

NICK LAROCCA INTERVIEWS

October 26, 1959: Reel I

Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices: <sup>✓</sup> Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; William R. Hogan;  
D. Clive Hardy

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John Phobos ?  
Shatter ←*

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[Hogan:] My name is W. R. Hogan. I'm chairman of the History Department at Tulane University. Mr. D. Clive Hardy, of Tulane University staff and I are interviewing Mr. Nick LaRocca, the leader of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. My purpose in coming here to Mr. LaRocca's home is to sort of wind up the tape recordings which have been conducted over a period of some months. Mr. LaRocca has been ill and he has very kindly gotten up out of a sick bed in order to talk to us. The first questions I have arise out of some inquiries that came from a reading of Mr. LaRocca's tape recordings, and the first question has to do with his early life. In his statement about his father he said that his father spoke four different languages. My first question is: what four languages did he speak?

[LaRocca:] He spoke German, he spoke French, and Italian and Portuguese. And he had trade with these boats--not boats, they were barks; they were sailing vessels. At that time of my early life they hadn't no steamships; they had steam boats, but not steamships. The wharfs used to be open.

[Hogan:] He needed these languages in his business.

[LaRocca:] That's correct; he used it to go and do business with these people.

[Hogan:] Now, Mr. LaRocca, did you ever personally learn any of these languages also?

[LaRocca:] No, I can't even speak Italian, but yet I can read the Italian newspaper and know what it's about and know every word about it, but I can't put it together. I never have tried but all my sisters and brothers can speak it fluently. I was a boy that never stayed home much; I liked music and I traveled. Many the times I would be out on the Gulf Coast playing when I was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old, out in Mississippi. And I'd travel along

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with different little groups of boys, playing for what we could get, in the early days.

[Hogan:] Do you think that the fact that these languages were spoken in your home had any effect on your musical career?

[LaRocca:] No, I don't think so. My father played music, but he played conventional music, off a book; he had a book what he used to make exercises. And maybe I got some of that stuff, like in "Ostrich walk"--[scats]--them kind of exercises that I put into a tune later on, maybe. Being a faker, you just don't pick up these things in one day; they may hit you today and maybe they don't come out maybe in three, four months. First thing you know you [are] playing it--

[Hogan:] Maybe ten years.

[LaRocca:] Yes.

[Hogan:] That's what I'm talking about.

[LaRocca:] And you don't know where you got it from. And I don't say everything I made was exactly original, but the way I played it was original.

[Hogan:] Sure. You mentioned White City in this manuscript. Where and what was White City?

[LaRocca:] Oh, that was in Chicago, that was in Chicago.

[Hogan:] I got the impression that it was some place around here.

[LaRocca:] No, they had no--oh, wait a minute. Stop the machine a minute.

[Machine off.] This was at Tulane Avenue and Carrollton [Avenue]. It was called the White City. They used to give plays there, all such semi-operatic plays and different things. My father used to take us there to listen to the music.

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[Hogan] It was a sort of a theatre?

[LaRocca] Theatre, yes--an amusement place.

[Hogan] Oh, yes; they had other things beside the theatre.

[LaRocca] Then it became a ball park years after.

[Hogan] Oh, yes, that's where the Tulane ball park--

[LaRocca] That's--yes, same ball park.

[Hogan] Fontainebleau Motel now.

[LaRocca] That's correct.

[Hogan] Now, tell us a little something about the amusement end of this. I'm personally interested in the amusements in New Orleans. What did they do there?

[LaRocca] Well, they used to have music and different little plays and shows; like the burning of a city, and you'd see a cardboard house, a building that had a fire, and some of the girls they'd hire for about \$2 a night and they'd come jumping out them windows, you understand? And that was big, big amusement to us. They had bands, who'd play opera, and singers--real plays like they put on now and then.

[Hogan] Did they serve beer, or anything like that?

[LaRocca] Well, they had all kinds of drinks. You could get anything you wanted but my father didn't drink and he didn't bring us there; he always brought us where the soft drinks was.

[Hogan] Yes.

[LaRocca] But they had other drinks around there also.

[Hogan] Did they have bottled soft drinks then?

[LaRocca] Well, yes, they did; they had a small bottle with a rubber on it, and you'd push it up this way. They'd call it pop.

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[Hogan:] Yeah? That's where soda pop came from.

[LaRocca:] Yeah, pop. When you'd open it up, it would go "pop," and that's what they called pop. They had maybe cream soda and strawberry, and maybe another one there--pineapple--

[Hogan:] This was made there, though, kind of like they do in these--

[LaRocca:] No, these were bottles; they were bottles.

[Hogan:] Did they have a name on them, a firm name, like Dr. Pepper, or something like that?

[LaRocca:] No, I couldn't tell you that now; you've gone way beyond me now. I couldn't go back that far and recreate that bottle. I can tell you the shape of the bottle: it wasn't exactly flat on the bottom; it was kind of round and it came up just the same as the other bottles. If you ever looked at one of these magnesia bottles in the old days about fifteen, twenty years ago, that was the style of bottle it was.

