

MASTER'S RESEARCH PROJECT

**“MAKING IT” IN NEW YORK CITY – THE SUPREMES AT THE
COPACABANA, 1965**

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ABSTRACT

During the tumultuous times of the Civil Rights Movement, Motown Records founder Berry Gordy vowed to span racial boundaries by producing music that would become the “Sound of Young America”. Motown Records achieved widespread crossover success amongst both black and white audiences in the youth-pop idiom during the 1960s, revolutionizing the American popular music industry. The Supremes led the way, capturing the hearts of American society and media audibly with their accessible pop songs and visually with their glamorous attire and elegant dance moves. Moreover, they became mainstream television variety program staples and permanent fixtures in the American entertainment industry during an era known for its racial and generational contention. This paper focuses on why Motown Records founder, Berry Gordy, was so determined to have the Supremes perform at the Copacabana nightclub in New York City. Using archival primary research, as well as analyzing a multitude of secondary sources, this paper argues that the Supremes 1965 Copa performance was a landmark moment in their careers and in American popular music. It argues that Gordy wanted the Supremes to perform at the Copa for three main reasons. First, performing there would expand and cement their crossover success to a new demographic – the sophisticated, urban, elite white adult, which in turn, validated the presence of the Supremes in the adult oriented world of nightclubs. Furthermore, it marked the Supremes’ entry into the high life of New York’s café society and subsequently into the white dominated entertainment establishment, which was centered on the Copacabana during this time.

INTRODUCTION

I loved the way the Supremes could do standards and Broadway songs like “Make Someone Happy,” “You’re Nobody’ Till Somebody Loves You” and “Put On A Happy Face” in pure, three-part harmony without a band, a piano or anything. Snapping their fingers, enjoying themselves, they were incredible...I knew those standards were the key to taking our people to the next level of show business – top nightclubs around the country. And I knew the Supremes could lead the way.¹

– Berry Gordy Jr.

In the 1960s, Motown Records became not only the largest independent record company and the largest African American owned enterprise, but also the most prevalent sound in American popular music.² By the end of the twentieth century, the company had become one of the most successful recording companies of the time producing over one hundred Top Ten hits from artists such as the Supremes, the Temptations, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye.³ Moreover, during the Civil Rights Movement, Berry Gordy Jr. vowed to span racial boundaries by producing music that would become the “Sound of Young America”. Motown Records achieved widespread crossover success with both black and white audiences in the 1960s and also with fans of all ages during an era marked by stark racial and generational conflict. The Supremes led the way, capturing the hearts of American society and media audibly with the accessible pop songs and visually with their glamorous attire and elegant dance moves; however, what is particularly significant in the case of the Supremes was the crossover success they achieved within the youth-pop paradigm in the 1960s. By the end of the decade in 1969, the Supremes scored twelve Number One hits on the Billboard

¹ Berry Gordy, *To Be Loved: The Music, the Magic, the Memories of Motown* (London, England: Headline Book Publishing, 1994), 209.

² Jaap Koojiman, “From Elegance to Extravaganza: The Supremes on the Ed Sullivan Show as a Presentation of Beauty,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 49, no. 1 (2002), 4.

³ Koojiman, “From Elegance,” 4.

Top 100 and also achieved acclaimed international success, the first Motown group to accomplish both.⁴

Most of the scholarship to-date explores the cultural significance of Motown Records, highlighting the widespread crossover success and racial integration the company achieved and the strategies behind it. Motown's urban origins and cultural formation, its importance in creating notions of an African American public and a middle-brow African American audience and also in-depth studies on noteworthy moments during the company's career, such as the first time the Supremes performed on *The Ed Sullivan Show* are additional areas that have been explored in detail.⁵ However, one area that is neglected is the importance of the Supremes Copacabana performance in the summer of 1965 – the first Motown group to “make it” in New York City. Although much of the scholarship makes mention of this historical moment, none devote attention to the significance of the Copa performance for the Supremes and for African American youth performers as a whole. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to explore in detail the Supremes 1965 Copacabana performance, asking the broader question why was Berry Gordy so determined to have the Supremes perform there? What did it symbolize and what impact would the Supremes' success at the club mean not only for Motown but for the collectivity of African American youth performers?

To start, I argue that much of the Supremes' crossover success was attributed to their Copa performance as performing there expanded their appeal to a new demographic – the sophisticated, urban, white adult listener and subsequently validated the Supremes

⁴ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 33.

⁵ Gerald Early, Suzanne Smith, Jaap Koojiman, Jacqueline Warwick and Brian Ward all provide detailed studies on Motown Records, exploring the company's cultural significance and strategies used to achieve substantive success in the American popular music industry.

presence in the adult orientated world of nightclubs. Furthermore, it marked the Supremes' entry into the high life of New York's café society and also into the white dominated entertainment establishment, which was centered on the Copacabana during this time. On a larger scale, the Supremes made popular music history by performing there, becoming not only the first R&B group to perform there, but also the first African American youth-pop act to play there. This groundbreaking moment validated the presence of the Supremes in all facets of the American entertainment establishment as appropriate performers for fans of any age. Moreover, historically pop music or Rock and Roll as it was referred to in the 1960s was associated with low culture and more pointedly during this decade, as a form of degenerate music linked to the rising youth culture. However, by performing at the Copa the Supremes not only became names associated with the elite nightclub tastemakers, but also elevated the status of Rock and Roll as a reputable form of music in the sophisticated, adult dominated world of New York's café society. Last, successfully performing at the Copa validated and legitimized the presence of the Supremes in the white, adult-orientated entertainment establishment, also paving the way for African American youth performers as a whole.

This paper is broken down into five chapters. It begins first by laying the groundwork of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and also providing a historical overview of Motown Records and the rise of the Supremes. Then, it provides a discussion on the importance of "making it" in New York City, detailing the trajectory of New York nightlife that led to the rise of the modern nightclub in the 1920s. It provides further insight on what nightclubs represented in American society during the mid-twentieth century. Next, it leads into a discussion on the Copacabana, devoting attention

as to which artists performed there, its role in New York's café society and the entertainment establishment and its typical patrons. The fourth chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the Supremes 1965 Copa performance, leading into the fifth chapter, which discusses the cultural significance of the Copa performance itself.

CHAPTER 1
“ARE YOU READY FOR A BRAND NEW BEAT?” – MOTOWN RECORDS AND AN ERA OF CHANGE

Before discussing the rise of Motown Records, it is necessary to review the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century in order to fully understand the context in which Motown emerged and flourished. At the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans faced unsavory living conditions, particularly in the Southern states.⁶ Although the Thirteenth Amendment – which officially ended slavery – passed almost one hundred years earlier, African Americans still faced severe racial discrimination and violence.⁷ Segregation pervaded all facets of American life, particularly in the Deep South where Jim Crow laws, a result of the “separate but equal” doctrine, justified the segregation of blacks and whites in all public facilities, such as schools, libraries, restrooms, theatres, restaurants and legislatures.⁸ Moreover, this systemic segregation resulted in an atmosphere of bleak racism, lynching, rioting and the Klu Klux Klan, which became prevalent throughout the Southern states.⁹

As the mid-twentieth century approached, a number of factors amalgamated to dismantle Jim Crow laws. With tensions increasing as the 1950s progressed, the struggle

⁶ Michael Klarman, “Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement,” *Virginia Law Review* 80 (1994): 8.

⁷ Klarman, “Brown, Racial Change,” 9.

⁸ In the 1896 case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the United States Supreme Court upheld separate-but-equal facilities for white and black people on railroad cars. *Plessy v. Ferguson* was the defining case that determined the legal status of the Fourteenth Amendment, most notably known for the key phrase “equal protection of the laws, which up till this case, had been read in both broad and narrow views. By reading *Plessy v. Ferguson* in a more narrow view, the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed political and legal equality, but not social equality. “Separate-but-equal” facilities were constitutional because if “one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them on the same plane.”

Marsha Darling, “Early Pioneers,” in *Civil Rights Movement-People and Perspectives*, ed. Michael Ezra (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Inc., 2009), 5-10.

⁹ Lauren Chambers, Aggie Ebrahimi and Barbara McCaskill, “Southern Civil Rights Organizations,” in *Civil Rights Movement-People and Perspectives*, ed. Michael Ezra (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Inc., 2009), 60.

and discrimination of the African American collectivity was addressed and brought to the political forefront through a number of Supreme Court decisions.¹⁰ The Supreme Court's decisions in *Sweatt v. Painter* in 1949 and *Mclaurin v. Oklahoma* in 1950 began to sever the "separate but equal" doctrine set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896.¹¹ However, the pivotal case of *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* ruled segregated schools unconstitutional and outlawed state-sponsored segregation as a whole.¹² Following white opposition in 1955, the Supreme Court hastily ordered state and local governments to enforce widespread desegregation of public schools, although it was not until the 1970s that white resistance collapsed and most Southern schools became fully integrated.¹³ Overall, *Brown v. Board of Education* brought the injustices against African Americans to the forefront of American society and gave significant impetus to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, hastening the legal end of segregation in all public facilities.

Following *Brown v. Board of Education* began the start of the seventeen-year struggle – from 1954 to 1971 – for publicly recognized civil equality and rights for African Americans.¹⁴ As mentioned above, *Brown* was pivotal in uniting African American activists together to publicly fight the indignities perpetrated against African Americans. Civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. advocated nonviolent protest and civil disobedience, such as marches, peaceful demonstrations, sit-ins, boycotts, and voter registration drives throughout the South to bring the longstanding inequalities to the

¹⁰ Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding-Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 23-4.

¹¹ Brian Ward, *Radio and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the South* (Tampa, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004), 23.

¹² Gerard Early, *One Nation Under A Groove* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004): 5.

¹³ Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change," 12-13.

¹⁴ Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change," 15-18.

forefront of the national agenda.¹⁵ In the end, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation and discrimination of people of different colour and race in public facilities and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which enshrined the right to vote for African Americans, came to legally validate the efforts of the Civil Rights activists.¹⁶

Berry Gordy founded Motown Records in 1959 while the battle for African American civil rights was well under way.¹⁷ Motown was founded in Detroit, Michigan, a city heavily populated with African Americans who came North during the Great Migration of the 1920s.¹⁸ Although living conditions were not as severe as those in the Southern states during the mid-twentieth century, the city of Detroit was still increasingly segregated and experienced racial violence of its own during this time.¹⁹ As early as 1943, as Detroit was dealing with a burgeoning of African American immigrants, black and white youth clashed on Belle Isle.²⁰ Later in 1943, white workers at a Packard automotive plant went on strike when three blacks were hired to work alongside them; this led to three days of the notorious race riots and thirty-four people, mostly African Americans, killed.²¹ In the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans still faced discrimination in the workforce; they did not receive equal pay and job opportunities comparable to white coworkers and were also exempt from holding civil service jobs.²² Detroit also witnessed further racial conflict in July of 1967 when Detroit police officers invaded an

¹⁵ Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change," 25.

¹⁶ Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change," 30-31.

¹⁷ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 6.

¹⁸ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 8.

¹⁹ Mark Anthony Neal, "Reflections: The Supremes and the Politics of Image," in *NewBlackMan in Exile*, February 11, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-anthony-neal/reflections-the-supremes_b_2662440.html

²⁰ Neal, *Reflections*.

²¹ Posner, *Motown*, 11-12.

²² Berry, *To Be Loved*, 12-13.

African American nightclub.²³ The subsequent violence forced Governor George Romney to call in federal troops to terminate the violence and establish order.²⁴ Therefore, although African Americans in the South faced racial discrimination with voting rights and the desegregation of public facilities, African Americans in Northern cities like Detroit struggled with their own civil rights issues – as mentioned above – relating to urban renewal, de facto housing segregation, police brutality and employment discrimination.²⁵ Such discrimination and racial tensions would have a profound impact on Gordy’s vision of Motown and what he sought to accomplish. As scholar Suzanne E. Smith observes, “*Hitsville, U.S.A.*, emerged from a city in which African Americans felt they had little influence over white power structures and within an economy that was wholly dependent on the patterns and fluctuations of the auto industry.”²⁶

Before discussing Berry Gordy Jr. and the founding of Motown Records, I would like to devote attention to Gordy’s origins and the impact they had on him and Motown. Berry Gordy Sr. – one of the many African American Southern immigrants who came North during the Great Migration of the 1920s – was like his son, an entrepreneur. Gordy Sr., who owned a grocery store business, naming it “The Booker T. Washington Grocery Store” in reference to not only one of the most important African American leaders of the twentieth century, but also to the specific set of values, beliefs and morals Washington endorsed.²⁷ Moreover, the name explicitly referred to, as scholar Gerald Early observes “...the very qualities of bourgeois righteousness and success – thrift, Yankee ingenuity,

²³ Neal, *Reflections*.

