

## Examining “Worldmaking” and the “Worlds of Pan-Africanism”

*Through a Visual Analysis of The First World Festival of Negro Arts (Dakar Senegal, 1966) and Josephine Baker (Paris, France, 1926)*



*Léopold Sédar Senghor, president of Senegal, in Dakar, April 1966. Quai Branly*



IMAGE: LINK: [HERE](#)

### Introduction

This essay draws on empirical approaches taken by scholars in Historiography, Political Theory, and Performance Studies who have analyzed Africa's interactions with the world, outside the conventional Western-centric perspective. It asks what collective body of work brings new interpretation and evidence to elements of Africa's colonial and postcolonial era. For instance, two texts in political theory, *Worldmaking after Empire*, *the Rise and Fall of Self-*

*Determination* (2019) by Adom Getachew and *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) by Stuart Hall move beyond traditionally accepted notions of textual and chronologically oriented understandings of the continent's relationship to the West. In doing so, they have also moved beyond the fieldwork tradition of African history by foregrounding the idea of “worldmaking” (Getachew) and “cultural representation” (Hall). Examining methods of “worldmaking” and “cultural representation” highlights the active role of marginalized communities and their historical struggles for decolonization and liberation. Getachew’s definition of “worldmaking” emphasizes agency, collective action, and the transformative potential of political engagement in shaping the world and challenging oppressive systems. Similarly, Hall’s concept of “cultural representation” can be understood as the process by which meaning is assigned to individuals and groups through various forms of cultural expression, such as media, language, and symbols. It involves the construction, interpretation, and circulation of images and narratives that shape how social groups are portrayed and understood in society. Fundamentally, each term provides a fresh lens through which to analyze and understand international politics, leading to important contributions to political theory that break free from Eurocentric biases. Hall critically analyzes narratives that maintain Western ideologies and power dynamics, while Getachew moves theories of “cultural representation” forward by repositioning anti-colonial thinkers as her main points of analysis. The central thesis of this argument suggests that through emphasizing one form of collective action (The First World Festival of Negro Arts, 1966) and exploring the perspective of one marginalized figure (Josephine Baker, 1906-1975), my findings add depth and insight to Hall and Getachew’s understanding of “cultural representation” and “worldmaking.” To add context to this claim, Getachew explores Anglophone Black Pan-Africanist intellectuals working to promote a global

vision of Black empowerment that introduces a more equitable study of “worldmaking.” As a result, this essay will expand on Getachew’s findings by using Hall’s theories on “cultural representation” to highlight the fundamental role that Baker played in this fight for equity. Investigating Baker as a medium to analyze “cultural representation” offers nuanced insights into the social landscapes and intricate realities that were central to the festival’s thematic structures. A visual examination of the festival’s political make-up shows the issues that it aimed to combat including (but not limited to) a negative portrayal of Afro-descended people and a dominance of Eurocentric knowledge production and representation. To argue this claim, this essay draws attention to specific visual elements of the exhibition— the style of artifacts that were showcased, objects embodying geographic representation, and an overview of artistic intent— as well as visual aspects of Josephine Baker’s performance— the tempo in which she walks, the direction in which she stands, and her facial expressions— as an alternative narrative rejecting prevailing colonial frameworks and offering an alternate way of studying “worlds of Pan-Africanism” (Getachew).

As this essay embarks on its visual examination, it is essential to recognize the methodologies employed in my analysis. This essay uses empirical approaches taken by scholars in Historiography, Political Theory, and Performance Studies who have analyzed Africa's interactions with the world, outside the conventional Western-centric perspective. It leans heavily on the work of Cultural Theorist, Hall and Sociologist, Benetta Jules-Rosette’s text, *Josephine Baker in Art, and Life: The Icon and the Image* (2006) to examine varying aspects of historiography, with a particular emphasis on The First Negro Arts Festival and Josephine Baker’s image. Jules-Rosette’s text is one of my key sources because she intricately explores the

creation of Baker's image by using semiography as a research method. In other words, to complete an analysis on "cultural representation" (Hall), it is necessary to emphasize how Jules-Rosette's research method supported these claims. Semiography uses the tools of socio semiotics to— "excavate the narratives, images, and representations that constitute the public and private lives of biographical subjects. [This research method] traces the story of a life through signs, symbols, and images.... Semiography's focus is to interpret how the pieces of the puzzle fit together as a cultural production rather than a chronology."<sup>1</sup> This quote demonstrates how Jules-Rosette's use of semiography allows me to study Baker's work more effectively in theater and performance. Arguably, Baker's image serves as an alternative site to examine the role of Negritude and Pan-Africanism in ways that are reflective of embodied memories and traditions of performance, including gestures, orality, movement, dance, and singing. For these reasons, Baker is an exciting subject to study while examining several readings that document the intricate ways various expressions of Blackness have added to Hall and Getachew's understanding of "cultural representation" and "worldmaking."

