



Dan Desdunes: New Orleans Civil Rights Activist and “The Father of Negro Musicians of Omaha”

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Article Summary: Dan Desdunes lived a remarkable life as a bandleader, educator, and civil rights activist. In his native New Orleans, he played a key role in an unsuccessful legal challenge to railway segregation that led to the U.S. Supreme Court’s infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. In Omaha, he became a successful bandleader who also volunteered at Father Flanagan’s Boys Home, where he trained the boys for fundraising musical tours.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Daniel Desdunes, Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, Clarence Desdunes, Homer Plessy

Bands Desdunes Directed: Desdunes Jazz Orchestra, Cousto-Desdunes Orchestra, Omaha Military Band (later called the Dan Desdunes Band, the Desdunes Prize Band, the First Regimental Band)

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Keywords: Daniel Desdunes, Comité des Citoyens, Separate Car Act, Plessy v. Ferguson, minstrels, [Omaha] Chamber of Commerce, Boys Town, Father Flanagan’s Boys’ Band

Photographs / Images: Dan Desdunes Band on a 1923 “good will excursion”; Omaha Military Band, 1904; Desdunes; Desdunes Band, c. 1919; Desdunes and the Father Flanagan’s Boys’ Home Band, 1921; Desdunes Band on a “Sunrise Excursion,” 1922; 1924 event in Wilber, Nebraska, featuring “Dan Desdune’s (*sic*) Band and Minstrel Show of Omaha Colored Entertainers Supreme”; Desdunes Band in 1925; horses and bus used to transport Father Flanagan’s Boys’ Shows (2 views); Paul Whiteman with the Boys Town Band, November 2, 1928; Desdunes Band in the 1960s, long after his death



DAN DESDUNES:

New Orleans Civil Rights Activist

— AND —

“The Father of Negro Musicians of Omaha”

BY JESSE J. OTTO

Jazz critic and historian George Lipsitz has observed that “established histories of jazz tend to focus on a select group of individual geniuses in only a few cities.”¹ This group includes figures such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Charlie Parker; and those “few cities” are New Orleans, Kansas City, Chicago, and New York. Lipsitz contends that many of the artists and cities that have been neglected in general surveys of jazz history merit attention and that Omaha, Nebraska, is one such place.²

Before the end of the dance band era, around 1960, many black musicians came to Omaha in order to develop their talents and try to work their way into big name bands. Omaha jazz musician Preston Love asserted, “If New York, Chicago, and Kansas City were the major leagues of jazz, Omaha was the triple-A. If you wanted to make the big leagues, you came and played in Omaha.”³ Omaha’s black bandleaders had long upheld a tradition of nurturing and producing prominent musicians, many of whom had been attracted to Omaha from other parts of the country. Dan Desdunes was largely responsible for beginning this tradition.

The Dan Desdunes Band on a 1923 “good will excursion.” Douglas County Historical Society

The Omaha Military Band, 1904. Douglas County Historical Society



The word “jazz” first appeared in *The Monitor*, Omaha’s black weekly newspaper, on November 3, 1917, less than a year after the first jazz recordings were made.⁴ This word was used in an advertisement for a charity ball at which the music was to be provided by the Desdunes Jazz Orchestra.⁵ This band was led by Dan Desdunes, who was described as “the father of negro musicians of Omaha” in Harrison J. Pinkett’s 1937 manuscript, “An Historical Sketch of the Omaha Negro.”⁶

Dan Desdunes was born in New Orleans in 1873 to an upper-middle class Creole family with a penchant for public service and for notoriety.⁷ His grandfather, Jeremiah Desdunes, came from Haiti and his grandmother, Henrietta, was originally from Cuba. Dan’s father, Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, was born in New Orleans in 1849.⁸ Rodolphe was a writer who, in 1911, published *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire*, a book about the history and the culture of Creoles in Louisiana.⁹ Therein, Rodolphe highlighted the achievements of several successful Creoles. This work has been translated and reprinted many times, most recently in 2009.¹⁰