[Hogan:] I see. Now, in the preceding tapes I don't believe we've gone very much into your education. You went to school a while?

[LaRocca:] Yes, I went to St. Alphonsus Parochial School; that's right down here just about two blocks from here.

[Hogan:] How do you spell Alphonsus?

[LaRocca:] A-L-P-H-O-N-S-U-S. Saint--S-T.

[Hogan:] Yes.

[LaRocca:] And then when I finished there I went to the University School that was run by Chenet and Dwyer.

[Hogan:] How do you spell Chenet?

[LaRocca:] C-H-E-N-E-T. D-W-Y-E-R is the other man. And they had a man by the name of Ferrin.

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[Hogan:] Was this a private school?

[LaRocca:] Oh, it was a private school, yes sir. There was a preparatory school for people who wanted to go into other colleges. I was studying to go into Tulane to be a medical student. And my father died when I was fifteen and a half, almost sixteen, and my mother couldn't keep up the tuition, and I was taken away from school.

[Hogan:] Well, how far along, by modern standards, would you think that you got-- did you get well into high school?

[LaRocca:] Oh, yes, I think I was in about two or three years in high school.

[Hogan:] I see.

[LaRocca:] But what I know today them kids don't know when they come out of college.

[Hogan:] Yes. That's right.

[LaRocca:] That's right.

[Hogan:] Did you feel deprived when you weren't--when you had to abandon the idea of going into medicine as a career?

[LaRocca:] Well, I did, sort of, because I was in the same class with this Dr. Palmisano, and I used to show him his lessons. He didn't know how to make his lessons and I used to help him out. He used to live up here on Aline--I mean Magazine and Foucher [Streets], somewhere up in that neighborhood. But I think he's dead now, this man.

[Hogan:] He finally made it, though?

[LaRocca:] He made it, yes, he made it; he made it by the hardest.

[Hogan:] Do you think of anything else in your early life that may have contributed to your musical career--that is, anything else that we haven't discussed?

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[LaRocca] Well, I'll tell you what contributed more to my musical career; because my daddy didn't want me to play and I wanted to play.

[Hogan] You described that.

[LaRocca] Yes. And when you don't want a person to do something, that's just when he's going to do it the most.

[Hogan] You think that's--you think his opposition was a great incentive?

[LaRocca] Yes. That's right; it was a big incentive to me, because had he told me to study music, maybe I would have given it up.

[Hogan] That's the way I was. My mother was a music teacher, and I can't play the piano today.

[LaRocca] If he'd told me to play the music I would have given it up. But see, my inability to play music, or to learn, and nobody to teach me--yet my sisters all played and my brothers played--my older brother played violin; he played by notes; my two sisters, they played music.

[Hogan] Played piano?

[LaRocca] No, one played the zither and they all played by notes. They used to go around selling these zithers with these things on--well, my father used to show them how to play. And at that time they used to play tunes like "La Paloma." You don't hear them mention that at all. They'll tell you "When the Saints Go Marchin' In" today. But they had numbers like "[La] Paloma," "Over the Waves," mostly--I won't say all Italian music--but they were from all over: from Germany, from--I guess from every land in the world.

[Hogan] Did you ever have any musical groups get together and play or record--I don't mean record--I mean musical groups in your home, that played together?

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[LaRocca] Well, yes; my sisters and brothers and my father played together, but I never played.

[Hogan] You never did play with them?

[LaRocca] No, when he--when I thought [it?] was proud when I first learned the cornet--it was his cornet that I used to take down to the empty house which--well, we lived at that time at Washington Avenue and St. Thomas--down in the next block was an empty house, and I used to go down there and play his horn; steal--in other words, take it without him knowing--not stealing, because I'd bring it back--and play. And when I thought I'd learned a few tunes by writing the numbers down, on what valves to press, I went home and played the number. And when I did, "bing" goes the horn; he chopped it up with the axe, his own horn. He told me all musicians was trampe, and today I have an idea that he was somewhere near right.

[Hogan] Was he right about most musicians in that day?

[LaRocca] Well, at that time, you see, when he came here he thought he could make a living on music, and he couldn't make a living in music; he had to do other things besides play music. Because most of the people that hired you then, for a birthday party or something, got you for nothing; you got a group of musicians together, and that's all; you got food and drink, and that's all you got. There was nothing [home?] to take home.

[Hardy] Mr. LaRocca, did you ever play--or not play--but sing, or have anything to do with the St. Alphonsue choir?

[LaRocca] No, I didn't. But I did sing at the closing exercise. And there was a man who used to teach us there was named Ciccola [spelling?]-his first name I can't remember--but he used to put on the show for us. And we were singing "The Holy City"--[ecats] "Hoeanna" and so on--and I used to sing counter melodies

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against it. At that time I didn't know anything--I could show you on the piano how easy it is for me to get a melody, and many people say, "How you put them together?" Well, to me they come just like they come out of the air; all I need is four notes or five notes to start on and a chord construction to follow, and I can make a melody. And that's not only now: I've been doing this since I've been nine, ten years old.