### **Examining Pan-Africanism and the Festival's**

#### **Visual Artifacts**

Building on ideas of "worldmaking" (Getachew) and "cultural representation" (Hall), I will examine a primary account of the First World Festival of Negro Arts. This original testimony of the festival prioritizes Africa's (mostly West Africa and the Congo region) role in

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<sup>1</sup>Bennetta Jules-Rosette., *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

the making and reclaiming of cultural achievements and intellectual contributions to world history. Thomas Cassirer's first-person account of the First World Festival of Negro Arts was published by The Massachusetts Review in the *Observer* in 1967. Cassirer starts his review of the festival in Dakar from March 30 to April 24, 1966, by acknowledging that the artifactual displays of art were brought together from museums and private collections in Africa, Europe and America. In preparation for the archival objects' arrival, the Senegalese and French governments worked closely with UNESCO to sort out the technical arrangements of the exhibition. For example, one key aspect of the festival's organizational set up was the necessity of "geographical representation" (Cassirer). Arguably, the significance of geographical representation in the context of Pan-Africanist thinking is multifaceted and carries several implications. For instance, in Cassirer's account of the festival, he meticulously describes the artistic objects that visually represented the continent's cultural diversity. Specifically, he writes, "in the face of the large array of wooden and bronze masks, of sculptures in wood, ivory, and metal, some of them covered with cowrie shells or brightly colored pearls. In style these ranged from the bird-masks of the Dogon and the stylized antelopes of the Bambara in Mali to the Benin bronzes of Nigeria and included as well the colorful art of Cameroon ...."<sup>2</sup> Cassirer's analysis showcases the richness and diversity of African geography by offering a counter-narrative to prevailing negative stereotypes. His observations on style, size, and texture simultaneously document the tangible outcome of these different artistic expressions and contribute to a broader as well as more accurate understanding of each African country and its people. Cassirer swiftly moves into a complex discussion on the continent's interaction with the West by highlighting

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Cassirer "Africa's Olympiad of the Arts: Some Observations on the Dakar Festival. (The Massachusetts Review, 1967), 178.

Africa's extended artistic influence. Arguably, Cassirer's brief visual analysis, that he refers to as, "Africa's 'Dialogue with the World'" (178) mirrors aspects of Getachew's ideas on "worldmaking." For instance, Getachew's emphasis on "collective action" in relation to "worldmaking" provides historical and theoretical context to the visible objects that Cassirer notes and observes were reflective of Africa's active participation in global affairs. The continent's engagement with other nations is evident once Cassirer writes, "Africa's 'Dialogue with the World,' its long contact with other countries and continents, was illustrated by several pieces of Ancient Nubian art, some sculptures from Madagascar, as well as several objects from the Congo and Angola in which African and European motifs intermingle."<sup>3</sup> Due to Cassirer's exploration of the intermingling of African and European "motifs" (Cassirer), it is also important to refer to Getachew's theory of "worldmaking" to properly expand his analysis. Arguably, Cassirer's thoughts on 'Africa's Dialogue with the World' underscores the significance of investigating "cultural representation" (Hall) in order to deepen our comprehension of decolonization movements. Implying that an "intermingling" (Cassirer) of African and European motifs subverts colonial hierarchies and power dynamics by showcasing African motifs as integral components of cultural expression. It also challenges the historical exoticization of African cultures within European narratives of art history. Pan-Africanism is not typically referred to as a "motif" in the traditional sense. Seemingly, Cassirer is referring to a "motif" as a reflection of each object's design and pattern that carries symbolic or decorative significance. However, if we broaden the definition of "motif" to include broader thematic or ideological

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<sup>3</sup>Cassirer, *Africa's Olympiad of the Arts: Some Observations on the Dakar Festival*, 176.

elements, we could consider Pan-Africanism as a recurring motif in the context of the festival and the anti-colonial social and political movements that follow.