²⁴ Neal, *Reflections*.

²⁵ Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street-Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20.

²⁶ Smith, *Dancing*, 20.

²⁷ Early, *One Nation*, 41.

hard work, business acumen, ambition, willingness to do humble, menial work...that were being commemorated.”²⁸ The Gordy’s worked hard to instill these values in their family and it was undoubtedly evident in Berry Gordy Jr. and his ambition in founding Motown Records.

Moreover as scholar Mark Anthony Neal observes, the Gordy’s in part represented the introduction of the “New Negro” into 1960s popular culture.²⁹ According to Neal, “This 1960s revitalization of the “New Negro” was based in the urban Midwest and like the New Negroes of the 1920s, part of a generation of African Americans born across an urban landscape far removed from Southern experiences.”³⁰ The New Negro of the late 1950s and 1960s was represented in the rise of African American figures such as Sammy Davis Jr., Nat King Cole and Floyd Paterson, most notably.³¹ As Neal further asserts “...they did not aim to be accepted as part of the liberal bourgeois establishment, but firmly believed that on the basis of their talent, hard work and ethics, they were already part of such an establishment, due to their presence in American popular culture.”³² Therefore, Gordy hoped that Motown and its artists would be the visual representation of these sensibilities.³³

It is also important to keep in mind that although Motown was an inspirational symbol for the Civil Rights Movement, Motown was firmly entrenched in the ideologies of the mass market; the two were not working in tandem, although both worked toward

²⁸ Early, *One Nation*, 43.

²⁹ Mark Anthony Neal *What The Music Said-Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 43.

³⁰ The phrase “New Negro” is an explicit reference to Alain Locke’s 1925 essay, “The New Negro”. In this essay, Locke voices the concern for African Americans to “transform” and overcome past racial stereotypes – relating to slavery and inferiority – and embrace education, pride and self-awareness.

Neal, *What The Music Said*, 43-45.

³¹ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 43.

³² Early, *One Nation*, 32.

³³ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 43.

similar goals – equality and acceptance for African Americans in American society.³⁴ Using his experiences working on the assembly line, Gordy modeled his operation after Detroit’s own automobile industry, the quintessential example of mass production in America’s capitalist market economy.³⁵ As Early asserts, “Gordy’s project surmised that the mass consumption of soul, via an efficient mass-production process was a natural corollary to broader efforts by blacks to integrate American society in general and corporate boardrooms in particular.”³⁶ Given the unstable political terrain during the early 1960s, Gordy’s strategy was prudent, as he had to be mindful of the large white audiences of Motown’s recordings.³⁷ Nonetheless, Motown became a very visible icon of the economic and social opportunities afforded African Americans during the early 1960s.³⁸ Motown transformed young working-class and working-poor youth, such as Diana Ross, Eddie Kendricks and Smokey Robinson, into social icons that the Civil Rights Movement could appropriate and use in its own strategy for racial integration.³⁹ Moreover, scholar Suzanne E. Smith asserts that the heightened awareness of racial inequality brought forth by the Civil Rights Movement contributed to Motown’s widespread cultural appeal.⁴⁰ Although not working simultaneously together, it is not coincidental that the success of both Motown Records and of the Civil Rights Movement occurred in the same time period – one that was clearly ready for change.

³⁴ Early, *One Nation*, 34.

³⁵ Posner, *Motown*, 30.

³⁶ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 43.

³⁷ Early, *One Nation*, 42.

³⁸ Early, *One Nation*, 44-5.

³⁹ Smith, *Dancing*, 78.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Dancing*, 7.

Keeping this in mind, when Gordy founded Motown in 1959 he made it known that it would be “The Sound of Young America”.⁴¹ Although Motown’s performers would not be the first African American artists to have significant crossover success with white youth audiences – the urban blues and swing bands of the 1920s and 1930s along with the bebop movement of the late 1940s and 1950s had achieved success with white and black youth audiences – Gordy understood “...America’s fascination, if not obsession, with youth, virility and sensuality” and knew gearing Motown to appeal to a interracial youth audience would be key to its success.⁴² In his two-story home called *Hitsville U.S.A.* on West Grand Boulevard, Gordy began his quest for musical success.⁴³ With the help of his family and close friend, budding artist Smokey Robinson, Gordy launched Motown, which became the only major African American recording company in the white dominated music industry at the time.⁴⁴

Historically, the music industry was racially segregated for marketing purposes. Record companies first began marketing “black” music as “race records” in the 1920s in response to the rise of blues singers such as Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith.⁴⁵ *Billboard* magazine monitored these records on its “Harlem Hit Parade,” which eventually became the “Rhythm and Blues” chart.⁴⁶ Before Motown, most independent black-owned record companies such as Don Robey’s Duke Peacock label in Houston and Vee-Jay Records in Chicago achieved success within the confines of the Rhythm and Blues market.⁴⁷ It was these segregating factors perpetuated by the music industry that

⁴¹ Posner, *Motown*, 30.

⁴² Neal, *What The Music Said*, 43.

⁴³ Smith, *Dancing*, 23.

⁴⁴ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 27-29.

⁴⁵ Early, *To Be Loved*, 35.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Dancing*, 5.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Dancing*, 6.

Motown dismantled; Motown's music confronted the internal divisions of the music industry when its records began to sell widely outside conventional black markets" achieving tremendous success on the pop based Billboard Top 100 Chart.⁴⁸ As scholar Gerald Early asserts,

...Motown moved black music...within the popular-music mainstream, negotiating with considerable aplomb, the enterprise of authenticating itself as youth music, while acknowledging, even celebrating, the R and B sources of African American music, reaffirming in an astonishing cultural wave, the innovative power of R and B as pop music.⁴⁹

The major goal that Gordy hoped to achieve with Motown was to create music that was universally popular and appealed to people regardless of their race.⁵⁰ Evident in Motown's slogan, "The Sound of Young America", Gordy hoped his music would span the boundaries of race and be valued for its sound, not colour.⁵¹ During a decade marked by drastic cultural crossover in areas such as literature, sports and film, Gordy hoped Motown Records was pivotal in cementing crossover success in the music industry.⁵² As scholar Suzanne E. Smith observes "Never before had a black-owned company been able to create and produce the musical artistry of its own community and then sell it successfully to audiences across racial boundaries."⁵³

Throughout Motown's evolution, it received criticism that its sound was not "black enough".⁵⁴ However, what Gordy wanted to achieve with Motown was not racially defined music as heard in earlier times with blues, gospel, and jazz; rather, he abandoned sounds traditionally associated African American musical genres and created

⁴⁸ Smith, *Dancing*, 6.

⁴⁹ Early, *One Nation*, 85.

⁵⁰ Early, *One Nation*, 12.

⁵¹ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 34-35.

⁵² Early, *One Nation*, 92-94.

⁵³ Smith, *Dancing*, 5.

⁵⁴ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 38.

Early, *One Nation*, 87.

music that was collectively popular regardless of an individual's race.⁵⁵ As scholar Gerald Early explains, Gordy's "...objective always was to reconfigure what was meant by pop music; he believed pop music was as black as it was white".⁵⁶ Moreover, as Mary Wilson, a member of the Supremes, wrote in her autobiography *My Life as A Dreamgirl*,

Our tours made breakthroughs and helped weaken racial barriers. When it came to music, segregation didn't mean a thing in some of those towns and if it did, black and white fans would ignore the local customs to attend the shows. To see crowds that were integrated – sometimes for the first time in a community – made me realize that Motown truly was the sound of young America.⁵⁷

Additionally, despite Gordy's early immersion in Rhythm and Blues – he owned a rhythm and blues specialty record store before getting into the song writing and production business – Gordy wisely constructed Motown's artists in direct opposition to classic, Rhythm and Blues artists of the era.⁵⁸ As Mark Anthony Neal observes, although "sex could sell", Gordy realized an explicit sexualized approach in his music would not lead to cross-cultural acceptance.⁵⁹ By achieving widespread success amongst both black and white listeners during such a divided era – within the youth-pop idiom – Motown revolutionized the music industry and transformed the popular music landscape in the United States.

In terms of Motown Record's cultural importance, Gerald Early argues Motown was significant for two reasons.⁶⁰ First, Motown helped to crystallize the distinctive, novel African American audience accompanied by their own selective tastes, which became regarded as an expression of a general aesthetic among a broad class of

⁵⁵ Posner, *Motown*, 40.

⁵⁶ Early, *One Nation*, 84.

⁵⁷ Mary Wilson, *Dreamgirl and Supreme Faith-My Life as a Supreme* (New York City, NY: Cooper Square Press, 1999), 56.

⁵⁸ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 43.

⁵⁹ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 44.

⁶⁰ Early, *One Nation*, 5.

Americans.⁶¹ In other words, Motown helped to establish and validate the presence of a viable African American consumer market with their own distinctive tastes.⁶² Second, Motown was pivotal, as mentioned above, in bringing to the forefront the tastes and urges of a middlebrow African American audience and consequently in creating as Early asserts, “...middle-brow black conceptions of Afrocentrism, the name African American and the mythology of the black community”.⁶³

With Motown operating more like a close-knit family – its most revered values as stated in Mary Wilson’s autobiography were loyalty, honesty and obedience – the company became one of the most successful recording companies of the twentieth century.⁶⁴ It is the only recording company to produce over one hundred Top 10 hits, from artists such as the Supremes, the Temptations, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Marvin Gaye, Marry Wells, the Four Tops, Martha, and the Vandellas, and Stevie Wonder.⁶⁵ During the tumultuous Civil Rights era, with the music industry dominated by white corporations, the ability of Motown, a company owned and run by an African American, to achieve widespread crossover success was not only groundbreaking but as Mark Anthony Neal puts it, “inspirational for the black community”.⁶⁶ Overall, Motown Records was fundamental in breaking down the longstanding racial barriers in the music industry.

Key to the success of Motown was the highly successful girl group, the Supremes. The Supremes, which first began as a four-person girl group called the Primettes, were

⁶¹ Early, *One Nation*, 5.

⁶² Early, *One Nation* 6.

⁶³ Early, *One Nation*, 4.

⁶⁴ Early, *One Nation*, 12.

⁶⁵ Posner, *Motown*, 5.

⁶⁶ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 43.

signed to Motown Records in January 1961.⁶⁷ The original Supremes, which this paper focuses on, included Diana Ross, Florence Ballard, and Mary Wilson.⁶⁸ Widespread success for the Supremes did not come early; for the first two and a half years, the Supremes released several mediocre singles.⁶⁹ At this time, the group was still perceived as having a “black sound”; their only success with their singles was on the R&B chart and the occasional appearance very low on the Billboard Top 100 Chart.⁷⁰ It was not until late 1963 that the Supremes had success with their first pop hit “When the Lovelight Starts Shining Through His Eyes”, which reached number twenty-three on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart.⁷¹ With the help of Motown’s in-house songwriting team of Holland-Dozier-Holland, by 1965 the Supremes produced five successive number one hits – “Back in my Arms Again”, “Where Did Our Love Go”, “Baby Love”, “Come See About Me”, and “Stop! In the Name of Love” – and made popular music history.⁷² By 1969, the Supremes achieved twelve Number One hits and also achieved acclaimed international success – the first Motown group to accomplish both.⁷³

Furthermore, the Supremes were the first Motown artists to perform on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on December 27th, 1964.⁷⁴ This was a landmark moment in both popular music and television history and also for Motown as the Supremes were the first African American Rhythm and Blues – pop group to perform on the show.⁷⁵ The Supremes continued to be regular guests on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and made a total of fifteen

⁶⁷ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 12.

⁶⁸ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 13.

⁶⁹ Diana Ross, *Secrets of a Sparrow-Memoirs* (New York City, NY Villard Books, 1993), 18.

⁷⁰ Ross, *Secrets*, 20-21.

⁷¹ Posner, *Motown*, 52.

⁷² Posner, *Motown*, 54.

⁷³ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 33.

⁷⁴ Gerald Nachman, *Right Here On Our Stage Tonight! The Ed Sullivan Show* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 154.