[Hogan:] You've just published a couple of records--pieces of sheet music.

[LaRocca:] Yes. And I had good luck on one of them.

[Hogan:] This last group?

[LaRocca:] Yes. I put that with Charles H. Hansen [spelling?] music publishers, and they'll take more if I put them on tape. He is looking for original music of Nick LaRocca. And I [couldn't?] tell you more on that--

[Hogan:] You've got some more, haven't you?

[LaRocca:] Oh, yes, I've got about forty, fifty numbers. I have twenty-five of them that I just had copyrighted in the last year, and I--

[Hogan:] Twenty-five copyrighted? Within the last year?

[LaRocca:] Yes, within the last year. And I have twenty-five others that is not copyrighted. Then I have about thirty or forty of them that has no copyright, that I've had laying in the drawer for many, many years. Many of them. I had men like Eugene West used to come to me for melodies, and I'd give them songs, and when they'd come out they were different. I'll show you in a pack right here. I give them a song, and it was called "Once in a While," and then they changed the title, and what do you think they did? They took the title and put it on their song, and made my song "Some Rainy Night." Their song went for a hit, and mine stood there--"Some Rainy Night."

[Hogans:] [Unintelligible]

[Hardy:] Do you--

[Hogans:] Do you--excuse me--do you have any pieces among the ones that you haven't published which might be described as <sup>#</sup>jazz pieces in the sense that "Tiger Rag" and pieces like that--

[LaRocca:] Yes, I've got others almost--I don't say they're as good as "Tiger Rag," but there's one in here has very good jazz number, and this "Let's Jam It" can, it has possibilities. Even this one that I put out as a popular number can be played in the same idiom that I would play it--(scats)--and so on. There's nothing to it. Any tune becomes a jazz tune when you put the idioms to it. These people tell you it's a great big secret. It's nothing but march time, syncopated. White man's music and not colored. That's all it is. You take the "Tiger Rag" will fit it the (scats "National Emblem" March). You play--(scats "Hold That Tiger"). <sup>#</sup>Now you can do anything you want with it. It's working up different embellishments on a chord construction, that's all it is. Now these fellows that in New Orleans they play today--you know who they play? I want to let you know who they play. They're great; I was nobody. They play Bix Beiderbecke, they play Red Nichols, and they play Bunny Berigan. And if you don't believe what I tell you, they play the three of them together. And all of them copied from Nick LaRocca and admit it. In fact, I started Bix Beiderbecke on the horn; you must study his records and listen to his endings. And he developed a style of music--(scats)--that's from the "Ostrich Walk"--the same as Louis Armstrong's attack, and the same as the rest of them modern men who taken from the records, which they had something to work on; I didn't. All I had was ragtime music that was played by note to play with, and I had to make my own. And these fellows have something to work with. And it's an easy thing when you can lay out a record and play alongside

of it: you can play a contramelody, you can play against it, and you can make up your own style when you have something already started for you.

[Hogan:] Mr. LaRocca, I'm glad you brought Bix's name into this, because I wanted you to tell us a little more about your relationship with him. In your previous statements you have said you thought he was a very great musician.

[LaRocca:] Yes sir, I still think that. But--he played piano, when I first met him; he was a young fellow.

[Hogan:] Where was that?

[LaRocca:] In Reisenweber's [Cafe], about the latter part of 1918, when we--

[Hogan:] You've told about that on the tape, I think.

[LaRocca:] Yeah, we was just about finishing. He left high school and came up there and I--then in 1923 he came back again, and I used to let him sit in with me and play in the band.

[Hogan:] He'd actually sit there while you played?

[LaRocca:] Yeah, sit in the back of it.

[Hogan:] And he'd play along with you?

[LaRocca:] Along with me, yes.

[Hogan:] You had two trumpets, then?

[LaRocca:] Two trumpets--he'd play the second. He was a very good harmonist; he was very fast on the catch on the ear--he played piano, but not jazz piano. I never heard him play but on a record, but I did hear him in 1923; he sat down and he knew all operatic tunes--he was taught that; he was taught by music. But he became a faker on the cornet. Now that's about all I could tell you outside of when he came down here with Whiteman in 1926--I renewed my--'25, '26, I don't know the exact date, because--

[Hogan:] He came to New Orleans?

[LaRocca:] Yes, they came here with Whiteman at the Tulane University Stadium, and they played a concert there--Paul Whiteman.

[Hogan:] Did you hear it?

[LaRocca:] Oh, yes, I was there.

[Hogan:] What did you think about it?

[LaRocca:] I thought it was all right, but Whiteman never played no jazz. He taken all the arrangements from the Dixieland Jazz Band. It don't take you long to hear that; go listen to his "Wang-Wang Blues," or any of his tunes that [Henry] Busse played. Busse made this little lick that Joe ["King"] Oliver made before Joe Oliver put it on record. (Scats.) If you don't believe me, listen to "Hot Lips" Busse play it on "Hot Lips."