As Cassirer continues to critically assess the “motifs” of each art form, he gestures towards the seemingly non-artistic aspects of the festival that plausibly have “messages hidden within them” (Hall). Arguably, Cassirer highlights that these “encoded messages” (Hall) detail each theatrical performance, dance, and artifact over the course of the festival. In other words, Cassirer appears to emphasize the ways in which the festival engages in some aspects of Hall’s transcoding theory. Hall defines “transcoding” as the act of “taking an existing meaning and reappropriating it for new meanings (e.g., ‘Black is Beautiful’)” (259). Moreover, Hall notes that several forms of transcoding strategies have been adopted since the 1960s. More specifically, Hall’s three transcoding strategies include: “*an integrationist strategy*—” that focuses on fostering social cohesion and equality, *a subversion of popular representation*— “that attempts to substitute a range of ‘positive’ images of black people, black life and culture for the ‘negative’ imagery which continues to dominate popular representation” (262), and *an identification with the image (only through the act of complexification)*— that tries to “contest it from within” (263).

To exemplify Hall’s “*integrationist approach*”, we must turn to Cassirer’s point in noting that the “exhibition ended on this fusion, this ‘symbiosis’, as Senghor would call it, between African and European art... “(178). Based on Cassirer’s slight reference to Senegal’s President at the time, Léopold Sédar Senghor, (in tandem with various readings on the festival by Babacar M’Baye and David Murphy), it is evident that Senghor actively engaged in two facets of transcoding (Hall). For instance, in Cassirer’s reference to Senghor’s hope for “symbiosis”

between African and European art, it seems to imply a fruitful interdependence between the two entities. In this moment, Cassirer explores how Senghor advocates for an integrationist approach (Hall). Arguably, Senghor's approach to "the world of Pan-Africanism" (Getachew) promotes a preservation of African values that are deeply interwoven into European ideologies. In reference to Hall's integrationist approach, the potential hidden meanings behind Senghor's hope for "symbiosis" have become clearer. For instance, it is important to note that while symbiosis often implies mutual benefit, it can also involve varying degrees of exclusion, exploitation, or dependence. In this case, Cassirer uses art to explore these potential implications by stating that, "... [Senghor remarked that] European art brought the traditional art of Africa out of its isolation into the mainstream of modern art" (178). This act of Europe "bringing" African art into the spotlight seems to foreshadow how Senghor promotes a homogenous form of Pan-Africanist thinking. Arguably, this portion of Senghor's speech represents a pool of leaders who rely on one monolithic vision of Blackness that maintains colonial frameworks that Hall and Getachew confront. Hall challenges Senghor's style of Pan-Africanist thinking by revealing the "hidden messages" behind an integrationist approach. Correspondingly, Getachew seems more interested in examining anti-colonial thinkers who are more interested in moving away from Western artistic and political structures, rather than integrating (Hall) or "fusing," as Senghor puts it, into their cultural practices.

Intriguingly, at the opening speech of the festival, Senghor also seems to mirror some aspects of Hall's "subversion" theory. In the specific case of Senghor and his ideas on Negritude, a subverted approach would involve scrutinizing the language he employs to discuss the African experience, Black identity, and cultural heritage. In other words, Hall's theory of subversion