⁷⁵ Nachman, *Right Here*, 155.

performances up until 1969 when Diana Ross embarked on her solo career.⁷⁶ *The Ed Sullivan Show* played an instrumental role in Motown's success particularly for the Supremes, providing a platform for its performers to achieve substantive crossover success with white listeners of all ages.⁷⁷ Moreover, as will be discussed later, the show played a pivotal role in changing the racial perceptions of African American pop artists in the music industry.⁷⁸ The show showcased the glamorous, sophisticated appearance and demeanor of the Supremes, which revolutionized the historical portrayal of African American female pop artists.⁷⁹ In turn, the Supremes' widespread success on the *The Ed Sullivan Show* led the Supremes to become fixed television presences, appearing on shows such as *Hullabaloo*, *The Hollywood Palace* and Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show* and also becoming hosts of their own variety shows.⁸⁰ As Mary Wilson fondly recounts in her autobiography,

Of all the hosts we worked with, Ed Sullivan was my favourite. We were booked for his show so often that I began to think of it as *The Supremes Show*. Mr. Sullivan made no secret of the fact that he was crazy about us. The Supremes were the only act he let keep the special gowns from the production numbers.⁸¹

As mentioned above, during this time the Supremes revolutionized conceptions and portrayals of African Americans pop artists within the music industry. Historically, African American artists were portrayed as uncultured, coarse, rough and sexual – a stereotype long withstanding in American society.⁸² In order to combat this perpetuating stereotype, Gordy carefully crafted the appearance of the Supremes to defy this racial

⁷⁶ Nachman, *Right Here*, 156-157.

⁷⁷ Nachman, *Right Here*, 317-318.

⁷⁸ Koojiman, "From Elegance," 7.

⁷⁹ Koojiman, "From Elegance," 8.

⁸⁰ Nachman, *Right Here*, 163.

⁸¹ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 160.

⁸² Jaap Koojiman, "Ain't No Mountain High Enough-Diana Ross as American Pop Cultural Icon of the 1960s," in *Impossible to Hold-Women and Culture in the 1960s* ed. Avital Bloch and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 156-157.

stereotype.⁸³ He established an ‘Artist Development’ program in Motown, headed by Maxine Powell, who played an influential role in teaching the Supremes how to formally walk, sit, eat, dress, and conduct themselves in public.⁸⁴ Additionally, Gordy hired renowned dancer, and choreographer Cholly Atkins to refine the performance and dance skills of the Supremes.⁸⁵ Along with stunning gowns and impeccably coiffed hairstyles, the Supremes were the epitome of sophistication and glamour in the music industry and in American popular culture throughout the 1960s, and on.⁸⁶ Overall, Motown’s clean-cut, pristine artists revolutionized the landscape of American popular music.⁸⁷

⁸³ Jacqueline Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture-Popular Music, and Identity in the 1960s* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2007), 153-154.

⁸⁴ Koojiman, “Ain’t No Mountain,” 158.

⁸⁵ Warwick, *Girl Groups*, 156.

⁸⁶ Koojiman, “From Elegance,” 11.

⁸⁷ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 43.

CHAPTER 2
THE IMPORTANCE OF “MAKING IT” IN NEW YORK NIGHTCLUBS

From time immemorial, mankind has gathered in groups, large and small, dismissed care and worry and enjoyed especially prepared food of higher quality than ordinarily consumed together with rare wines while being entertained by dancers, musicians, singers, magicians and buffoons... We of today can, at very nominal costs, enjoy food, drink, and entertainment for which the Greeks and Romans would gladly have paid a king's ransom and given a thousand slaves as a bonus. Their crude musicians, their primitive dancers, and their torch lights did not compare with present-day restaurant revues.⁸⁸

International Night Life Magazine, 1931

According to Susan Waggoner, in theory a nightclub is a private, social club whose members gather to eat, talk and imbibe drinks.⁸⁹ In order to fully understand and analyze why Berry Gordy was so determined that the Supremes perform at the Copacabana nightclub, it is necessary to discuss the evolution of New York nightlife, leading to the emergence of nightclubs in the 1920s and more pointedly, what they represented in American society. Historically, New York City is known as the social and entertainment capital of the United States.⁹⁰ It is not surprising that nightlife and in particular nightclubs are a defining feature of New York City.⁹¹ The emergence of clubs like the Copacabana can be traced back to elite supper clubs in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹² To briefly provide background context at this time, public amusement in America was viewed as an imitation of public amusement in Europe.⁹³ For the well-to-do and middle classes, there were expositions and exhibitions, crystal palaces and rooftop

⁸⁸ Susan Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights: Art, Legend, and Style, 1920-1960* (New York City, NY: Rizzoli, 2001), 46.

⁸⁹ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 8.

⁹⁰ Lewis Erneberg, *Steppin' Out-New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 7.

⁹¹ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 9.

⁹² Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 11.

⁹³ Lewis Erneberg, "From New York to Middleton: Repeal and the Legitimization of Nightlife in the Great Depression," *American Quarterly* 38 (1986), 762.

gardens; for the lower classes, beer halls and traveling carnivals sufficed.⁹⁴ Public sex was looked down upon, but public gluttony was not and big bar-restaurants like Delmonico's provided all the entertainment one could want."⁹⁵

Delmonico's rose to prominence during the mid-nineteenth century as one of the most prestigious and esteemed examples of New York City high life.⁹⁶ Delmonico's originally began as a wine and pastry shop; however by 1848, under the guidance of Lorenzo Delmonico, the restaurant was expanded and overhauled everything including the food, service and location.⁹⁷ In turn, Delmonico's became regarded, as quoted by the *New York Weekly Herald*, as an "... expensive, and aristocratic restaurant, of which Delmonico's is the only complete specimen in the United States".⁹⁸ Part of the aristocratic appeal of Delmonico's was its exclusivity and appeal to the upper echelons of New York City nightlife. From the onset, Delmonico's was associated with families of old wealth in the City.⁹⁹ Delmonico's served as a place exclusively for such families and their way of life, perpetuating the longstanding association between nightlife and highbrows patrons.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, Delmonico's served as the chosen place for national and local business and was often occupied by government officials, merchants and businessmen.¹⁰¹ The reputation of Delmonico's as essential to the social, political and

⁹⁴ Erneberg, *Nightlife*, 6-7.

⁹⁵ Waggoner, *Nightclub*, 7.

⁹⁶ Michael Batterberry and Ariane Batterberry, *On the Town in New York: The Landmark History of Eating, Drinking, and Entertainment from the American Revolution to the Food Revolution* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 1999), 14.

⁹⁷ Baterberry, and Batterberry, *On the Town*, 17-18.

⁹⁸ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 11.

⁹⁹ Baterberry, and Batterberry, *On the Town*, 20-21.

¹⁰⁰ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 11.

¹⁰¹ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 16.

economic matters of the City and country itself also added an air of exclusivity to the restaurant.¹⁰²

On a more basic level, Delmonico's was an exclusively white restaurant, another longstanding characteristic of New York City nightlife.¹⁰³ Moreover, for the first thirty years Delmonico's welcomed only a male clientele; it was not until the 1860s that Delmonico's allowed women permitted they had an escort.¹⁰⁴ By the 1890s these rules were loosened and women were allowed in on their own until dinner; afterwards, they had to be escorted.¹⁰⁵ Overall, Delmonico's perpetuated its appeal as the most esteemed and sophisticated place to dine not only through its exquisite food, service and location, but also through its exclusivity and appeal to the elite of New York's society.

As the turn of the century approached, the glamour, sophistication and exclusivity associated with Delmonico's continued to be a defining feature of New York City nightlife. With the creation of the luxury restaurants and hotels – which also had restaurants attached – such as Sherry's and the Waldorf-Astoria in 1897, New York City nightlife became even more glamorous and over-the-top than at Delmonico's.¹⁰⁶ Appealing to patrons of new money now too, these grand venues continued to be dominated by the “first families” of New York City and also by other wealthy, elite families from various major cities.¹⁰⁷ Celebrities also became a staple feature of such venues, again emphasizing the elite and exclusive nature of these places.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 23.

¹⁰³ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 13-14.

¹⁰⁴ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 15.

¹⁰⁶ Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town*, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Waggoner, *Nightclub*, 34.

From the late 1890s till 1910, New York City nightlife also witnessed the creation of lobster palaces such as Bustanoby's and Churchill's.¹⁰⁹ These places, modeled after European architecture and design, sought to cater to the late night crowds following Broadway shows.¹¹⁰ Even more elaborate than the preceding grandiose hotels with everything from dining to the venue itself, these places sought to bring a livelier and less formal atmosphere to New York City nightlife.¹¹¹ Moreover, with the rising standard of living, exclusivity was not as dominant a criteria as it was in earlier times; rather, admission to such places was open to patrons of new money from the growing industrial class, which was a rapidly expanding demographic.¹¹² Nonetheless, lobster palaces of the early twentieth century were still exclusive to those of the elite upper classes, who were predominantly white.

Furthermore, cabarets played a pivotal role in merging live entertainment with dining. Modeled after French nightlife, cabarets rose to prominence in New York City in 1911.¹¹³ Initially, cabarets were associated with the fringes of New York society; however, following the success of the first cabaret in the City – the Follies – cabarets became a respectable form of nightlife for high society.¹¹⁴ Cabarets combined entertainment – usually from Chorus girls, singers and comedians like Sophie Tucker, or bands such as the Dixieland Jazz Band – along with a meal and alcoholic drinks for seated patrons until their demise circa 1918 due to the installment of Prohibition laws.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 23-24.

¹¹⁰ Baterberry, and Batterberry, *On the Town*, 38-39.

¹¹¹ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 16.

¹¹² Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, " 17-18.

¹¹³ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 42.

¹¹⁴ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 44-45.

¹¹⁵ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 46.

All of these factors – the merging of food, drinks and entertainment – played a key role in the formation of nightclubs as the decade progressed.

In 1918, the Volstead Act made the sale of liquor illegal, putting a temporary hold on New York City nightlife.¹¹⁶ Unable to “remain dry” and abide with the law, speakeasies – which sold alcohol illegally – rose to prominence in basements and backrooms across the City, offering a secretive, intimate venue to savor drinks; it was also at this point that such venues began to be referred to as “clubs”.¹¹⁷ As James Gavin suggests, since most speakeasies were operated by mobsters and for the most part were not considered reputable places to attend, the presence of live entertainment brought an air of legitimacy to the venues.¹¹⁸ As a result, entertainment at such “clubs” became a defining feature of speakeasies, paving the way for the modern nightclub. Moreover, as scholar Lewis Erneberg asserts not only did the Prohibition era highlight the durability and viability of New York nightlife; by the end of the 1920s, speakeasies were booming, including an addition of seventy new “clubs”.¹¹⁹ Moreover, as Erneberg highlights, it was out of the Prohibition era that the rudimentary nightclub was born.¹²⁰ As a result, speakeasies, which in turn became formally recognized as “nightclubs” once Prohibition ended, were a creation that was distinctively American, marking the start of a new epoch in American nightlife.¹²¹

As mentioned above, when Prohibition ended in 1933 nightclubs rose to prominence across New York City, although only a handful of speakeasies, such as the

¹¹⁶ James Gavin, *Intimate Nights-The Golden Age of New York Cabaret* (New York City, NY: Proscenium Publishers Inc.), 10.

¹¹⁷ Gavin, *Intimate Nights*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Erneberg, “From New York,” 763-764.

¹¹⁹ Erneberg, “From New York,” 764.

¹²⁰ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 10.

¹²¹ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 7.

Cotton Club, continued to thrive after the Volstead Act was lifted.¹²² Moreover, although the Great Depression was at its worst, nightclubs proved to be a viable pastime for many Americans and were increasingly in demand as the decade progressed.¹²³ As mentioned above, although nightclubs were not reputable places to attend at first, what significantly enhanced their legitimacy was the presence of entertainers.¹²⁴ Pivotal in attracting patrons to nightclubs was the show, or revue the club put on.¹²⁵ The large-scale revue had its roots in vaudeville, where audiences became used to a jolting mix of singers, dancers, comedians and novelty acts.¹²⁶ Every nightclub had a theme – such as Latin, French or Moroccan inspired – and a club would produce one or more revues a year each with a theme and musical numbers that were connected to the club’s main theme. Chorus girls also rose to prominence in the nightclub era appearing before and after the featured acts of the night. Dance numbers were exceedingly popular and in the early years of the nightclub era including Fred Astaire and his sister Adele, parody dance acts Clifton Webb and Mary Hay along with many Latin inspired dance teams were top acts.¹²⁷ Moreover, bands and orchestras such as Paul Whiteman, Guy Lombardo and Emil Coleman along with comedians Jimmy Durante and Sophie Tucker and female torch singers Helen Morgan and Libby Holman, all played a pivotal role in attracting patrons.¹²⁸

As the decade evolved, nightclubs became associated as urban fantasies – full of romance, glamour, and excitement – and were regarded as the epitome of New York

¹²² Erneberg, “From New York,” 765.

¹²³ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 7.

¹²⁴ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 8-9.

¹²⁵ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 13.

¹²⁶ Erneberg, “From New York,” 768.