[Hogan:] That's his favorite piece; I've heard it many times, danced to it.

[LaRocca:] All right. Now you'll hear that same idiom that Joe Oliver uses in there.

[Hogan:] You think Busse invented this?

[LaRocca:] Yeah, he invented--he got it from me, that's where he got it; they all got it--they ain't none of them invented none of that stuff. That's where they taken it from, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recording. Busse used to sit up at Reisenweber's there when he was out of a job; he used to almost cry. Ted Lewis was another one.

[Hogan:] They would come in and listen to you?

[LaRocca:] Yes. Sit up in the lobby; they wasn't working; they'd sit up there and listen.

[Hogan:] Why would he almost cry?

[LaRocca:] Well, because he was out of a job. At that time, when the music was changing, they had to have some to work [from]. That was before the record; after

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the record was out, many of them came there. It's been said that many of these colored men preceded us up there. I don't know about that; I couldn't comment, but I can tell you one band that didn't precede us to New York; that was the Creole Band, and they came March 6, and if you don't want to [believe me], look up in the New York papers, you can see what I tell is the truth. And they're recorded, like Brian Rust found; he found the dates that I give him were correct.

[Hogan:] Well, Mr. Brunm found the same thing in Chicago.

[LaRocca:] Yes, sir. And you'll find everything that I tell you has been right.

[Hogan:] Now, could you tell us a little about your impressions of Bix Beiderbecke as a person? What kind of personality did he have?

[LaRocca:] Well, he was a, I'd say--you see this young man here?

[Hogan:] Sure.

[LaRocca:] I won't put him in his class, because I don't think he'll go as far as Bix went--but he was a very quiet man, quiet mannerisms.

[Hogan:] Quiet fellow.

[LaRocca:] Very, very quiet. And what he did in later years--well, I've got no comment on that, because I have no business even to talk about it.

[Hogan:] But you liked him personally a great deal?

[LaRocca:] Personally I thought he was a wonderful boy. And there was nothing I wouldn't do for him or help him if I could at that time, in the beginning of the music.

[Hogan:] If he would have lasted--of course he died very young--if he had lasted, do you think he would have continued to be a great musician, or gone, gotten better, or--had he already reached his peak when he died?

[LaRocca:] Well, I couldn't tell you on that, because you know every man has his own given powers and the limits of how far he can go. But most of the tunes that

he copied, he copied from the Original Dixieland Jazz Band; most of them that he recorded was recorded before him by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

[Hogan:] I think he's said this, hasn't he, somewhere?

[LaRocca:] Yes.

[Hogan:] He said that he studied your records?

[LaRocca:] Yes; that's all he ever knew, was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band music. But he tried to build his style, the same as [Phil] Napoleon, Red Norvo, Red Nichols, Vic [?]-all these fellows tried to make up a different style of their own, to be a little different. They added to it, just--and what it is today, it ain't what we played; it's nowhere near it, because you can listen to our records. I don't say we were great musicians, but we only knew playing harmony. Today they use more modern harmony; they got better technique; and they're taught in school the music; which I never had that chance and I never was given that chance. But I'm glad in a way I wasn't given that chance, because probably I wouldn't be here talking. I'd be still like the rest of them.

[Hogan:] I've known people who had classical training who never could learn to play jazz.

[LaRocca:] That's right, it--

[Hogan:] Particularly on the piano.

[LaRocca:] That's right, it--they just can't make it, they just don't, they don't feel it; they don't have it. And that's all I can tell you on that part of it.

[Hogan:] Now--I would like for you to tell me what your impressions of the use of the word "jazz" is. When did you first hear this word? Did you ever hear it in New Orleans, before you went north? How did it first enter into your consciousness?

[LaRocca:] Well, I never heard of the word "jazz" in New Orleans. I never knew what the word "jazz" meant. After I was in Chicago for about a week, a couple kept hollering, "Jazz it up, jazz it up, jazz it up; give us some more jazz."

[Hogan:] They were people out in the audience.

[LaRocca:] That's right, on the dance floor.

[Hogan:] I see.

[LaRocca:] And--

[Hogan:] You had never heard it before then?

[LaRocca:] No sir, I never heard of it; I never heard it being used.

[Hogan:] It wasn't used in connection with your band, up to that time?

[LaRocca:] No, it wasn't used in connection with the band in the beginning, no. The first advertisement was never any connection with the band at all. The word was put on after by Harry James. And after they had so many New Orleans boys come up there [everybody was calling their New Orleans jazz band after our band was called jazz?]. Now I later found out that the word came from the underworld; it meant something bad.

[Hogan:] Probably in Chicago, in that area.

[LaRocca:] In Chicago, in that area, yes; around 22nd Street, 14th Street, where they had these bad women hanging around, they used that word.

