

# James Reese Europe: The Jazz Lieutenant

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Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to read *A Lovely War* by Julie Berry. This historical fiction novel chronicles the experiences of four characters during WWI while highlighting the impact of the 369th Infantry Regiment band, led by James Reese Europe. I was intrigued reading about how he helped spread a whole new genre of music to Europe, and I wanted to learn more. After conducting preliminary research, I discovered more about the trailblazer who led this group, James Reese Europe. The more information I acquired, the more I realized he is the quintessential unsung hero. I was spellbound by the story of this forgotten man who contributed to African-American musicians and to American music; I felt compelled to tell his story.

After acquiring background knowledge about James Reese Europe, I began to delve more deeply into different resources pertaining specifically to him. One of the most valuable resources I discovered was *A Life in Ragtime* by Reid Badger. This biography provided a plethora of information and primary quotes, thus enriching my understanding of his work. My research then led me to visit the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. There, I viewed dozens of primary sources, further enhancing my understanding of his experiences. I was fortunate enough to talk to Dr. Michael Dinwiddie, Professor David Gilbert, author Max Brooks, and musician Jason Moran. These individuals all have unique perspectives and expertise with regard to James Reese Europe. They expanded my knowledge of the difficulties James Reese Europe and other African-American musicians faced, and expounded on the repercussions of these racial and cultural barriers.

There were a number of factors that led to my decision to present my research as a website. Last year, I had the good fortune to spend a considerable amount of time working on websites, so I learned how to take full advantage of the features that make the website category unique. I appreciated that the website category would allow me to share the music of James Reese Europe. I knew that the variety of elements available allowed me to create a visually-stunning yet informative project. I chose to use magenta and olive green for my theme colors. The magenta represents James Reese Europe's music career, as it was a color I saw in many early ragtime score covers; the olive green represents his career in the military.

In the early 1910s, James Reese Europe saw the stereotypes and unfair working conditions plaguing African-American musicians and decided to eliminate the obstacles that restricted black musicians from advancing their careers. Furthermore, he introduced jazz to Europe, and he helped ensure that the genre would have a welcome reception both in America and abroad. James Reese Europe broke barriers restricting African-American professionals and paved a path for the subsequent Harlem Renaissance. But despite being a critical figure in the

fight for equality and a talented musician who's work impacts our culture to this day, James Reese Europe's legacy remains largely unsung.