hits home for you. How does Chick Webb's work and the community of Harlem as a whole, thriving during a period of tremendous crisis move you to expand in new directions, try new things, organize and offer new kinds of support to your friends and neighbors. Let's talk about it, and thank you very much for your time and attention.