¹²⁷ Erneberg, “From New York,” 768-769

¹²⁸ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 20.

nightlife.¹²⁹ They continued to be popular amongst the wealthy and prosperous in society.¹³⁰ At this time, the young adult demographic was booming and those of this age group who originated from wealthy families or who achieved financial success on their own, comprised a large majority of nightclub attendees.¹³¹ Additionally, celebrities continued to be a landmark feature of nightclubs; they were regular guests, and their appearances elevated the club's status.¹³² With the advent of national broadcasting, radios began streaming nightclub music to homes across the city and gossip columnists for newspapers began appearing at nightclubs and writing reviews about them the next day.¹³³ All of this contributed to a longing and desire to take part in the elite, revered life of New York nightclubs.

As the mid-twentieth century approached, New York nightclubs began gaining nationwide attention.¹³⁴ With migration from rural to metropolitan areas accelerating, the number of talented and cultured individuals in New York City irrevocably established it as the premier cultural capital of the United States.¹³⁵ Additionally, the 1939 New York World Fair casted further national and international limelight on the City, highlighting its outstanding entertainers.¹³⁶ During this time, Times Square enjoyed a reputation as the hub of great hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and theater.¹³⁷ Moreover, within the energetic entertainment circuit in New York City, it was hard to fathom that World War II was escalating in Europe or that America was still feeling the lingering of the Great

¹²⁹ Erneberg, "From New York," 767-769.

¹³⁰ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 7.

¹³¹ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 9-10.

¹³² Stanley Walker, *The Nightclub Era* (New York City, NY: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 13.

¹³³ Lowry, "New York's After-Midnight Clubs," *New York Times*, February 5, 1922.

¹³⁴ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 17.

¹³⁵ Gavin, *Intimate Nights*, 44.

¹³⁶ Erneberg, *Nightlife*, 12.

¹³⁷ Erneberg, *Steppin' Out*, 65.

Depression.¹³⁸

Although nightclubs were initially affected by World War II, the war proved to be financially beneficial for them in the long run.¹³⁹ With the ongoing conflict of the WWII, more than ever all people wanted to do was escape; nightclubs offered an escape to another time that was simpler, richer and more optimistic in its outlook.¹⁴⁰ Crowding together in clubs to watch a show that had nothing to do with reality turned out to be a surefire remedy for the news headlines of the day.¹⁴¹ Consequently, the entertainment business boomed in America; big cities were bursting with people, most of them young, many away from home for the first time and eager for distraction.¹⁴² Moreover, unemployment, at a level of 9.6% in 1940, sank to 1.9% by 1943 and for the first time in a decade, people had money to spend.¹⁴³

Consequently, there was no limit on the consumption of entertainment and nightclubs continued to meet the demand; during World War II, clubs earned their highest profits ever.¹⁴⁴ The highly charged atmosphere recalled the frenetic pace of the Roaring Twenties and again, the times were “hot”.¹⁴⁵ At this time, the nightclub business transformed to become an industry based on social and entertainment power.¹⁴⁶ These clubs served as a launching pad for establishing the careers of many performers, such as Frank Sinatra, Lena Horne, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, they catered to the select ultra-chic, café socialites, who established the glamorous image of New York

¹³⁸ Ernberg, *Steppin' Out*, 64.

¹³⁹ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 58.

¹⁴⁰ Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 64-5.

¹⁴¹ Gavin, *Intimate Nights*, 55.

¹⁴² Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 66.

¹⁴³ Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 68.

¹⁴⁴ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 62.

¹⁴⁵ Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 67.

¹⁴⁶ Gavin, *Intimate Nights*, 53.

¹⁴⁷ Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 62-63.

nightlife.¹⁴⁸ Clubs such as the Stork Club, 21 and El Morocco provided patrons with only the finest and most sophisticated experience New York City nightlife offered.¹⁴⁹

These nightclubs were in stark competition, although they resembled each other in many ways.¹⁵⁰ Each owed a substantive amount of their success to the personalities of their hosts.¹⁵¹ Moreover, each one distinguished themselves from dozens of other “dine-and-dance” clubs by creating an aura of exclusivity, as mentioned above, a long-standing trend in the upper echelons of New York high life.¹⁵² As Susan Waggoner observes, “...these clubs were among the most expensive watering holes in New York, whose high prices and velvet-rope lines were calculated to inspire longing in the very throngs they kept at bay”.¹⁵³ These clubs also thrived on publicity and even published their own newsletters such as *Stork Club Talk* and El Morocco’s *No News*.¹⁵⁴

Mirroring American society, nightclubs from their earliest emergence as speakeasies during the Prohibition and on until the late 1940s were segregated.¹⁵⁵ In most of the nightclubs in and around New York City only whites were allowed entry as patrons and also as personnel.¹⁵⁶ However, in the neighbourhood of Harlem, clubs like the Cotton Club, the Club Plantation and the Club Alabam’ showcased African American talent even as they enforced a whites-only policy for patrons.¹⁵⁷ These clubs sought to appeal to wealthy white patrons by exaggerating the stereotypes of primitiveness and exoticism and

¹⁴⁸ Ernberg, “From New York,” 767.

¹⁴⁹ Ralph Blumenthal, *Stork-Club-America’s Most Famous Nightspot, and the Lost World of Café Society* (Miami, FL: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 33-35.

¹⁵⁰ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 62.

¹⁵¹ Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 62-63.

¹⁵² Blumenthal, *Stork Club*, 45.

¹⁵³ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 57.

¹⁵⁴ Ernberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 79-80.

¹⁵⁵ Blumenthal, *Stork Club*, 57.

¹⁵⁶ Blumenthal, *Stork Club*, 57.

¹⁵⁷ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 60.

modeling said clubs after white representations of Southern plantation life.¹⁵⁸ For example, the infamous Cotton Club, which was in business from 1923 till 1940, employed African American waiters and talent, yet barred entry to African American patrons.¹⁵⁹ The club's focus was on creating an "authentic" African American experience for its white patrons, basing the menu, decorations and revues on the longstanding stereotypes associated with African Americans.¹⁶⁰ In turn, the Cotton Club continued to enforce a binary between whites and "primitive" African Americans.¹⁶¹

Despite this racial stereotyping, the Cotton Club was a launching pad for numerous African American performers, such as Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Ethel Waters, Lena Horne, Harold Arlen and Louis Armstrong, who were all brought to the forefront of the entertainment industry following their Cotton Club appearances.¹⁶² More importantly, the Cotton Club highlighted the talent and ingenuity of African American performers; not only did it allow African American performers to find jobs at other nightclubs, on stage and in movies much easier, it served as a platform for validating their presence in the entertainment industry.¹⁶³

Overall, as discussed above, New York nightclubs played a defining role not only in American culture and nightlife, but also in the entertainment industry. As highlighted, nightclubs proved to be a defining and durable feature of American society enduring through the Prohibition era and the Great Depression. Nightclubs were a public reflection of the changing cultural values in American popular culture and also serving as a place of

¹⁵⁸ Ernberg, *Steppin' Out*, 64.

¹⁵⁹ Gavin, *Intimate Nights*, 18.

¹⁶⁰ Ernberg, "From New York," 768.

¹⁶¹ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 60.

¹⁶² Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 72.

¹⁶³ Gavin, *Intimate Nights*, 41.

escape during times of hardship.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, New York nightclubs played a pivotal role in creating a celebrity culture and became invariably linked to American entertainment industry; stars often received their first major success after performing at these clubs. As also highlighted above, many of these nightclubs played a pivotal role in validating the presence of African Americans in the entertainment industry.¹⁶⁵ A detailed analysis of the Copacabana, one of the most esteemed New York nightclubs of all time, will provide further insight into the role nightclubs played in society and in the entertainment industry during the mid-twentieth century.

¹⁶⁴ Gavin, *Intimate Nights*, 38.

¹⁶⁵ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 70.

CHAPTER 3
THE COPACABANA, NYC – “THE HOTTEST CLUB NORTH OF HAVANA”

From the 1940s till the 1960s, the captivating Copacabana was the most well known and most popular nightclub not only in New York City, but in the United States.¹⁶⁶ In the pseudo-tropical atmosphere, you could gaze at the enchanting Copa Girls, catch a glimpse of which celebrities were sitting at the best tables and then read about it the following day in a number of news columns.¹⁶⁷ No other club had a greater impact on talent and on New York’s café society than the Copacabana.¹⁶⁸ Indubitably, the Copa was the pinnacle of the show business world for every café act, embodying the cosmopolitan and glamorous life of New York’s high society.¹⁶⁹

The Copacabana was established almost seventy-five years ago as the Great Depression was ending and World War II was beginning.¹⁷⁰ The Copacabana opened on Wednesday, October 30th, 1940 on Manhattan’s Upper East Side; this part of New York was dominated primarily by people of old wealth and was also home to the elite Harmonie Club, the Colony club for ladies and the Union Club for gentlemen, the Metropolitan Club, and a trio of the City’s finest old hotels – the Sherry Netherland, the Pierre and the Savoy-Plaza.¹⁷¹ The club was founded by publicist Monte Proser who was known as the “King of the Publicity World”; Proser was first hired as the Stork Club’s publicist and went on to publicize dozens of other nightspots in the City before becoming

¹⁶⁶ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 50.

¹⁶⁷ Baggelar, *Images*, 11-12.

¹⁶⁸ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 53.

¹⁶⁹ Baggelar, *Images*, 10-11.

¹⁷⁰ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 50.

¹⁷¹ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 51

a nightclub owner of several clubs in Los Angeles and New York City.¹⁷² However, the Copa became associated with part owner Jules Podell from 1950 on.¹⁷³

This Latin inspired supper club was named after the elegant and glamorous Copacabana nightclub at the Copacabana Palace Hotel in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.¹⁷⁴ After President Roosevelt announced the “good neighbour policy” with Latin America in 1933, there was widespread interest in Latin American culture amongst Americans, particularly in the realm of entertainment, a trend that continued throughout the 1940s.¹⁷⁵ Part of the Copa’s appeal was the extravagant approach it provided to patrons.¹⁷⁶ The Copa offered top-of-the-line entertainment, a full-course dinner from world-renowned chefs – all New York urbanites knew the Copa’s food was equal to that served at top eating-places in the City – accompanied with exquisite drinks, stellar music and a night of dancing, all of which established the club as a place of glamour and sophistication in New York high life in the early 1940s.¹⁷⁷ As described in one advertisement from October 1945,

The Copacabana practically invented smart cabaret entertainment in the modern manner. Here are a few things on which we claim the patents on: The Copa brought you the intimate revue of East of Fifth avenue, providing the swanky setting on the right side of the railroad tracks where you can see a full-dress musical revue, eat a full-course dinner and enjoy a full evening of dancing.¹⁷⁸

The Copa set itself apart from other nightclubs with its commitment to first-rate entertainment. Since the onset, Copa shows were more similar to grand Broadway ensembles – with full staging, chorography, and costume design departments – than

¹⁷² Baggelar, *Images*, 12.

¹⁷³ Baggelar, *Images*, 12-13.

¹⁷⁴ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 52.

¹⁷⁵ Baggelar, *Images*, 15.

¹⁷⁶ Mickey Podell-Raber, *The Copa-Jules Podell and the Hottest Club North of Havana* (New York City, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 16.

¹⁷⁷ Podell-Raber, *The Copa*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Podell-Raber, *The Copa*, 26.

typical nightclub shows.¹⁷⁹ Featuring up to five acts, the Copa provided its audience with diverse entertainment, expanding the scope of traditional nightclub acts.¹⁸⁰ In its early years from 1940 to 1943, the Copa featured ballroom dance teams such as the world-famous Ramon and Renita, ballerinas such as Patricia Bowman, operatic singing from Rosita Rios and Enya Gonzalez alongside full Latin-styled orchestras and nightly classic samba dancing.¹⁸¹ Particularly, ballroom dancers Don Loper and Maxine Barrat brought acclaimed fame to the Copacabana with their “authentic” samba dancing.¹⁸² As a result, the samba became the nightly highlight of the Copa show during the early 1940s, capturing citywide attention.¹⁸³ Overall, such a diverse group of acts gained widespread acclaim with the public and press, elevating the Copa as one of the most desirable venues in town.

However, from October 31st, 1941 and on, the Copa instituted a “big-name policy” to avert competition from other rising nightclubs.¹⁸⁴ Taking a more traditional approach, the Copa continually advertised a “name-band” policy of the star singer and band for the night.¹⁸⁵ Frequent signature acts from comedians Sophie Tucker, Joe E. Lewis and Jimmy Durante proved to be increasingly successful, along with the sweet singing of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin.¹⁸⁶ These acclaimed stars brought prestige and distinction to the Copa and continually elevated the status of the Copa as the most

¹⁷⁹ Podell-Raber, *The Copa*, 27-28.

¹⁸⁰ Baggelar, *Images*, 25.

¹⁸¹ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 55.

¹⁸² Podell-Raber, *The Copa*, 30.

¹⁸³ Baggelar, *Images*, 27-28.

¹⁸⁴ Louis Calta, “Sophie Tucker opens at the Copacabana,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1943.