emphasizes the importance of amplifying counter-discourses and alternative interpretations. Analyzing Senghor's speech with a subverted approach (Hall) aims to uncover the hidden assumptions, biases, and tensions within his reference to literary and cultural movements (like Negritude, a marginalized "collective action" (Getachew) that emerged in the 1930s). For instance, Cassirer points out how Senghor uses his welcome speech to "codify" (Hall) one facet of Black empowerment. Seemingly, to equalize various facets of Black culture at the festival, Senghor states, "Negritude had provided the impetus for the entire festival" (182). From Senghor's perspective, "Negritude" is defined as a harmonized demonstration of Blackness. Moreover, he states, "the festival was to demonstrate that the Negroes of today, like their ancestors, were once again producers of civilization" (182). It is necessary to examine the emphasis that Senghor puts on the words, "producer" and "civilization." Hall's subversion approach invites a critical analysis of the concept of "producers of civilization" by challenging dominant narratives and examining the underlying power dynamics and discursive strategies involved. Applying this approach to Senghor's belief in Black people becoming "once again producers of civilization" requires questioning and deconstructing the assumed meanings, biases, and hierarchies embedded within it. For instance, Senghor's use of "production" seems to imply a continuous and active participation in Western capitalist thinking patterns that maintain existing structures of inequity (Getachew). In a similar vein, Senghor's deployment of "civilization" provides further context to the positive global ramifications he associates with a specific group of Afro-descendant people— these individuals are typically popular artists, established intellectuals, or other leaders (active during the period of decolonization) who actively "contribute" in ways that are comparable to Senghor's definition of Negritude (i.e., Literary Excellence). Overall, Senghor's use of the phrase, "producers of civilization" seems to

suggest his belief in the transformative role of African contributions and influence in an international context. However, Cassirer gradually confronts the subverted (Hall) aspects of Senghor's speech by noting how, "*Senghor set the theme of the conference with his speech, and yet a nagging question remained in the minds of many participants on the validity of Negritude. Was this ideology not out of date in an independent Africa, whatever it might have contributed to the battle against colonialism? And the stress on Negritude, on Negro art and architecture and music, on the necessity of identifying oneself with the precolonial traditions of Africa, not act as a limiting, restraining influence just when Negro Africa needed to change and develop?*" (182) It is crucial to emphasize the imaginative nature of Cassirer's question due to its likeness towards the "different worlds" that Getachew refers to in her text. The political "worlds" that she examines highlight anti-colonial perspectives while introducing alternate possibilities of identification like Cassirer's first-person account. This is necessary to note because Cassirer's interests in exploring a different approach to Black globalization is significant to my argument. For example, Cassirer uses his attendance at the festival to construct and represent an alternate narrative that prioritizes marginalized perspectives. In doing so, his piece uses visual objects and linguistic forms of "cultural representation" (Hall) to challenge "pre-colonial traditions of Africa" (Cassirer) through an analysis of "collective action" (Getachew). As a result, Cassirer's observations offer alternate ways of studying the "worlds of Pan-Africanism" (Getachew).

To continue a discussion on Hall's theory of subversion— a conceptual framework that examines how dominant systems of power and meaning can be challenged and disrupted by subversive practices— it is necessary to note that, plausibly, the positive images of Black "cultural representation" (Hall) that Senghor is alluding to reflect like-minded, well-established,

and well-respected individuals like Langston Hughes. Before diving into an analysis on Senghor's representational fascination with Hughes, it is necessary to continue expanding on the speech in which he expresses his values of "new humanism." For instance, as Senghor continues his opening remarks he states,

"We deeply appreciate the honor the devolves upon us at the First World Festival of Negro Arts to welcome so many talents from the four continents.... But what honors us most of all and what constitutes your greatest merit is the fact that you will have participated in an undertaking much more revolutionary than the exploration of the cosmos: the elaboration of a new humanism which this time will include the totality of humanity on the totality of our planet Earth."<sup>4</sup> (30 *March 1966: 'The Function and Meaning of the First World Festival of Negro Arts'*)

It is important to add further context to the ways in which Senghor describes his hope to expand and continue adding to an "elaboration of a new humanism." Senghor believes that this "new humanism" would emerge from a synthesis of African and European cultural traditions, where both would be seen as complementary rather than oppositional. He rejected the notion of a binary opposition between Africa and Europe, advocating instead for a harmonious coexistence and mutual enrichment of different cultural influences. Moreover, it is necessary to also examine how he referred to specific individuals as "cultural representatives" (Hall) of this feat towards

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<sup>4</sup>David Murphy. *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966: Contexts and Legacies*. (Liverpool University Press, 2021).