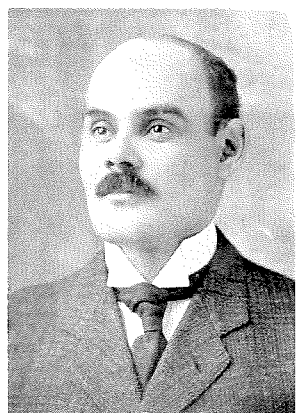
Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes was a staunch opponent of segregation and was one of the principal orchestrators of the Comité des Citoyens (Citizens’ Committee) on September 5, 1891.¹¹ Rodolphe was the primary editorial contributor to *The Crusader*, New Orleans’s weekly black newspaper, and held

the meetings of the Comité des Citoyens at the newspaper’s offices.¹² Rodolphe succinctly defined the objectives of the organization:

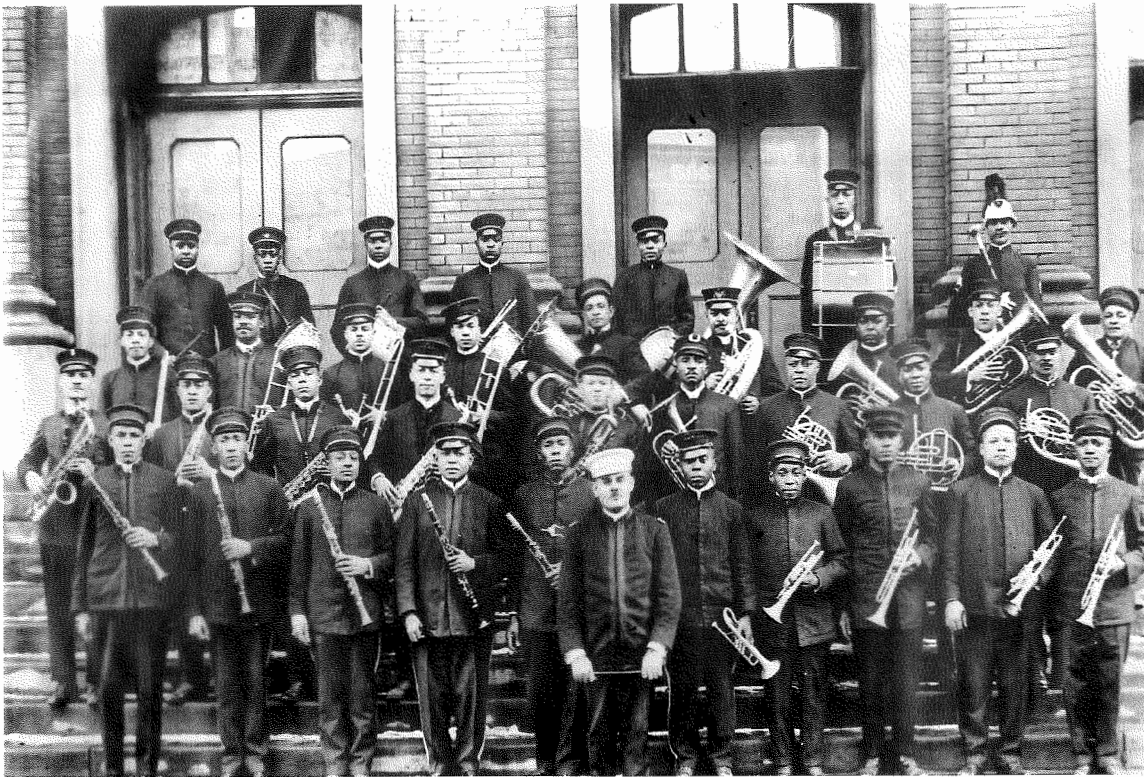
It was in 1890 that the Citizens’ Committee was formed, when a return to exaggerated fanaticism about caste or segregation once again alarmed the black people. This fanaticism was not confined merely to chance meetings. We were face to face with a government determined to develop and establish a system by which a portion of the people would have to submit to the rest. It was necessary to resist this state of affairs, even with no hope of success in sight. The idea was to give a dignified appearance to the resistance, which had to be implemented by lengthy judicial procedures.¹³

In 1890 the Louisiana Legislature enacted the Separate Car Act, which required railway companies to provide separate passenger cars for whites and blacks. It also required the railroads to halt physically anyone who attempted to enter a car reserved for persons of another race.¹⁴ After the Comité des Citoyens decided to challenge this law’s enforcement in interstate travel, Dan Desdunes volunteered, in February 1892, to violate this act.¹⁵