[Hogan:] You don't know how far the word went back before that, though, or when they first--

[LaRocca:] Oh, now; it could have been going on for years before I knew it. I wouldn't say that that was the first time it was used, because it would, I'd be telling a lie; I wouldn't know nothing about that. But the first time I ever heard it [was] when it was first called out in front of the band. Then Mr. James advertised us as a "jazz" band.

[Hogan:] It was his idea?

[LaRocca:] That's right.

[Hogan:] He was a sort of manager, or entrepreneur?

[LaRocca:] Yeah, yeah, he was the man that--

[Hogan:] Impresario.

[LaRocca:] Impresario, whatever you call it. You correct me in my English, because I don't know good English. I try, anyhow.

[Hogan:] I think your English is pretty good. Then after that, the word caught on pretty rapidly all over the country.

[LaRocca:] No sir, not that fast. No, it didn't caught on that fast. It was the records that had world-wide distribution, that went as far as Honolulu, Germany, Japan. If you look up my clippings you will find they had a jazz club in Japan in 1919. Look at--they only got a jazz club in New Orleans in 1949-- that's funny, ain't it? Thirty years after Japan has a jazz club, they build a New Orleans jazz club. And this man becomes a historian.

[Hogan:] Now--one of the things that I am personally interested in is the way the public, or certain aspects of the public, [and] the way the press, or certain aspects of the press, opposed jazz in the beginning. They thought it was not something that ought to be encouraged.

[LaRocca:] No, it--

[Hogan:] Now would you care to comment on--

[LaRocca:] Yes, I will.

[Hogan:] The whole history of the way jazz finally got to be adopted--

[LaRocca:] Well--

[Hogan:] As a respectable sort of thing?

[LaRocca:] When we went to New York and we made a great big hit, the word "jazz" was accepted as a respectable word, as the people didn't know what it meant. First the Victor Company put the first record out, J-A-S-S. They had four different ways of spelling "jazz." Believe it or not, the first way to spell it, J-A-S, I claim none of it; that's my second name, it's the abbreviation of James.

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I never knew J-A-S was jazz, and I have never claimed it up to today, because it never was meant for me, because nobody knew my name was Jas. in Chicago. After the Victor Company put the circulars out these records had world-wide distribution, and they went all over the country. The people down in New Orleans, when the music got popular, the Times-Picayune in particular, on June 20, 1918--many people say, "How can you remember those dates?"--well, any man's been on the spot like I have can remember any date or any little incident. I don't have to go back and bump up memory or drink whiskey or something to tell you what I know about this. Now these people here in the Times-Picayune wrote an article called "Jass and Jassism" which you contain at your Archives.

[Hogan:] They spelled it with a double S.

[LaRocca:] Double S. Let me tell you how many spellings they had and you can find them. They had J-A-S, J-A-S-S, J-A-S-Z. Around on the fifteenth we arrived in New York, and we tried out two weeks. Many people think we started on the twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh. That's not right. We were there before the [twenty-] seventh because we didn't have no uniforms to work with, and we went over to Jimmy Baletta's [spelling?] which, and Nat Levy to get tuxedos fitted up for us and make us look like gentlemen. Now we're coming out of a dive in Chicago and we're going into a first-class place, one of the largest places in New York. And we tried out at the Coconut Grove; we tried out at the Paradise and we tried out at the 400 Room. We played in the main dining room. All these places we played before we had a contract. And in the paper around the fifteenth, you will find in a telegram--J-A-S-Z they spell it. But that ain't the way we gave it to them. We spelled it J-A-S-S. Well, I'm running ahead on something here. The Victor Company first spelled it J-A-S-S; then they changed to J-A-Z-Z, because some of the young fellows would go in with girls, and they'd take off the J off the

front--rub it off with a knife. And they'd say, "You want to hear some good music? Look at the title of that thing." And it was a vulgar word then; it became a vulgar word. It always was a vulgar word to me, because that's what I know it was to be, and our music had the same effect on the dancers. In other words, a lot of people said that we didn't do nothing. They'd go around and they'd tell you, "Aw, this man did this, this one did that." They'll tell you when they closed the District [Red Light District] down, that's when they spread jazz. That's not so. Jazz had spread before Joe Oliver came. And not only that, when Joe Oliver made them records, he had a young man with him who copied from the Dixieland Band, and if anyone cares to listen, I've studied them records, and they take the [Larry] Shields part in toto, and they taken part of my first cornet part on the "Livery Stable Blues." Johnny Dodds uses that.

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Voices: <sup>u</sup>Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; William R. Hogan;  
D. Clive Hardy

[Hogan:] Mr. LaRocca, all during the twenties, and to some extent during the 1930's, there were people who were deriding jazz, who said that it was something that we ought to try to abolish. The Etude magazine carried long discourses about how this was such an awful kind of music. What do you think--

[LaRocca:] You talk about--

[Hogan:] The sum total effect of jazz upon life in the United States and our influence abroad has been? Do you think it's been for the good, or for the bad, or do you think--

[LaRocca:] Well, the music itself didn't make the people bad; it gave them a sort of enjoyment. In other words, many masters have strived to move people; it took this music to move them. But you don't mention the Times-Picayune, who started all this thing down the road. Then it was taken up by the dancing masters of Chicago. Then in 1920 John Rhodes Statton had a bill passed. Up to this time there were no negro bands playing jazz, only imitators.