¹⁸⁵ Calta, “Sophie Tucker.”

¹⁸⁶ Baggelar, *Images*, 26-32.

Louis Calta, “A New Show Opens at the Copacabana This Week – Other Café, and Hotel News,” *The New York Times*, 1943.

popular nightspot not only in New York City, but also in the United States.¹⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the Copa also played a fundamental role in launching the careers of many unknown performers. Performers, such as Perry Como, Janis Page, Eddie Fisher, Sid Caesar, Johnnie Ray and even the eponymous Copa girls, all had major career breaks following their Copa performances.¹⁸⁸ Overall, whether a veteran star, or an aspiring performer was performing the Copacabana invariably had a tremendous influence on the careers of its performers. A 1963 advertisement for the legendary Copa Bonnet reads,

The Copa Bonnet is the most famous hand-me down in show business...it is the laurel wreath of achievement in nightclub circles and is awarded only to entertainers who reach the peak...it has graced the brows of such established stars as Jimmy Durante, Joe E. Lewis, Danny Thomas, Frank Sinatra, Johnny Mathis, Jack Leonard, Louis Prima, Nat “King” Cole, Peggy Lee and many more. It was the first crowning glory of such great Copa protégés as Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis, Perry Como, Lena Horne, Tony Bennett, Sammy Davis Jr., Steve Lawrence & Eydie Gorme, Joey Bishop, Bobby Darrin, Jimmy Roselli, Petula Clark and Connie Francis. No wonder the world has come to know that you will always find the smartest entertainment in town at the world famous Copacabana.¹⁸⁹

The Copacabana was inextricably linked to the American entertainment industry and the excerpt above highlights the nature of this relationship. As Frank Sinatra famously stated, “You’re a show business nobody until you make the Copa and do three shows nightly...”¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, part of the prestige and glamour associated with the Copacabana was attributed to those who were frequent audience guests. As mentioned above, celebrities were a defining feature of nightclubs and contributed to the exclusive air of the

¹⁸⁷ Baggelar, *Images*, 45.

¹⁸⁸ Podell-Raber, *The Copa*, 18, 34, 48-54.

¹⁸⁹ *The Copacabana, Where the Stars Shine Brightest*, New York Times Advertisement, October 10th, 1958

¹⁹⁰ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 110.

clubs.¹⁹¹ As Susan Waggoner observes, “From its inception, Monte Proser envisioned the Copacabana as an escapist’s paradise where people would flock for the transient thrill of rubbing elbows with the rich and famous.”¹⁹² At the Copa, audience members were continually famed movie stars, performers and acclaimed sports figures heightening the elite nature of the club.¹⁹³ According to Kristin Baggelaar’s extensive work on the Copacabana, “...there was a glamour and excitement about the Copa that did not exist in any other club in America.”¹⁹⁴ ¹⁹⁵ As also mentioned above, the affluent socialites of New York’s café society were another staple feature of nightclubs and were to some extent regarded as celebrities.

There was also a radio program broadcast from the Copa that commenced in 1947.¹⁹⁶ “Meet Me At the Copa” hosted by Jack Eigen on WHN interviewed celebrities in the Copa lounge and brought the star-studded life of the Copa to middle-class American homes, allowing the audience to audibly experience the elite café society life.¹⁹⁷ Even the catch phrase used in advertisements, “We’re At The Copa! Where Are You?” further heightened the air of exclusivity and prestige surrounding the Copa as a must-be spot for the wealthy and famous.¹⁹⁸ As Susan Waggoner observes, “...the glamour, up-to-the-minute delight and the Copa magic of anything goes swept across the nation’s airwaves nightly during Eigen’s sessions.”¹⁹⁹ Moreover, even the “Live At The Copa!” recording albums, which were released from 1958 and on, sought to bring not

¹⁹¹ Baggelaar, *Images*, 70.

¹⁹² Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 77.

¹⁹³ Baggelaar, *Images*, 69-70.

¹⁹⁴ Baggelaar, *Images*, 68.

¹⁹⁵ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 68-69.

¹⁹⁶ Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 80.

¹⁹⁷ Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 81.

¹⁹⁸ Walker, *The Nightclub Era*, 70.

¹⁹⁹ Waggoner, *Nightclub*, 72.

only the music, but the glitz and glamour of the Copa to everyday Americans through the purchase and experience of a recorded performance.

Additionally, members of the popular press and music industry were also frequent guests, further heightening the exclusive nature of the club.²⁰⁰ Nightclub columnists, such as Ed Sullivan from the *New York Daily Times*, Earl Wilson from the *New York Post*, and Jack Thompson from the *New York Journal-American* played a pivotal role in publicizing Copa performers thereby impacting the course of their careers.²⁰¹ Reporters from magazines such as *Variety* and *Billboard* and executives from record companies including Columbia Records and Capitol Records had correspondents present at every show.²⁰² They too played a key role in publicizing the club as one of the most desirable places to attend and perform and also in influencing the careers of the Copa performers.

Also important in discussing was the Copa's "no blacks" policy in place until 1952.²⁰³ Although the Nat Cole Trio and Lena Horne was the first African American to get a job as a Copa lounge act – the downstairs room at the Copacabana – in 1945, no African Americans were admitted or booked for the main room.²⁰⁴ It was well known that both Harry Belafonte and Sammy Davis Jr. were denied entry as guests at the Copa in the early 1950s.²⁰⁵ Sinatra – who was appalled when Davis was denied entry to see one of his Copa performances – played a pivotal role in overturning this policy in 1952 when Jules Podell let Davis return the next night to watch his performance.²⁰⁶ Later on that same year, jazz baritone Billy Eckstine became the first African American to headline the

²⁰⁰ Nachman, *Right Here*, 56-58.

²⁰¹ N.d., "The Supremes Just Concluded the Copcabana," *Variety Magazine*, September 1, 1965.

²⁰² N.d., "The Supremes."

²⁰³ Nachman, *Right Here*, 59.

²⁰⁴ Baggelar, *Images*, 79.

²⁰⁵ Podell-Raber, *The Copa*, 24.

²⁰⁶ Podell-Raber, *The Copa*, 25-26.

newly integrated nightclub, paving the way for Sammy Davis Jr. and the Will Mastin Trio in 1954, Harry Belafone in 1955, Ella Fitzgerald in 1957, Nat King Cole in 1958, Sam Cooke in 1958, Johnny Mathis in 1959 and George Kirby in 1962.²⁰⁷ However, it is important to highlight that the aforementioned African American artists who played at the Copa were foremost, adult entertainers and secondly, were either jazz, or adult pop singers.²⁰⁸ Therefore, the Copa appealed to Gordy not only as an opportunity to “make it” at this historically defined and predominantly white venue, but also as an opportunity for a Motown group to be the first African American youth-pop artists to perform there.²⁰⁹

Overall, although the Copa was not the most profitable nightclub in New York City, it was by far the largest and most well known nightclub of its time.²¹⁰ Entertainers considered it the mecca of the nightclub world – most famously called the “Carnegie Hall” of nightclubs – and performing there signified that one achieved the highest pinnacle of fame.²¹¹ Even the eponymous “Copa Bonnet”, which was awarded to successful performers, represented the “Oscar of after the dark entertainment”.²¹² Overall, the Copa proved to be a place inextricably tied to the American entertainment industry

²⁰⁷ Gardner, “Dark Laughter.”

²⁰⁸ Keir Keightley, “Long Play: Adult-Oriented Popular Music and the Temporal Logistics of the Post-War Sound Recording Industry in the U.S.A.” *Media, Culture and Society* 26 no. 3 (2004): 376.

As discussed by scholar Keir Keightley, adult pop, including artists such as Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole and Dean Martin, was the dominant economic and cultural force in the United States recording industry from the 1950s till the late 1960s – up until rock music took its place. During this time, adult pop via the format of the LP album was in direct opposition to its teenage counterpart, the 45 rpm, which was the medium for youth rock. As Keightley discusses, adult pop was viewed on the same level as European classical music and jazz due to its shared dissemination format of the LP. Thus, adult pop via the LP album and the youth rock via the single can be interpreted as a form of high–low discourse.

See Keir Keightley’s articles “Long Play: Adult-Oriented Popular Music and the Temporal Logistics of the Post-War Sound Recording Industry in the U.S.A.” (2004) and also “You Keep Coming Back Like A Song: Adult Audiences, Taste Panics and The Idea of The Standard” (2001) for a further discussion of adult pop and its cultural significance.

²⁰⁹ Early, *One Nation*, 102.

²¹⁰ Waggoner, *Nightclub Nights*, 109.

²¹¹ Waggoner, *Nightclub*, 110-111.

²¹² Baggelar, *Images*, 83.

and it is clear that “making it” to the Copa had a paramount influence on an entertainer’s career.

CHAPTER 4 MOTOWN IN NYC – THE SUPREMES AT THE COPACABANA, 1965

The 1960s witnessed the rise of an unprecedented new demographic – seventy million post-war baby boomers became teenagers and young adults, marking the first time in history that the youth demographic was regarded as an independent, viable consumer market.²¹³ The 1960s brought a world of change in American society as there was a continual move away from the traditionalist 1950s; this resulted in a newfound way of thinking in American culture, ushering in widespread cultural changes in areas such as education, lifestyle and entertainment.²¹⁴ Despite this changing world, the Copa still maintained its bourgeois air as the top venue in the entertainment industry.

Changes in the American music industry during this time were wide sweeping.²¹⁵ The 1950s saw the demise of sweet crooners like Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, as the most successful pop artists of the time and consequently the rise of Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll artists.²¹⁶ As scholar Keir Keightley discusses, the post World War II record industry witnessed the massive segmentation of audiences by age.²¹⁷ With the rise of a new viable consumer group – teenagers and young adults – a new medium of dissemination became inextricably linked to the youth demographic – the 45 rpm “singles”; conversely, the long-playing album, which was associated with adult pop,

²¹³ Reebee Garofalo, *Rockin’ Out-Popular Music in the U.S.A.* (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts, 2005), 151.

²¹⁴ Garofalo, *Rockin’ Out*, 151.

²¹⁵ Baggelar, *Images*, 87.

²¹⁶ Baggelar, *Images*, 88.

²¹⁷ Keir Keightley, “You Keep Coming Back Like A Song: Adult Audiences, Taste Panics, and the Idea of the Standard,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 13 (2001), 8.

mood music, Broadway and standards, was associated with the adult audience.²¹⁸ This in turn signified the generational and also class tensions that characterized the popular music industry during this time.²¹⁹ With Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Big Joe Turner, Bill Haley and the Comets and the notorious Elvis Presley leading the way, the 1950s and 1960s were decades defined by youth culture and Rock and Roll.²²⁰ As mentioned above, it was out of this youth-pop idiom that Motown Records, and in particular, the Supremes achieved acclaimed crossover success.

In 1964, the Supremes were the first Motown group to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on December 27th of that year.²²¹ As mentioned earlier, in 1965 the Supremes were the top female selling vocal group, producing five successive number one hits on the Billboard Top 100 – “Back in my Arms Again”, “Where Did Our Love Go”, “Baby Love”, “Come See About Me”, and “Stop! In the Name of Love” – making popular music history.²²² A January 16th, 1965 article from the *Boston Globe* describes the Supremes as “the most valuable record property in the world of popular music.”²²³ It also states that, at this time, the Supremes were the favourites among both white and black teenagers from the ages of thirteen to sixteen years.²²⁴

Up to this point in 1965, the Supremes were incredibly well known and increasingly popular artists, achieving unprecedented crossover success – crossing over

²¹⁸ Keightley, “You Keep Coming,” 8.

²¹⁹ As mentioned in an earlier footnote, adult pop via the LP album and the youth rock via the single can be interpreted as a form of high–low discourse. In the 1950s, “good music” referred to adult pop along with art music and opera, which were all disseminated using the LP album. As Keightley points out “good music” was positioned directly against teenage Rock and Roll music, which was viewed as “bad” music. Moreover, he argues that adult pop appropriated the terminology of classical music by using terms such as “standard” and “good”, highlighting not only age tensions, but class tensions at play.

Keightley, “You Keep Coming,” 8-12.

²²⁰ Garofalo, *Rockin’ Out*, 152.

²²¹ Koojiman, “From Elegance,” 7.

²²² Posner, *Motown*, 52.

²²³ Buchanan, “The Supremes.”