building an image of the world that “will include the totality of humanity” (Senghor). A plethora of scholars have analyzed Senghor’s address more broadly in the context of the ‘festivalization’ of Africa, the ‘spectacularization’ of culture, and the various policies of cultural and touristic development.<sup>5</sup> However, one scholar in particular, Babacar M’Baye, examines how Senghor refers to Langston Hughes as a cultural symbol that could “close the circle between Africa and the diaspora.”<sup>6</sup> When Senghor stated that Langston Hughes can “close the circle between Africa and the diaspora,” he was referring to the role that Hughes played in bridging the cultural and historical connections between Africa and the African diaspora, particularly in the context of the Negritude movement. By referring to Langston Hughes, Senghor acknowledges Hughes’ significant contributions to African American literature and his exploration of themes related to African heritage, identity, and the African diaspora. Hughes’ writings often celebrated African culture, history, and the experiences of Black people both in America and across the diaspora. For these reasons, by referring to well-established and internationally respected figures like Langston Hughes, Senghor is drawing attention to voices that have gained recognition and influence outside of dominant Western frameworks. This amplification of counter-discourses contributes to a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding of Negritude and its significance. Overall, Hall’s subversion theory underscores the importance of challenging dominant narratives, amplifying counter-discourses, subverting power structures, and resisting marginalization in order to promote a more inclusive and equitable understanding of African identity and culture. Arguably, however, Senghor’s appreciation of Hughes as a seemingly *ideal* image of Black unification and other forms of “cultural representation” (Hall) like Pan-

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<sup>5</sup>Murphy. *The First World Festival of Negro Arts*, 11.

<sup>6</sup>Murphy, David. *The First World Festival of Negro Art*, 11.

Africanism and Negritude can be expanded through Hall's third analysis of transcoding—*an identification with the image (only through the act of complexification)*. To move this discussion on Hall's theories of "cultural representation," and Getachew's theories on "worldmaking" forward, it is now necessary to highlight Josephine Baker's live performance in 1926, "La Danse Sauvage." Here, Baker effectively embodies aspects of Hall's third method of transcoding by rejecting prevailing frameworks of colonialism and providing an alternate way of studying "worlds of Pan-Africanism" (Getachew). To argue this claim, it is crucial to examine visual aspects of Baker's performance—the tempo in which she walks, the direction in which she stands, and her facial expressions.

### **Examining Pan-Africanism & Josephine Baker's "Banana Dance"**

Josephine Baker's "Danse Sauvage" holds significant cultural and historical importance. The performance, which she debuted in Paris in 1925, showcased her unique talent and introduced a groundbreaking style that challenged traditional notions of dance and representation. The significance of Baker's "Danse Sauvage" lies in its subversive nature and cultural impact. In the performance, Baker appeared on stage wearing a revealing costume, accompanied by what was described as exotic music and movements inspired by African and Caribbean cultures. In this clip, Baker seemed to portray a Black woman reflecting aspects of her cultural heritage and expressing her sexuality in a public space. Her sexual gestures and provocative expressions

were/are considered groundbreaking as they challenged prevailing racial and gender norms of the time.



<https://www.kickmag.net/2021/06/13/throwback-josephine-baker-the-banana-dance/>

Arguably, Baker's ongoing use of performative strategies disrupt monolithic and race-related narratives through the process of transcoding<sup>7</sup> her own self-image beyond utopic or inhumane interpretations of Blackness and Africa. It is necessary to investigate Baker's choice to depict a live caricature (in "La Danse Sauvage"), to closely examine how she embodies contradicting expressions of racialization. Arguably, Baker's controversial forms of embodiment and "cultural

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<sup>7</sup>Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (London: Sage Publ. (1997) 2011), 259.

representation” (Hall) speak to the complexities of “self-image” building. This process of constructing a public presentation of self relies on the technical aspects of performance. In part, these practical facets of performance include an ability to project and articulate a particular image that is clearly audible and understandable. In many ways, Baker’s process of image construction mirrors Senghor’s welcoming speech that focuses on conveying a particular image of Negritude. To revisit the analysis on Baker, it is necessary to highlight her bodily movements and the ways in which they are particularly concentrated on her infamous banana skirt. Due to the banana skirt being an important aspect of her visual presentation, Hall’s third theoretical approach to transcoding allows a more in-depth investigation of *how* Baker uses performative gestures (like hip thrusts and jolted movements) to “contest the image from within.”

