

Jazz as Armstrong learned it was a creation of the ratty people, as Isidore Barbarin would have called them, the “roustabouts unloading banana boats on the wharves – all of my folks,” which is how Armstrong once identified his community, the common laborers, domestics, hustlers and prostitutes who found themselves confined by the color line to the economic bottom of society.

His success was theirs too. It was a victory for the people who nourished him, the Saints in church who applauded his singing as a child, the rags-bottles-and-bones men who held him spellbound with soulful talk, his buddies in the vocal quartet, his teacher at the Waif’s Home, the honky tonk musicians, and little routine musicians who circulated around town every day on advertising wagons. A victory for those people who loved to move their bodies in time with rhythmically exciting music, who spoke in musical ways, who admired instrumentally inflected singing and vocally inflected instruments, who regarded blue notes as the strongest notes you could play. People who looked forward to Sundays in church, where the music they made brought the sum of their community to a greater whole, who relied on music to proudly proclaim who they were in public events, who admired musicians with professional skills but could also appreciate music played by an amateur, as long as he showed willingness and heart. Out of their values and practices came the fruits of an expressive culture that are with us still.

Concluding paragraph (pp.304-305) of *Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans* by Thomas Brothers