[Hogan:] That was a New York minister?

[LaRocca:] Yeah, a New York minister. He went to Albany and knocked us out of a job, forcing us [to be] relegated to a dance hall. We took the job in a dance hall-- that almost took all the starch out of me. The Victor Company refused to record any more jazz. They made us put a saxophone in the band, and this thing almost ruined the band, never give us the right--although--right kind of music--although this man was a wonderful musician; he was a very talented musician, Benny Krueger. But nobody wanted to record jazz no more, only the Okeh people. Well, we went to the Okeh people and recorded two numbers, or two sides--two different sittings, I think four numbers altogether. And they come out in their little book, and they called it "Race" records, making negroes out of us. And then that's why I quit them. And we had no place else to record; nobody wanted jazz, everybody was against it.

Whiteman hadn't come in, and his sweetened style. He didn't play jazz; he called himself the King of Jazz, but he didn't play no jazz. You've got his records to go by; you can see, see what I say, I have been telling what is today the truth, and not bumped up from memory, like these people took this negro to Washington, with jugs of wine. I've been told by someone that heard the record that he says, "I like whiskey; give me some more whiskey," on the record. That's a wonderful thing to put out by the State Department or by anyone that wants to put that out.

[Hogan:] Who was that?

[LaRocca:] Jelly Roll Morton. It's on the record where he says [it]; you can hear him say, "I like whiskey; give me some more whiskey." This fellow invented him. This man never was recognized in his life.

[Hogan:] You mean Alan Lomax?

[LaRocca:] Alan Lomax invented him.

[Hogan:] Did you ever see Jelly Roll Morton?

[LaRocca:] No, I never knew him; I never met him. In fact, I never knew Joe Oliver. I never met Papa Celestin 'til a New Orleans Jazz Club [meeting] down here, and Mrs. Menville introduced me to him. And she asked him, "Was this one of the men who used to sit down and listen to you?" He said, "No, ma'am, I never seen this man in my life before." I had already told her I never met him, but she didn't believe it, but she tried to put me on the spot. But that Negro had more honesty and truthfulness in his body than Mrs. Menville has in her whole family. He told her right there and then, he said, "No, I never seen this man in my life before," and I told [her?], "Thank you, Celestin, for telling the truth, because there's been many lies been told around New Orleans." What else you want to ask me?

[Hogan:] Was Celestin playing when you were a young man?

[LaRocca:] Not--they say he was playing; I couldn't tell you. Some people say he played down in the District; maybe he was. But when I went down there, I didn't have that kind of money to go in a dance hall. We went down there with our fifty cents and went to the Grunewald Theatre first, to look at the girl show, burlesque show; then we'd make it back there. We didn't go in where there was dancing, because you'd have to have money to go and dance with them women. You couldn't go in them places without money.

[Hogan:] Taxi dance hall?

[LaRocca:] Yeah, no--from what I understood you'd go in there, and you'd meet a girl, and you'd buy her beer, or highballs; you'd pay for it. And maybe it'd cost you ten, fifteen, twenty dollars before you got out of there. Now I only had fifty cents to spend, and I spent that fifty cents and I got out of there, because it wasn't a place for any decent man to hang around.

[Hogan:] I want to change the subject. This album here is a recording of the records you made in Great Britain in 1919. I understand another one has been issued.

[LaRocca:] Yes, sir.

[Hogan:] So there are two of them, at least, have been reissued.

[LaRocca:] Yes.

[Hogan:] Now--is there any one place, or any one set of albums or records, that is available in this country that has most of your original records available for people who would like to buy them?

[LaRocca:] No. You see, the thing is, these people control the press; they control the television. I've been fighting these television people for a long time. If you care to look up my things, letters that I wrote them, telling about the lies-- they were fouling up the air with filthy lies and propoganda. Now--

[Hogan:] My point is: don't you think it would be a good idea if somebody could be persuaded to bring all your original records together in an album?

[LaRocca:] Yes, it would be a good idea; it would be a good idea, but who's going to do it?

[Hogan:] Well, here they're doing it in England.

[LaRocca:] That's right.

[Hogan:] I think possibly your best records were made on this side.