²²⁴ Buchanan, “The Supremes.”

from the Rhythm and Blues chart to the pop chart – with youth audiences at the time. Moreover, Berry Gordy and the Supremes were just beginning their adult-oriented nightclub careers, with their first established nightclub performance at the Basin Street South Club in Boston. An article from the *Chicago Defender* on July 26th, 1965 details that the club only showcased African American talent and attracted patrons of primarily non-white backgrounds.²²⁵ The Supremes next nightclub performance, which was a only few days away at the Copacabana in New York City– they were hired from July 29th till August 18th – would be in front of a predominantly white audience at a venue that was historically segregated; undoubtedly, their Copa performance would a stark change from any of their earlier nightclub performances. Gordy wanted to take advantage of the tremendous popularity of the Supremes and reach audiences beyond Motown’s substantive youth market; he knew that the nightclub industry in New York would lead to such success and that the Copacabana was the gateway to do so.²²⁶ Further discussion on this point follows in chapter 5.

As mentioned above, to keep up with the changing musical times, the Copacabana revues shifted in phase despite reluctance to abandon its traditional stage acts.²²⁷ As Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll rose to prominence in the 1950s, the Copa consequently hired a number of Rock and Roll performers, such as Bobby Darin, Jackie Wilson and Sam Cooke as headliners throughout the decade.²²⁸ The hiring of these Rock and Roll acts not only symbolized the change in musical tastes during the 1950s and 1960s, but equally important, the domineering presence of a viable youth market and

²²⁵ N.d. “Top Female Vocal Group Plays Copacabana Club,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 26, 1965.

²²⁶ Early, *One Nation*, 62.

²²⁷ Baggelar, *Images*, 88.

²²⁸ Baggelar, *Images*, 89.

significance of youth performers in the American entertainment industry. Along with the desegregation of public facilities in the South and also in many venues in the North, such as nightclubs during the 1950s, the aforementioned two points highlight two of the most significant trends that occurred throughout the mid-twentieth century.²²⁹ Likewise, they are key factors which Motown Records, and the Supremes capitalized on in effort to “make it” to the Copacabana in New York City.

After numerous efforts, Berry Gordy, with the help of General Artists Corporation talent agency, secured a deal with Copa owner Jules Podell, allowing the Supremes to play at the Copa from July 29th till August 18th, 1965.²³⁰ According to Gordy in his autobiography *To Be Loved*,

Podell agreed to give the girls a shot. That was just about all that he was willing to give. Knowing what a major launching pad his club was, Jules made us [Motown Records] pay for everything. Nobody got breaks at the Copa... On top of that we had to sign what many considered a “slave contract” for three years. We would appear for two-or three-week periods, seven days a week, two shows a night for less than \$3,000 a week. The second year (if he wanted us back) it would go to \$10,000 and the third \$15,000. His option. But I was always willing to lose money if it meant building stars.²³¹

Podell agreed to let the Supremes perform during the club’s off-season, which was during the summer months.²³² It was not as busy during this time and his rationale was that it was the best time to try out new acts; if they were a success, Podell would bring them back when prime season ran from October to March.²³³ According to Mary Wilson’s autobiography, “Although Ed Sullivan had predicted our [the Supremes’] success and

²²⁹ Ward, *Just My Soul*, 32.

²³⁰ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 216.

N.d., “Top Female Group Plays Copacabana Club,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 26th, 1965.

N.d., “The Supremes Opening at the Copacabana, New York,” *Variety*, July 28th, 1965.

²³¹ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 216.

²³² Gordy, *To Be Loved*, 142.

²³³ Podell-Raber, *The Copa*, 25-26

we'd received nothing but raves for all of our shows, Mr. Podell took no chances."²³⁴ It is clear that allowing the Supremes to perform at the Copa was outside the comfort zone of the club's accustomed acts, which were geared toward the sophisticated and affluent adult pop audience. However, successfully performing at the Copa would allow the Supremes to crossover and appeal not only to a greater white audience, but also to adult pop audience members. Further detail on this point will also follow in chapter 5.

With the Copa dates set, Gordy ensured that Motown Records went all out for the Supremes performance. Gordy brought back again the Artist Development department, comprised of Cholly Atkins, Maxine Powell and Gil Askey, who worked continuously on the staging, choreography, costumes and musical arrangements.²³⁵ Additionally, Gordy, along with other Motown Records executives ensured that top press distributors, DJs and all other important record industry people would be present.²³⁶ According to Mary Wilson, the Supremes rehearsed for the Copa date for over four months.²³⁷ Gordy even organized a "practice" stage show for the Supremes, allowing them to rehearse the show at a local club in Wildwood, New Jersey, called Rip-Tide.²³⁸ Clearly, Gordy knew performing at the Copa would have a pivotal effect on the careers of the Supremes and the amount of effort and practice he put forth prior to the Supremes performance is a testament to this.

Of particular importance is the argument Susan Smith posits in her book, *Dancing In the Street*. Motown was in the beginning stages of pursuing their Copa premiere when

²³⁴ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 170.

²³⁵ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 216.

²³⁶ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 216.

²³⁷ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 169.

²³⁸ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 217.

Nat King Cole passed away in February of 1965.²³⁹ In particular, news coverage focused on Cole's elegant and sophisticated persona.²⁴⁰ As Smith observes, "Nat King Cole's suave image made him one of the most popular entertainers, regardless of his race, to perform regularly at the Copacabana".²⁴¹ As Motown and the Supremes prepared for their Copa debut, Gordy hoped to emulate the style and content of Cole's performances.²⁴² However, in doing so Motown also experienced the many racial obstacles Cole faced as an African American artist in racially divided America.²⁴³

Motown experienced the generational tensions between Cole's adult-oriented style and the burgeoning youth market.²⁴⁴ As Smith asserts, Motown offered a distinctive musical approach, similar to that of Cole, to appeal to racially integrated audiences.²⁴⁵ Moreover, Gordy desired to emulate Cole's success with singing standards in the nightclub industry.²⁴⁶ As Keir Keightly argues,

"Higher levels of cultural prestige and higher profits are believed to accompany the cultivation of the adult segment via standards, whether through the scale of higher-margin LP albums, high-paying nightclub appearances in Las Vegas [and New York] or general career stability and longevity."²⁴⁷

²³⁹ Smith, *Dancing*, 146.

²⁴⁰ Smith, *Dancing*, 146.

²⁴¹ Smith, *Dancing*, 147.

²⁴² Smith, *Dancing*, 147-148.

²⁴³ Although Nat King Cole achieved tremendous crossover success and was incredibly liked for his sophisticated demeanor, he still faced the same frustrations and contradictions that confronted any African American celebrity in racially polarized America. Both Cole and Motown Records had urban roots and were increasingly commercial. Both Cole and many of Motown's artists chose to sing, in the case of Cole romantic ballads, while for Motown's artists teen-orientated Rock and Roll rather than "message" songs for the civil rights movement. Moreover, since Cole and Motown's artists performed at nightclubs, – in efforts to broaden their markets – they were viewed as "selling out" to white hegemonic power. Due to this, both received criticism from many civil rights activists, as they opted for more "authentic" African American art and cultural expression to voice the movement's causes. Also, as both Cole and Motown's artists realized, crossover success of their music with white audiences did not translate into more racially tolerant behaviour; Cole and Motown's artists continued to face systemic racial discrimination, despite their celebrity status, regularly in both personal and public lives.

Smith, *Dancing*, 146-151.

²⁴⁴ Early, *One Nation*, 56.

²⁴⁵ Smith, *Dancing*, 152.

²⁴⁶ Smith, *Dancing*, 153.

²⁴⁷ Keightley, "You Keep Coming," 8.

Thus, following in the footsteps of Nat King Cole and undoubtedly performing classic standards was something Berry Gordy had in mind as the Supremes prepared for the Copa debut. Further discussion on this follows in chapter 5.

On July 29th, the Supremes made their debut at the Copacabana in New York City – their first New York elite nightclub performance. Wearing sophisticated, French-inspired soft blue dresses with flowers around the neckline and accompanied with matching hats and canes reminiscent of typical Vaudeville style, indubitably, the Supremes were the embodiment of chic, nightclub sophistication.²⁴⁸ The Supremes were also backed up by an orchestra and according to a *Billboard Magazine* article from August 7th, 1965, Cholly Aiken’s choreography “...created a visual impact perfectly matched to the powerful Supreme musical arrangements.”²⁴⁹ The Supremes performed a diverse array of songs; along with performing Motown hits accompanied by an orchestra, the group also performed traditional American standards such as “Rock-a-Bye Your Baby”, “You’re Nobody Till Somebody Loves You”, beloved Broadway classics, such as “Somewhere” from *West Side Story*, “Do Re Mi” from Rogers and Hammerstein, and also songs from the acclaimed musical “Bye Bye Birdie”.²⁵⁰ They concluded with a tribute to Sam Cooke, singing a medley of his top songs in a jazz-like sentiment.

In terms of audience members, Mary Wilson remembers that,

The club was packed. Eddie Bisco [Motown’s head promotion manager] was in charge of making sure that everyone was comfortable and that the important people – disc jockeys, industry heavies, promotion men, press – had anything they wanted and good seats...Among the celebrities at our debut were Ed Sullivan, columnist Earl Wilson, Sammy Davis Jr., disc jockeys Murray the K and Frankie Crocker and countless sales reps and distributors...Since the

²⁴⁸ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 156.

²⁴⁹ Hal Cook, “Billboard Backstage: Supreme Supremes,” *Billboard Magazine*, August 7th, 1965.

²⁵⁰ Baggelar, *Images*, 85.

Broadway shows were over, many stars were in this audience and I felt like we were just getting better and better.²⁵¹

A *Billboard* article from July 30th, 1965 also revealed that radio personalities Jack Cassidy, Marty Allen, Bill Randle, Hal Jackson, along with Washington record distributor Jim Schwartz, Columbia Record Club executives, Neil Keating and Bill Bell and a number of representatives from other record labels were present on the Supremes' opening night.²⁵² Gordy knew that the Copa was the gateway to making it big into the white dominated entertainment establishment.²⁵³ As described earlier, the Copacabana was linked to the American entertainment industry and had tremendous clout in catapulting and cementing the careers of its performers.²⁵⁴ With an audience filled with prominent newspaper columnists and executives from the music and entertainment industries, successfully performing at the Copa would lead the Supremes to achieve widespread fame in the white dominated entertainment establishment. Indubitably, performing at the Copa would have a "make it" or "break it" impact on the Supremes' careers.

Fortunately, the Supremes opening performance proved to be a triumph; numerous articles appeared the following day with rave reviews about the sound, image and performance of the Supremes. *Billboard* described the Supremes as "bringing joy to the Copa" and stated the Supremes "...shook up the entire [New York] block with their fantastic performance".²⁵⁵ It also details that the Supremes received a standing ovation following their powerful tribute to Sam Cooke and ended up doing three encore

²⁵¹ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 136.

²⁵² Aaron Sternfield, "Copa Proving Ground: As An Act for All Ages Supremes Blossom Out," *Billboard Magazine*, August 7th, 1965.

²⁵³ Gordy, *To Be Loved*, 217.

²⁵⁴ Baggelar, *Images*, 5.

²⁵⁵ Cook, "Billboard."

performances.²⁵⁶ The article concludes by stating “the lovely Supremes...brought excitement to what in the summer in New York can be a pretty dull room.”²⁵⁷ Aside from describing the success of the performance, another *Billboard* article asserts that the Supremes will be an “...act around a long time as a top adult act” and describes their sound as “polished, refined and arranged to a fare-thee-well.”²⁵⁸ It closes by positing that the Supremes have “...all the equipment – poise, polish and a comic sense to...not only keep their teenage following for some time, but to last even longer as a staple adult nightclub act.”²⁵⁹

Another article from *Variety* echoes this same sentiment. It details that adult entertainment venues like those in Las Vegas and in New York City may need to turn to “the kids”, referencing young Rock and Roll performers, as viable nightclub acts.²⁶⁰ It describes how many of these young performers have adopted “more adult catalogs” in order to appeal to the older generation, who continue to patronize the younger performers. The author commends the Supremes, commenting that they “...provide a fresh face and vision for the café front” and also compares them to a modern day incarnation of the Andrews, Pickens and Boswell Sisters of the 1940s.²⁶¹ Although author Jose admits that the “...café customer isn’t quite ready to accept the new wave of singers clamoring for their place in the café spotlight”, he posits that the Supremes have the talent to usher in this era of change.²⁶²

Moreover, in a post-Copacabana advertisement also in *Variety* titled, *The*

²⁵⁶ Cook, “Billboard.”

²⁵⁷ Cook, “Billboard.”

²⁵⁸ Sternfield, “Copa.”

²⁵⁹ Sternfield, “Copa.”

²⁶⁰ Jose, “Nightclub Reviews – Copacabana, N.Y.,” *Variety*, August 4th, 1965.

²⁶¹ Jose, “Nightclub.”

²⁶² Jose, “Nightclub.”

