

**Barnett, Kyle, Bellarmine University. "I'm All Broke Out With the Blues": Production Culture and Genre Formation at Wisconsin's Paramount Records'**

In the early 1920s, newly formed record companies sought niches in the U.S. recording industry through pursuing music that larger companies had ignored. Paramount Records of Port Washington, Wisconsin was among the labels that jumped into the blues, or "race records," market in the aftermath of Mamie Smith's groundbreaking Okeh Records hit, "Crazy Blues." Soon, Paramount advertisements promised race music fans "A New Hit Record Released Every Week," surpassing even Okeh's output. With its ambitious release schedule, Paramount's recording directors had to function both as talent scouts and traveling salesmen to keep up the pace. The company also began developing freelance scouts that had particular expertise in a given region and/or style.

Paramount's foray into race records nicely illustrates how one of the foundational genres of American popular music first emerged. By employing archival research on Paramount's business practices during this period, my presentation will analyze the unique roles of these early recording directors and talent scouts in light of their role as cultural intermediaries. They were called upon to educate those at Paramount in regards to a music their bosses knew little about. Through striving to identify audience tastes regarding race records, particularly among black audiences, they also traversed varying socio-cultural, racial, regional, and economic environments as the recording industry expanded further into the race records market.

Through their roles, Paramount employees took part in defining race records as an emerging genre. Genre does not simply designate a given style of music but suggests a constellation of social, cultural, and aesthetic designations with its own set of specific values. Genre informs cultural tastes but also encompasses beliefs and attitudes that have not only defined American music but also mirror longstanding relationships and conflicts that make up social life in the United States.

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