[LaRocca:] On this side. The Victor has got the best records. And the Victor Company--I asked them for permission to redub them records, and they told me--it come from their legal department--that they kept them in their vault--they call them some kind of record vault--and my hands was tied. I was going to take a chance and put them out myself, to combat this propaganda that these other men were putting out. You see, they have an organization; they make money at this thing called the Jazz Club. The very word they use is stolen from the Dixieland Jazz Band, who made this word famous around the world. Marshall Stearns--you look up his articles in Downbeat--in 1936 he says, "We ought to find a different expression than jazz for the music, because when you say jazz it pertains to anything from the Dixieland Band to Paul Whiteman." That's what Marshall Stearns said. He tried to change the name; they tried to call it Chicago swing; they tried to call it everything. In 1936 I went and brought the band back, and we still kept it jazz. They ain't never changed nothing, and they couldn't sell it as anything else, because too many people know about it, and it will only be just a question of time that these people will have to tell the truth. Just recently I got a thing from Leonard Feather, first time in my life anybody ever wrote me anything to find out about me to print. In all these years that I've been around I haven't ever had one of these jazz historians ask me one question about jazz, but they go ask other guys who never was around and never

made a success about it. They say I want to take everything for myself. I never.

[Hogan:] Did you answer his inquiry?

[LaRocca:] Yes, I did. He says he's building up a new--what-do-you-call'em--on jazz, and what did I do since 1955? He don't ask me what I did before. But I took the liberty of telling him where to look for the true history on jazz, and stop writing his filthy lies. And I says, "I don't have many days on this earth, and I hope to see some truth before I die be printed about jazz music."

[Hogan:] Have you heard from him in reply to that?

[LaRocca:] He, he has never--and I sent him two pieces of music, too.

[Hogan:] He didn't acknowledge or anything?

[LaRocca:] No, he never acknowledged nothing. He's supposed to help that German man along in the jazz history they were going to put down on a moving picture--take names and places of jazz history. And all you can get out of them people is [that] the music come from Africa. It's like I aeen [Dr. Edmond] Souchon get on the television one day--I'm sitting right in this kitchen here--and he says, I went all the way to the wilds of Africa. I endangered my health," he says, "to get the rhythm." And he says, "Of course I could play many other jazz records, but I'm kind of selfish, I'm gonna play one of my own," he says. And he goes on there and he plays that crumby banjo-guitar he's got. Now this man never was a musician in my days. Probably he couldn't make a living at his doctor business. He's got a brother who's a lawyer, and I want them to hear what I have to say. He's said many dirty things about me, [through other people's name for dirt?]. I have never said anything dirty about him or anybody else. But when it was time to prove it, these men ran, just like he'll run. He says--he puts articles in the Second Line--that's the books you must read. They have a man that came down here when the New Orleans

Jazz Club was formed, a name by, a carpetbagger in other words--a northern carpet-bagger by the name of Dave Stern. Whether he's related to the Sterns, Edgar Stern or not, I don't know.

[Hogan:] I don't think so.

[LaRocca:] Maybe I'll get in trouble by mentioning Edgar Stern, but he put money in there. But this Edgar Stern had a lot to do from keeping me from getting recognition, because he was a big owner in the Times-Picayune long time ago, and I found out all this stuff; not recently, but in a roundabout way things have been rounding themselves up. This Dave Stern came here; he bought the New Orleans Item in. He was the same man who created the talking mule, Francis; he helped to create the talking jackasses, the New Orleans Jazz Club. He lent them Thomas Sancton to go around to the crazy house to find out about Buddy Bolden. Then later they dug up Bolden's grave to see if they could find an autograph of some tune that he made, maybe buried alongside of him, that he could get up and autograph a piece for Mrs. Myra Menville, because she's got all the autographs of all the other musicians--all the other great negro musicians, she has. This is the same man that whenever any negro dies, he was a great jazz man. Aided and abetted by no other than Dr. Souchan, who puts himself up as a jazz historian. Now this man here, as a jazz historian, never played jazz. He says he used to sit across the road from--on Basin Street--and listen to Joe Oliver play music, and there's where he got his idea from. Well, now, the only thing he could have heard on Basin Street--and there's many more men as old as I am can tell you they had no music on Basin Street, outside a little violin or a piano, or they had three negro [rhymers?] at Anderson's--but Joe Oliver, you couldn't hear him on Basin Street. The only thing he could have encountered was the customers who went into Lulu White's and Josie Arlington's, and that's all. And he says he went over to get a beer, in some of his articles. Well, I can tell

you this: New Orleans was a place less than 285,000 people; there was a policeman that was on every block that knew every strange face that come into the District. He'd a had his tail whipped with the strap, because they don't play with them like they play with them today. They play with them [like] a gentlemen. Them police worked on you. You were bad, they made you good. There was no two ways about it. And you could tell your daddy when you went home, you got another beating, too. But today the daddy wants to put police in jail for whipping a bad boy. That's why you have so much damn juvenile delinquency, and all other stuff around this country. Through propaganda, through lies, it's been spread around; you don't know what to believe any ore. But getting back to the Jazz Club; these people formed a racket. Marshall Stearns founded a good racket; he got in and milked the Guggenheimer Foundation on it; he got a lot of money; I don't know whether he divided up with Dr. Souchon or not. But up to that time, Dr. Souchon was with me. You got his letter at Tulane. He says, "Notwithstanding," he says, "the Original Dixieland Jazz Band started the whole thing." Today I didn't start anything; I was nowhere around; he was around with his 6 and 7/8 Band. They make me laugh sometimes. They get on here with these colored funerals. I feel sorry for colored man; I say, give him what any white man deserves: a good living, a good job, good education. But when it comes to integration--they may be hard on me on this, but I say I draw the line, because he hasn't earned that in their morals. Now they have some good colored people; they don't suffer. They are allowed to make as good a living as any white man. There's people run insurance companies; there's the Goddes, the Moss [funeral homes], and other people who set themself up in business. I had many colored people work with me, and they used to bring up this subject. I said, "Now what stopped you from building a hotel for colored people, as well as a white man build a hotel for white men? Why do you want to mix with the white men?" "Well,"