Supremes Just Concluded the Copacabana, several excerpts from notable columnists, such as Ed Sullivan from the *New York Daily News*, Earl Wilson from the *New York Post*, and Jack Thomson from the *New York Journal-American* comment on the exceptional performance of the Supremes and hail them as one of the greatest musical groups of all time.²⁶³ There is also a copy of the “thank you” letter sent from Jules Podell to the Supremes where he describes the group as “one of the biggest hits” ever to perform at the Copa and also comments on the multitude of positive feedback received from audience members.²⁶⁴ He concludes the letter by saying he cannot wait for the Supremes to perform again in 1966.²⁶⁵

An October 16th, 1965 article from *The Chicago Defender* further highlights the resounding success of the Supremes’ performance. It states that the Supremes broke Copa summer attendance records and as a result, have been formally invited back to perform again from March 3rd to March 16th of 1966.²⁶⁶ It also states that due to such positive feedback on their performance, the Supremes will release a “Live at the Copa!” album by the end of 1965.²⁶⁷ Moreover, a *Boston Globe* article from December 19th, 1965 describes, “...how the same effervescence that is so apparent from the minute they [the Supremes] walk on stage, comes throughout on records, especially in their Copa album” and also describes them as “the classiest of the young female singing groups.”²⁶⁸ Evidently, the Copa performance proved to be a pivotal moment for the Supremes’ careers. As Gordy hoped, successfully performing at the mecca of the nightclub world

²⁶³ N.d., “The Supremes Just Concluded the Copacabana,” *Variety*, September 1st, 1965.

²⁶⁴ N.d. “The Supremes Just Concluded The Copa.”

²⁶⁵ N.d. “The Supremes Just Concluded The Copa.”

²⁶⁶ N.d. “The Supremes Return to Copacabana,” *The Chicago Defender*, October 16th, 1965.

²⁶⁷ N.d., “The Supremes.”

²⁶⁸ William Buchanan, “Spins and Needles: When the Boss Sings, Everyone Really Listens,” *Boston Globe*, December 19th, 1965.

allowed the group to expand not only their crossover success, but to appeal to a new age demographic – the white, sophisticated adults of New York’s café society. Further discussion on this point follows in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF “MAKING IT” AT THE COPA

After analyzing the history of the Copacabana and the evolution of New York nightclubs, we can understand why Berry Gordy was so determined to have the Supremes perform at the Copacabana and moreover, what it meant to perform there. As mentioned earlier, Gordy founded Motown hoping to capture the widest spectrum of fans. According to *Boston Globe* and *Chicago Defender* articles from February 1965, the Supremes current fan base consisted of black and white teens from ages thirteen to sixteen.²⁶⁹ Gordy saw performing at the Copa, a historically all-white nightclub, as an avenue to appeal to a greater audience – the affluent, middle-aged white adult listener and it was at the Copacabana that the Supremes proved their versatility. Moreover, successfully performing a number of standards and Broadway classics further enhanced the appeal of the Supremes to the star-studded and predominantly white, well versed audience of the Copacabana.

Particularly, the Supremes ability to perform their current Rock and Roll hits, yet still master American classics of another era highlights the versatility and likeability of the Supremes to fans of any age. As Suzanne Smith asserts, the Supremes, more than any other Motown group, represented the company’s commercial potential to overcome racial and generational barriers, allowing them to master any musical genre and to capture the widest spectrum of fans.²⁷⁰ With the Supremes having recently released the album, *The Supremes Sing Country, Western, and Pop* in January 1965, along with their most recent number-one pop single, “Stop! In the Name of Love”, their jazz-inspired performance at

²⁶⁹ William Buchanan, “The Supremes-A Pop Sound for Young and Old,” *Boston Globe*, October 13th, 1965.

William Buchanan, “The Supremes Vocal Trio Due at Basin Street Club,” *Boston Globe*, June 16th, 1965.

²⁷⁰ Smith, *Dancing*, 165.

the Copa indubitably highlights their versatility and effort to appeal to fans of all ages and musical tastes.²⁷¹

On a larger scale, the Supremes' performance of such treasured classics proved that African American pop-youth artists could perform adult-oriented material.²⁷² By performing at the Copa, the Supremes made popular music history and become not only the first R&B group to perform there, but also the first African American, youth-pop act to play there. As mentioned above, the 1960s was an era defined by both racial and generational conflict. Rock and Roll was inextricably associated with the rising youth culture of this time and was shirked by the adult demographic as being the music of "delinquents".²⁷³ The ability of the Supremes to appeal not only to teenagers, but also to the "parents" of this decade and unite these two ideologically dissonant generations through the medium of music is an astounding accomplishment. Even the Supremes *Live At the Copa!* LP album, with its liner notes written by Sammy Davis Jr., is symbolic of the Supremes bridging the generational gap; as mentioned above, the LP was representative of the adult market, whereas the 45 rpm single signified the teenage Rock and Roll market.²⁷⁴ This groundbreaking moment validated the presence of the Supremes in the American entertainment industry as authentic performers for fans of any age.

Moreover, historically speaking, pop music has been associated with low culture.²⁷⁵ As described above, Rock and Roll, which was considered a part of the pop

²⁷¹ Smith, *Dancing*, 165.

²⁷² Smith, *Dancing*, 167.

²⁷³ Early, *One Nation*, 23.

²⁷⁴ Early, *One Nation*, 45.

²⁷⁵ Keir Keightley, "Music for Middlebrows: Defining the Easy Listening Era, 1946-1966," *American Music* 26, no. 3 (2008), 39.

music paradigm, was the defining sound of the 1960s youth culture. As Suzanne Smith asserts,

“In May 1965, the Supremes reaffirmed their place at the forefront of Rock and Roll when their fifth single, “Back in My Arms Again,” went to the top of the pop and rhythm and blues charts...leading both *Ebony* and *Time* magazine to proclaim that the Detroit trio “topped the rock and roll field” in cover stories both magazines ran that month.”²⁷⁶

Although the Supremes did perform treasured American standards, Motown’s Rock and Roll songs performed such as “Baby Love” and “Come See About Me” thrilled the Copa audience.

In an October 13th, 1965 article from the *Boston Globe*, author William Buchanan comments “...unlike other groups and singles operating within the framework of the ‘pop sound’, you can actually understand the words when the Supremes sing. This fact alone has endeared them to capture a broad range of fans.”²⁷⁷ It was the multifaceted musical approach of the Supremes that contributed to the Supremes’ success in adult orientated venues like the Copa. More pointedly, this highlights the Supremes’ ability to elevate the status of pop music, during a decade when it was shunned, to a form of music more highly regarded. By performing at the Copacabana, the Supremes not only became names associated with the elite nightclub tastemakers, but also elevated the status of pop music as a reputable form of music in the sophisticated, adult dominated world of New York’s café society.

Additionally, Berry Gordy was so adamant about the Supremes making it to the Copa because of its reputation as the epitome of high society in the United States. New York City was the entertainment capitol not only of the United States, but also in the

²⁷⁶ Smith, *Dancing*, 167.

²⁷⁷ William Buchanan, “The Supremes Ready for Blinstrub’s Stand,” *Boston Globe*, October 13th, 1965. Charles Champlin, “Three Little Girls From Cool Are We,” *Los Angeles Time*, September 27th, 1965.

world during the mid-twentieth century.²⁷⁸ New York City was also the founding place of the nightclub and numerous other entertainment venues such as Broadway, therefore, performing, or “making it” there carried significant weight. As described throughout this paper, historically New York nightlife was synonymously defined by the presence of the wealthy and elite urbanites of American society. Specifically, the Copacabana embodied the glamour, sophistication and exclusivity of New York café society in the mid-twentieth century. Coming from the Detroit housing projects, and Motown Records humble roots at *Hitsville, U.S.A.*, performing and “making it” in New York City and more importantly, at the Copacabana nightclub, was an astounding accomplishment for the Supremes.²⁷⁹

As mentioned above, the Copa was the gateway to making it big in the white dominated entertainment establishment.²⁸⁰ An advertisement titled *The Supremes Just Concluded the Copa* from *Variety* lists the Supremes numerous up-and-coming performances, including television appearances on *Hullabaloo* on September 13th, *The Red Skelton Show* on September 21st, *The Ed Sullivan Show* on October 18th and *The Dean Martin Show* on November 18th.²⁸¹ It also lists their up-and-coming personal appearances at Grand Gala Du Disque in Holland on October 2nd, Lincoln Center on October 15th and Blinstrub’s nightclub in Boston from October 16th till October 24th.²⁸² Last, it reveals the Supremes’ schedule for 1966, with bookings at the Deauville Hotel in Miami Beach, the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco and an international concert tour. Evidently, the Copa performance had a considerable impact on the Supremes careers and

²⁷⁸ Baggelar, *Images*, 14.

²⁷⁹ Smith, *Dancing*, 32.

²⁸⁰ Gordy, *To Be Loved*, 217.

²⁸¹ N.d. “The Supremes Just Concluded The Copa.”

²⁸² N.d. “The Supremes Just Concluded The Copa.”

undoubtedly catapulted their careers into the white dominated entertainment establishment, which led to further performances at other high caliber venues. Moreover, Berry Gordy hoped the Supremes would be regarded on the same level as other classic performers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. – performers that Gordy treasured himself.²⁸³ With the Copa as the gateway to future success in the American entertainment establishment, it is clear that the Supremes were on the road to such distinction.

Specifically, comparing and contrasting the Supremes pre-and-post nightclub venues is worthwhile. Prior to their Copa performance, the Supremes were performing, as mentioned earlier, at Boston’s Basin Street South Club – a low-key nightclub known to host only African American performers and attract an ethnic audience. However, following their Copa performance, the Supremes were scheduled to play at Blinstrub’s nightclub, also in Boston. Blinstrub’s, according to an October 13th, 1965 article in the *Boston Globe* is described as a sophisticated place to attend, attracting well-established acts such as Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr. and Al Martino, who were scheduled to play at the club over the next couple of months.²⁸⁴ The article also mentions record executives and noteworthy columnists present in the audience.²⁸⁵ Clearly, the Supremes Copa performance had momentous influence on the Supremes’ careers and it is evident, by comparing the two aforementioned nightclubs, that the Copacabana was the launching pad to future success in the predominantly white entertainment establishment. As Mary Wilson stated in her autobiography following the group’s Copa performance, “Now

²⁸³ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 261.

²⁸⁴ Buchanan, “The Supremes.”

²⁸⁵ Buchanan, “The Supremes.”

everyone in the entertainment world knew the Supremes had what it takes and we weren't just girl singers anymore. We had arrived."²⁸⁶

Moreover, the Supremes' Copa performance was pivotal as it not only paved the way, but also validated the presence of African American youth-pop performers in the white dominated entertainment establishment. As mentioned above, there was apprehension with the Supremes performing at the Copa – an adult oriented and historically segregated venue. The Supremes embodied the ascendance of African American youth in the entertainment establishment and their acceptance into the white dominated entertainment establishment not only validated their presence as legitimate youth-pop performers, but also African American youth performers collectively. As seen with the number of poignant and prestigious up-and-coming performances, following their Copa performance, the Supremes established the presence and importance of African American youth artists at many adult-oriented venues.

The fact that the Supremes became hosts of their own television variety specials is a testament of their success. For example, together with Sammy Davis Jr., Diana Ross hosted *The Hollywood Palace*, on which she introduced Michael Jackson of the Jackson 5 to the American public.²⁸⁷ Additionally, after performing together on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, Diana Ross and the Supremes – the name of the group changed in 1967 – joined fellow Motown group the Temptations in two popular NBC television specials: *Taking Care of Business (TCB)* in 1968 and *Getting It Together (GIT)* on Broadway in 1969.²⁸⁸ Clearly, the entertainment sphere proved to be the starting ground where African American youth were making progress towards racial tolerance and equality.

²⁸⁶ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 172.

²⁸⁷ Koojiman, "From Elegance," 9.

²⁸⁸ Koojiman, "Ain't No Mountain," 155-156.

The Supremes' Copa performance also played a pivotal role in bringing to fruition the sophisticated, glamorous image of African American female pop artists. As scholar Jaap Koojiman asserts,

...the Supremes challenged preconceived notions of how African American pop artists were supposed to present themselves. They did not fit the racial stereotype of the unruly and unsophisticated black body. Instead the Supremes presented an image of sophisticated beauty based on style, music and their bodies, three elements that, as Stuart Hall has argued, are essential in black popular culture.²⁸⁹

In his article, *From Elegance to Extravaganza: The Supremes on The Ed Sullivan Show as a Presentation of Beauty*, Koojiman examines fourteen performances of the Supremes on *The Ed Sullivan Show* from 1964 to 1996. He argues that the style of the Supremes evolved initially from one of innocent elegance to elaborate extravagance as the groups' career progressed.²⁹⁰ This shift presented an evolving construction of African American beauty, which in turn, challenged preconceived notions of African American beauty, offering a more diverse perspective on African American identities beyond racial stereotypes.²⁹¹

I argue the Copa performance played a pivotal moment in the Supremes' image transformation from elegant to extravagant. As mentioned above, the Supremes first major public appearance was on the Ed Sullivan Show on December 27th, 1964. As Mary Wilson recalled, the three Supremes dressed in "short, blue, softly tiered sleeveless dresses, the most elegant in our stage wardrobe thus far."²⁹² Subsequently, the Supremes' next appearance on Ed Sullivan was October 10th, 1965 – their second television appearance following their Copa debut. As Diana Ross recalls, "The producers wanted us

²⁸⁹ Koojiman, "From Elegance," 2.