Hall’s third analysis of transcoding—*an identification with the image (only through the act of complexification)* encourages actors, like Baker, to challenge the dominant narratives, stereotypes, and ideologies that are embedded within the image. For the purposes of this paper, the “image” that Baker is contesting is one that Hall and Getachew also confront separately in their texts— dominant visual portrayals of Eurocentric knowledge production and representation. Through Baker’s act of contesting the image, she unveils and disrupts the dominant meanings and power relations that may be “encoded within it” (Hall). For instance, in the opening frame of the clip, Baker slinks down the jungle embroidered tree, she quickly jolts her head to the left and right, clearly on the ‘look-out’ for *something*, Baker toys with the speed in which she climbs down the tree until she launches her body forward and swiftly lays flat on the “jungle floor” (0:36-38, “La Danse Sauvage”). Exploring Baker’s bodily control (based on its temporality) as well her act of ‘taking up space’ in a sensually driven way is particularly fascinating and of

relevance. Arguably, as a foreign novelty (in this context), Baker depicts the “stranger within.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, in this frame, there is a juxtaposition of Baker pausing on the floor, right before she launches herself onto her own two feet and continues her performance. It is important to connect this temporal tension (the pace of the movement starting as gentle and then stretching itself to an explosive level). Due to Jules-Rosette’s in-depth examination of “Baker’s image,” the theoretical relationship between Baker and various facets of “cultural representation” (Hall) as well as Hall’s third approach to transcoding becomes clearer. For example, in the scene described above, based on the tempo in which Baker moves, she exerts a mass of contradictions and symbolic strategies that Jules-Rosette argues that Baker uses to create “the image of Josephine Baker” (7). Moreover, Jules-Rosette writes that, “Baker combines the folkloric narrative of her rise to fame with powerful images of exoticism and freedom in a modern, mechanistic society... [Baker’s life serves as a test case] for the study of assimilation, acculturation, and identity invention... by performing her identity transformations in public spaces.... Often overlooked, however, is her clever use of the performative strategies of assimilation and image construction to surmount cultural barriers” (71). Jules-Rosette’s exploration of Baker as a “test case” to study “identity invention” is most evident based on the direction in which Baker’s caricature moves in the following scene. As the camera continues to follow Baker across stage, the next frame cuts to a wide shot of Baker walking in a straight line. She makes her way closer to two Black men sitting on the “jungle floor.” Intriguingly, Baker does not seem to turn her body to face *them*, nor does she face the camera. As a result, her heightened movements take place *sideways* as she thrusts her hips back and forth, (0:41-46, “La Danse Sauvage”). Baker uses a combination of her legs,

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<sup>8</sup>Katharina Gerund, *Josephine Baker's Routes and Roots: Mobility, Belonging, and Activism in the Atlantic World*. (Liverpool University Press, 2018), 11–32.

torso, head, and hips to swirl her body weight around in circles. In this frame, it is crucial to note that Baker's act of dancing *sideways* causes the cluster of dangling bananas on her skirt to become most apparent at this moment. As the viewer watches Baker dancing sideways, the camera can only cover a limited portion of her body. Since the bananas become the focus of the performance, the audience is forced to question— What is the symbolic purpose of the bananas? And— What are the significant ways in which Baker uses the bananas as a form of embodiment, rather than *just* a prop? Seemingly, this is the moment in which Baker's performance actively transcodes (Hall) the *primitive* elements of her costume as she reclaims the banana skirt, and it becomes an embodiment of her agency. In other words, the technical ways in which Baker portrays her caricature using props, costumes, and the direction in which she stands, opens a new avenue to study the process of “self-image building” (Jules-Rosette).

Arguably, an in-depth analysis of Baker's choice to stand *sideways* in this frame provides further exploration of alternative perspectives of “Pan-Africanism” (as defined by Getachew). For instance, Baker's choice to face forward based on her own positioning on stage (in other words, she is not looking at the two seemingly African men, nor the camera) may speak to the suggestive ways in which Baker effectively embodies aspects of Hall's third method of transcoding by rejecting prevailing frameworks of colonialism and providing an alternate way of studying “worlds of Pan-Africanism” (Getachew). To further this point, it is important to highlight that at the time of this performance, the image of a Black woman in a sexually suggestive and exoticized performance could be seen as perpetuating racial stereotypes and reinforcing the objectification of Black bodies. However, Baker's "Banana Dance" can be interpreted as a complexification of this image, and therefore mirror aspects of Hall's third

transcoding theory. More specifically, Baker's performance subverted and reappropriated the racialized imagery associated with exoticism and primitivism. Instead of being a passive object of the gaze, she took agency over her own body and performance. By embracing the provocative nature of the dance, she challenged prevailing notions of propriety and the objectification of Black women. For these reasons, it is equally as important to question the direction in which Baker stands on stage as it is to consider the overall artistic intent behind her movements.