he says, "that's equality." "No, that ain't equality," I say, "Do you think it's equality that I can't go down into one of these big clubs?" I'm a white man. I'm barred from their clubs; I can't get into their clubs. That's segregation against me. I don't have no scruples against that. First place, I don't have the money. Next place, I don't belong in there. I'm a poor man, they're rich men. When the colored man says he's the same as the white man, I say he's wrong, because when I read--lot of these guys, and they went trekked back through Europe--to Africa--all they found--yes, they found where white men were that they had some of them were smart. And just like a beggar, when you put him on a horse, they want to ride him to death. But I say the NAACP is riding to a great big fall. And it ain't going to be long, either, because they will never get integration, the way they want it. They want white skin; they don't want equality, they want to marry with white people. Now, if that's allowed to be done, I feel sorry for the Anglo-Saxon people and the European white people--what you call the Caucasian race--because two-thirds of the world are yellow and black. You won't have no white race. I was once told by a doctor; he say, "Mr. La Rocca, you holler at the colored man. You save yourself, [or] you're going to get heart trouble." He says, "You've got a million years of learning in you; this negro has a hundred and fifty years of education behind him. How can a brain compete with a man that has millions of years of cultivation of ideas, and this colored man just has in the last hundred and fifty years the little education that he has acquired from the white man, compete?" Yes, there's plenty smart colored men, but I haven't seen no Enrico Fermi; I haven't seen no Einstein with them; I ain't seen no Columbus--not coming out of Africa. If you want to know the truth about it, I ain't ever been to Africa. They don't have no jazz music there, either. They don't have no Dixieland music. They never had no instruments there, either. They don't even know what a wheel is.

They're so damn lazy all they do is lay down and let the women work for them. And when they come over here, that's what they expect to do--get the women to work for them. And that's what they do here. Their women work for them. Can I put something else on there? I'm going out of line, now.

[Hogan:] Go right ahead, whatever you want. That's why I came down here, so you could have your say.

[LaRocca:] Go ahead? Yeah, all right, sir. I want to talk about--in my work in carpentry work, I went to many places they had many colored people. I used to see a lot of colored children, and one family had so many different names, I said, "How come's his name?" "Well, his father left me, he just disappeared." Well, I said, "How do you support him? You don't work." She says, "Well, I get relief. Fifty dollars a month for each child." That's a hell of a good racket. They can propagate like rats. White woman go there, she'll turn red in the face. You go down to Charity Hospital--I've been told white people--I never went there, never had occasion to, but I had a brother went there, and they turned him down--he didn't have no money--but they don't turn the negro down. Somehow or another they feel sorry for him, poor colored man. You can't see the reaction on his face, but if I tell you a lie you're going to see it on my face; I'm going to turn red. And you're going to catch me in that lie, but you don't catch the negro in a lie, because he don't have that, he makes believe he's stupid. He ain't stupid; he's smart. And the same way with these women that they have. Nine-tenths of the colored people, they don't marry; they live together. And any white person that says that they're fit to integrate, I say they're stepping down and lowering the morals of the white race. All you have to do is read Louis Armstrong's book. He had nine daddies; he says he didn't know who was his right daddy. He didn't know, but he had nine daddies. That's what they're trying to force on you, these

minority groups. They'll tell you, "Integration is good, it's the right thing to do." But these people themselves--I won't mention--they came here in around 1600--I've studied them, studied them very good. They disappeared as the same people. Then they came back and they emerged, and they are the same people, yet they have never integrated. But the Italians, Germans, the Frenchmen, the Czechoslovakians, or any other nationality, they intermarry. But this one kind of people, they don't mix. But they tell them how to run the country, and the country is run according to that. They control the money; they control the television; they control all the big presses; and that's the way it goes. And they want integration. White man has no more to say any more about integration, because those rights have been taken away from him by our Supreme Court--men, I guess, who never were judges any more than I am, that don't know anything. I am in favor of giving every colored man his just dues, and let him remain colored, the same as he's been. Build hotels for them. Build everything for them; schools--give him college education, if he wants it. Now if anybody's got any grievance against me, that'll be just too bad for me, because I want to make this tape, and I want my expression to be on that tape, just as it is. I'm a segregationist, and a die-hard one, because I don't think the colored man has earned his place, so far. Maybe [in] years to come, yes, but not now. Any other questions?

[Hogan:] Turn it off.

End of Reel II  
October 26, 1959