²⁹⁰ Koojiman, "From Elegance," 5.

²⁹¹ Koojiman, *From Elegance*, 6.

²⁹² Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 56.

to do our biggest hit at the time, but Berry had a different idea. He wanted people to know that we could also sing the show tune, “You’re Nobody’ till Somebody Loves You” ” – a song usually associated with artists like Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Nat King Cole.²⁹³ This was also one of the songs that the Supremes performed at the Copacabana and received a standing ovation for it.²⁹⁴

Dressed in long pink sleeveless evening gowns and singing, “You’re Nobody’ till Somebody Loves You”, the Supremes presented a polished nightclub performance that even included a comedy line by Florence Ballard.”²⁹⁵ It was the Copacabana performance that marked this transition in their appearance as they were now regarded as sophisticated, glamorous nightclub performers, an image rarely associated with African American pop artists, let alone African American girl groups.²⁹⁶ Moreover, this shift in image was reflected in the group’s performance repertoire, which now showcased standards, elevating the cultural significance of the Supremes to higher, more extravagant status. Overall, it was group’s performance at the Copacabana, the esteemed gateway to the entertainment establishment that was pivotal in the Supremes image transformation from innocent elegance to extravagant as seen in succeeding performances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ Ross, *Memoirs*, 110.

²⁹⁴ Wilson, *Dreamgirl*, 66.

²⁹⁵ Koojiman, “From Elegance,” 7.

²⁹⁶ Koojiman, “From Elegance,” 15.

²⁹⁷ Koojiman, “From Elegance,” 12.

CONCLUSION

As Berry Gordy Jr. recalls in his autobiography,

Very few things in life are as exciting as an opening night at New York City's Copacabana...So much was riding on what would happen. If the Supremes flopped they could set our music back ten years. If they did well, it could open doors for other Motown acts...[As the Supremes finished singing "Put On A Happy Face"], I looked over and saw Jules sitting with Sammy Davis Jr. and Ed Sullivan, smiling from ear to ear.²⁹⁸

Situated in the entertainment capitol of the world – New York City – the Copacabana nightclub on Manhattan's Upper East Side was the mecca of the nightclub world in mid-twentieth century America. Located in a city inextricably known for entertainment, fine dining, class mobility and exclusivity, the Copacabana, which was established in October 1940, was the modern embodiment of such values. Moreover, emerging during the midst of World War II, the Copacabana provided an alternate haven to the ongoing conflict, transporting its patrons into the glamorous, posh world of New York City high life. It provided its patrons not only with the finest dining experience in the City, but also with top-rate entertainment, offering an eclectic revue of only the "best and brightest" performers. More pointedly, the Copa played a pivotal role in launching and establishing the careers of many novel, up-and-coming performers, such as Perry Como, Janis Page and Eddie Fisher. The Copa audience was regularly filled with entertainment and record executives, celebrities and wealthy urbanites from the City who continually elevated the club's status as one of the most desirable and reputable venues to attend from its establishment in 1940 well until the end of the 1960s.

The Supremes were Motown's most commercial group and offered the best hope to appeal to the broadest range of fans. After a number of mediocre singles from 1961 to

²⁹⁸ Berry, *To Be Loved*, 220.

1963, the Supremes achieved acclaimed international success with five successive number one hits by 1965. By this time, Motown was not only the largest independent record company and the largest African American owned business, but also the most popular sound in American pop music, with the Supremes leading the way. Although it is well documented that Motown Records was not politically involved with the ongoing Civil Rights Movement of the time, the level of crossover success the company had with fans within the pop-youth paradigm is unprecedented. Moreover, during a decade marked by stark racial and generational conflict, Motown and in particular the Supremes, played a pivotal force in uniting people of all races and ages via the medium of music. After several months of negotiations, Motown and the Supremes landed their first performance contract at the Copacabana nightclub, scheduled from July 29th, 1965 till August 18th. As highlighted above in Gordy's excerpt, successfully performing at the Copa would have a monumental impact on the Supremes and Motown's careers. More pointedly, it would mark the first time African American youth-pop artists performed there.

After months of continuous dedication and hard work, the Supremes' three-week run at the Copa achieved great reviews – exactly what Gordy had hoped for. As explored throughout this paper, the Supremes' Copa performance was profound for a number of reasons. On a more basic level, but nonetheless important, the Copa performance signified further crossover success as the Supremes now appealed to the sophisticated, white adult listener – the first Rock and Roll group of the decade to achieve such a feat. In doing so, the Supremes also elevated the status of Rock and Roll, or pop music, which historically has been viewed apart of low culture. During a decade where Rock and Roll was viewed as degenerative music associated with the youths of the time, the Supremes'

Copa performance bridged this generational gap, elevating the status of pop music as a reputable form of music in the adult-oriented world of nightclubs.

Also following the Supremes' Copa performance was their acceptance into the high life of New York's café society. The Supremes now became names associated with the wealthy, elites of café society, a resounding accomplishment for three young African American girls from the Detroit Housing Projects. Additionally, their performance marked their entryway into the white dominated entertainment establishment. The Supremes now had performances scheduled at further high caliber venues such as the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, Blinstrub's, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, along with numerous television appearances including *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *The Red Skelton* and *The Dean Martin Show* and were booked solid for the remainder of the year and into the start of 1966.

On a larger scale, performing at the Copa validated the presence of African American youth performers as a whole in the white dominated entertainment establishment. With the Supremes paving the way, becoming staple acts in many white dominated venues such as in other prestigious nightclubs and on television as hosts of their own variety shows, African American youth performers were recognized as a viable and undeniable presence in the American entertainment industry. Although outside the scope of this paper, further research on the means and impact further African American youth performers achieved in the entertainment establishment is a fruitful research area. Particularly, I am interested in completing a detailed case analysis of four African American performers – Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Harry Belafonte, and the Supremes. I plan to examine how these performers used traditionally white platforms to

break racial barriers in the white entertainment establishment and achieve crossover success during such a divided era. As mentioned throughout this paper, crossover is a complex and ambiguous term, and many of these African American performers' success were defined through the eyes of white America. The complex balancing act these artists performed is an issue that I would like to explore in future research. Examining the various avenues that the above-mentioned performers used, such as television, Broadway, and nightclubs to achieve breakthrough success in the white dominated entertainment establishment will help to further understand how the aforementioned performers reconfigured the widespread racial, and gender stereotypes associated with African Americans in the entertainment industry.

Additionally, the Copa performance played a pivotal role in establishing the image of the Supremes as sophisticated and the embodiment of glamour. I build off scholar Jaap Koojiman's argument that the Supremes present an evolving transformation of African American beauty – defying predefined racial stereotypes – from innocent elegance in 1964 to elaborate extravagance by 1969. I argue that the Copa performance played a fundamental role in leading the Supremes to become extravagant African American beauties from mid-1965 and on. Future questions arise as to what exactly was the political and cultural impact of the Supremes extravagant image in relation to the ongoing battle for Civil Rights, which politicized the image of the African American girl with figures like Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama and Elizabeth Eckford in Little Rock, Arkansas. On a larger scale, questions arise as to how successful Gordy's nightclub strategy was and moreover, what exactly happened to nightclubs as the praxis of the American entertainment industry in the wake of Rock and Roll? Also, what is the new

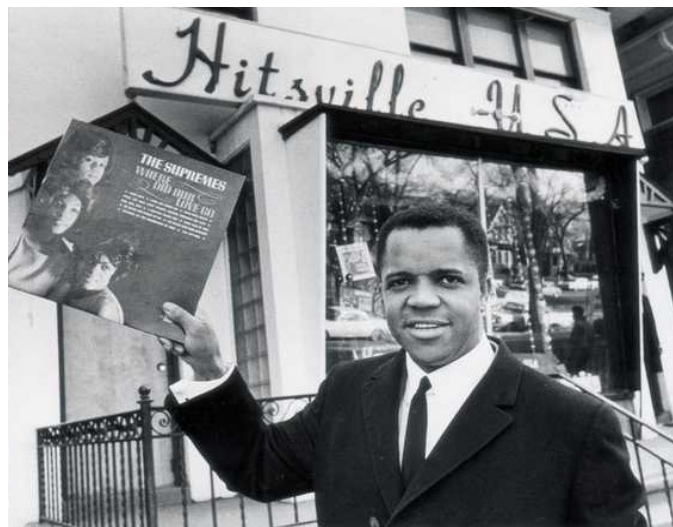
“nightclub” platform in American society today? These too are prolific research areas and ones that I will address in future research. Nonetheless, the Supremes’ 1965 performance at New York’s Copacabana proved to be a landmark in American popular music and culture during a decade marked by stark racial and generational conflict.

ILLUSTRATIVE APPENDIX

SECTION 1 – MOTOWN RECORDS



The home of Motown Records, *Hitsville, U.S.A.* on 2648 West Grand Boulevard in Detroit, Michigan. (Photography courtesy of Motown Museum).



Motown Records founder, Berry Gordy Jr., holding the Supremes first hit single, “Where Did Our Love Go?” in the summer of 1964, which marked the first of a continuous streak of hits. (Photograph courtesy of Motown Museum)



The Supremes with their songwriting team, Brian Holland, Eddie Holland and Lamont Dozier after recording vocals for “You Keep Me Hanging On” in 1996. (Photograph courtesy of Motown Museum)



The Supremes in one of their most well-known publicity shots in 1966. The Supremes truly were the embodiment of glamour and sophistication. (Courtesy of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum)

SECTION 2 – THE NIGHTCLUB ERA



Harlem's Cotton Club in 1937. (Photograph courtesy of Michael Ochs Digital Archives)



An advertisement for the Cotton Club in 1937. (Photograph courtesy of Michael Ochs Digital Archives)



The Stork Club in 1948. (Photograph courtesy of Michael Ochs Digital Archives)

SECTION 3 – THE COPACABANA, NEW YORK CITY



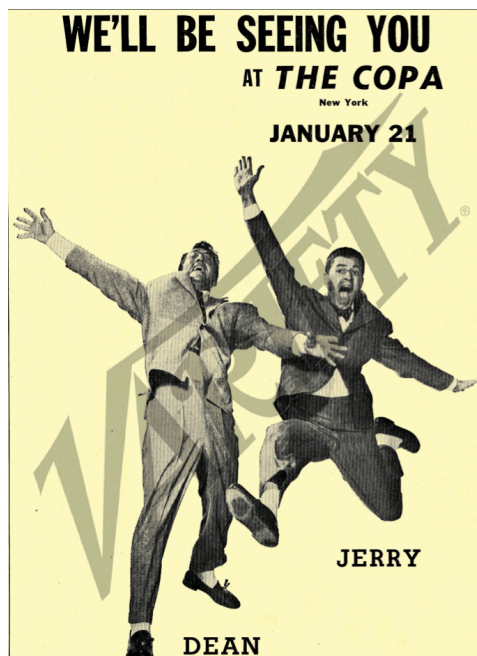
The official advertisement for the Copacabana in 1940. As described in the paper, the eponymous Copacabana hat was worn by the best and brightest Copacabana performers. (Photograph courtesy of Kristin Baggelaar Images)



A photograph of the elaborate stage shows at the Copacabana. (Photograph courtesy of Kristin Baggelaar Images)



An advertisement for Frank Sinatra at the Copa in 1945. (Photograph courtesy of Kristin Baggelaar Images)



An advertisement for Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis at the Copacabana in 1952. (Photograph courtesy of Kristin Baggelaar Images)



A photograph of radio talk show host Jack Eigen with comedian Joe E. Lewis (center) and Milton Berle (right) during his program at the Copa on October 15th, 1947. (Photograph courtesy of Kristin Baggelaar Images)



Nat King Cole along with his wife Ruthe Campanella and injured Brooklyn Dodgers' catcher Roy Campanella on November 7th, 1958. (Photograph courtesy of Kristin Baggelaar Images)



The Supremes performing at the Copa in 1965. (Photograph courtesy of Kristin Baggelaar Images)



The Supremes *Live At the Copa!* album, which was released in December 1965. (Photograph courtesy of Kristin Baggelaar Images)

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