Debatably, examining suggestive intersections between Baker's choice to stand *sideways* and the act of portraying an individual, rather than a collective version of Pan-Africanism is necessary to consider. For these reasons, Hall's third transcoding theory provides context to analyze Baker's banana skirt and can allow for a deeper analysis into the construction of her "image" (Jules-Rosette). Through Baker's act of complexification, she transforms the image of the "Banana Dance" into a statement of empowerment and resistance. Simultaneously, throughout her performance, Baker reinterprets the symbol of the banana skirt and reclaims it as a visual object of artistic expression that can speak to Baker's choice to celebrate aspects of her African heritage. Arguably, Baker's "Banana Dance" can be seen as a political statement against racism and colonialism. By performing in predominantly white spaces and captivating audiences with her talent and "charisma" (Jules Rosette), she disrupts racial hierarchies and challenges the notion of Black inferiority. In this way, Baker's "Banana Dance" reflects Hall's theory of transcoding because she is engaging with and reinterpreting the racialized imagery associated with the performance. Lastly, as a result of Baker *complexifying* Western images of "cultural representation" (Hall), she creates new meanings and possibilities for Black identification.

In this specific performance, perhaps Baker’s act of standing away from the seemingly African men *as well as* the audience/camera shows her residing (even momentarily) in her own space of self-expression. This concept of “individuality” is an important aspect of her performance to consider because it details the impact of Baker never adhering to a “stable historical identity.”<sup>9</sup> To continue this conversation of individuality, it is crucial to highlight the frame in which Baker’s body is shown in its totality— the camera depicts a close-up of Baker, smiling, widely as she dances to her own rendition of the Charleston dance, (1:03-1:05, “La Danse Sauvage”). Since the Charleston was originally a popular dance associated with white American mainstream culture in the 1920s; Baker’s choice to dance to her own rendition of the Charleston exemplified her commitment to breaking down racial barriers and challenging the limited roles available to Black performers. However, the true significance of Baker choosing to show her own rendition of the Charleston dance lies in her ability to assert her artistic agency, showcase her unique style, and challenge conventional norms of the time. In brief, by choosing to perform her own interpretation of the Charleston, Baker demonstrated her creative autonomy and the freedom to reinterpret and innovate established dance forms. As a result, Baker’s repeated process of identity construction (seemingly created in an individualistic fashion, based on her physical movements in “La Danse Sauvage”) offers alternative ways of viewing Pan-Africanism.

### **Examining Intersections Between “Worldmaking” and the “Worlds of Pan-Africanism”**

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<sup>9</sup>Gerund, *Josephine Baker's Routes and Roots: Mobility, Belonging, and Activism in the Atlantic World*, 11–32.

Getachew's work on "worldmaking" provides the historical foundation needed to ground Jules-Rosette's theoretical findings on the ongoing racialization of Africa, Africans, and Afro-descended people. As a result, this essay expands on Getachew's research on "worldmaking" from the marginalized perspective and provides language and context to the fundamental role that Baker played in this fight for equity. As Getachew highlights the significance of the "worlds of Pan-Africanism", she explores how the Black Atlantic's path towards "imagining a world after empire [that] drew on an anticolonial critique," negotiating forms of "self-determination," an "envisioning [of] a New International Economic Order" (5), and "[tracing] the ways its legacies were constitutive of racial hierarchy in the international order."<sup>10</sup> Arguably, Baker serves as another medium for which Getachew (and scholars alike) can examine alternative ways of expressing Black unification (like Negritude and Pan-Africanism). Like the other Pan-Africanist intellectuals that Getachew is interested in examining, Baker's performance seems to sit outside of conventional understandings of Pan-Africanism. For these reasons, Baker's provocative performance of the "Banana Dance" seems to offer an alternate avenue to study "worlds of Pan-Africanism" (Getachew) through a socially marginalized perspective. Moreover, in the Introduction of Getachew's text, she writes, "[European bourgeoisie] sought to create 'a world after its own image.'"<sup>11</sup> This quote illustrates one way in which Getachew analyzes the West's pervasive practice of violent control and its relationship to visual forms of cultural representation. Additionally, based on Getachew's introductory analysis of Pan-Africanism, and her hope to prioritize narratives (that are often overlooked in traditional decolonial discourse), it

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<sup>10</sup> Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, 4.

is evident that the history of anticolonial world-making<sup>12</sup> in Africa is often positioned as a one-sided narrative dominated by the West. To expand a discussion on some visual examples of worldmaking,<sup>13</sup> Getachew explores this process of decolonization by studying central Anglophone Black Atlantic intellectuals as interlocutors<sup>14</sup> of Pan-Africanism (beginning in the interwar period): W.E.B Du Bois, Michael Manley, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, George Padmore, and Eric Williams. In short, Getachew studies how these actors “[illuminate] the multiplicity of political projects that decolonization entailed.”<sup>15</sup> Her analysis of Black Atlantic intellectuals as “interlocutors” emphasizes the ongoing exchange of ideologies and perspectives that complicate this period of decolonization. To further contextualize these complications, it is helpful to examine similar, yet unconventional practices advocating for decolonization, arguably, Baker is one artistic example of these seemingly overlooked anti-colonial efforts. For instance, Baker’s indirect act of emphasizing the “Historical Dimension” (Cassirer) of African and African American culture provides an alternative lens into these emerging formations of Pan-Africanist thinking. Therefore, Baker’s performances add further analysis to the performative aspects of Pan-Africanism. More specifically, examining the technical aspects of Baker’s performance provides a deeper understanding of the messages that she is trying to convey to her audience. The technical aspects of her performance include— the tightness of her posture and the fluidness (or lack thereof) of Baker’s arms, legs and torso which seem to highlight her intentional use of physical gestures to create a visual impact (and subsequently, visually contribute to decolonial discourse about racialization and “cultural representation” (Hall)). As a result, Baker’s seemingly

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<sup>12</sup>Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, 5.

<sup>13</sup>Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, 5.

<sup>14</sup>Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, 5.

<sup>15</sup>Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, 9.

effective use of body language throughout her performance enhances Getachew's study of "the worlds of Pan-Africanism" as well as her exploration of the "global image" through the eyes of the marginalized perspective. Consequently, addressing Baker's attendance at the festival and referencing the cultural intricacies of her performance remains integral in analyzing the complex role of Pan-Africanism.

### **Conclusion**

Repeatedly, articles have stated that Baker was in attendance on March 30, 1966, but they do not dive into the "legacy" or impact of her involvement. Subsequently, this essay uses the festival as a launch-pad to shed light on the complicated ways in which Baker's identity continues to shift and morph in ways that are dependent on a cultural/political context, and the key themes of that period. Overall, Baker's work in theater and performance offers an alternative lens to examine the role of Negritude and Pan-Africanism (as defined by Senghor). To argue this claim, this essay draws attention to specific visual elements of the exhibition—the style of artifacts that were showcased, objects embodying geographic representation, and an overview of artistic intent—as well as visual aspects of Josephine Baker's performance—the tempo in which she walks, the direction in which she stands, and her facial expressions—as an alternative narrative rejecting prevailing colonial frameworks and offering an alternate way of studying "worlds of Pan-Africanism" (Getachew). Leaning on Hall's research to explore how Baker engages in the process of transcoding has allowed an in-depth analysis of "cultural representation" (Hall) to unfold. In sum, finding intersections between Hall's process of transcoding in relation to Getachew's contributions to studies investigating imperial expansion

and Pan-Africanism from a marginalized perspective resulted in a close examination of narratives that document the visual significance of a spectacle (like Baker, 1926 and The First Negro Arts Festival, 1966). In conclusion, highlighting intersections between these creative works and relating them to a historical process will uncover a social temporal space that is necessary to examine. This space can be found when visually analyzing creative texts by members of the African diaspora who gesture towards various neocolonial paradigms and the systems that uphold them. Studying decolonial frameworks from a Performance Studies perspective and legitimizing their cultural-historical relevance can highlight anti-colonial efforts rooted in performative acts of self-expression. As a result, empirical approaches taken by scholars in varying fields can more effectively emphasize Africa's interactions with the world, outside the conventional Western-centric perspective.

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