Dan Desdunes was one-eighth black, and according to Louisiana law, legally classified as “colored,” which meant he was forbidden to ride in any



Dan Desdunes. Boys Town Hall of History



Dan Desdunes Band, circa 1919. Desdunes stands in front wearing a white hat. Douglas County Historical Society

“white” railroad passenger car. Desdunes’ skin color was light enough that he was able to pass as white and gain admission to a “white only” coach.¹⁶ The Comité des Citoyens was so certain that Desdunes would pass for white that it hired private detectives to arrest him in order to ensure that the committee could challenge the Separate Car Act in court. Dan Desdunes spent no time in jail because he was immediately bailed out by the committee. After a short trial, he was acquitted.¹⁷ Justice John Howard Ferguson ruled that enforcement of the Separate Car Act upon interstate travel was unconstitutional because only the federal government had the authority to regulate interstate commerce.¹⁸

Next, the Comité des Citoyens decided to challenge racial segregation on intrastate railway travel. They recruited Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes’ friend, Homer Plessy, to be arrested in this challenge. This case eventually went to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled on May 18, 1896, that Homer Plessy’s constitutional rights had not been violated by Louisiana law.¹⁹ This ruling was devastating to Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, who reported that “our defeat sanctioned the odious principle of the segregation of the races.”²⁰

Whereas Rodolphe primarily dedicated his life to scholarship and civil activism, Dan Desdunes pursued a livelihood in arts and entertainment. The son’s means may have differed from his father’s, yet Dan’s career allowed him to work toward

Rodolphe’s goals. Dan Desdunes not only became a musician and an educator but also worked against racial segregation.

Dan attended public schools as a child and received his college education at Straight University in New Orleans. After college, he found work as a house painter.²¹ Desdunes was a classically trained musician and earned additional income as a performer and music teacher in New Orleans.²² He married Victoria Oliver in 1895; and his only child, Clarence Desdunes, was born on February 17, 1896, in New Orleans. Victoria died shortly afterward and Dan then married Madia Dodd, to whom he remained married until his death.²³

Dan Desdunes was also involved in popular music and co-led the Cousto-Desdunes Orchestra,



Dan Desdunes and the Father Flanagan’s Boys’ Home Band in 1921. Boys Town Hall of History.

**The Dan Desdunes Band
on a "Sunrise Excursion"
in 1922.** Douglas County
Historical Society



one of New Orleans's most celebrated dance bands of the 1890s.²⁴ Many scholars agree that the style of music known as "jazz" was developed gradually through the contributions of many artists and in many different places. Others contend that New Orleans cornetist Charles "Buddy" Bolden "led the first jazz band" around 1905.²⁵ Lawrence Gushee, in his article "Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz," includes excerpts of an interview with a New Orleans trombonist, George Filhe, who was born in 1872. Filhe recalled that, in 1892, he played cornet with the Cousto-Desdunes Orchestra and that the band "played jazz, would always swing the music, that was their novelty. Younger musicians about 1892 began to 'swing.' Older men used lots of Mexican music."²⁶ This statement places Dan Desdunes among the first artists to perform "jazz."

Dan Desdunes left New Orleans in the late 1890s to tour with Docstader's Minstrels.²⁷ This troupe was among the most popular in the nation, thanks in large part to a roster featuring many famous entertainers, including Al Jolson.²⁸ Desdunes also performed in other prominent minstrel troupes such as Gideon's Minstrels, whose tours most often traveled through the Midwest.²⁹ He came to Omaha in 1904 with a traveling show company that was then producing a play he had written. Dan Desdunes liked Omaha so much that he decided to make it his home.³⁰

Desdunes' first job in Omaha was as a janitor. He later became the manager of billiard rooms at the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, a connection which would eventually benefit him greatly. Desdunes received the opportunity to lead an orchestra when the Colored Knights of Pythias formed one and recruited him to direct it.³¹

In 1904 a group of black Omaha musicians founded the Omaha Military Band and selected Professor Ernest Tyler to lead it. This band gained little popularity until 1908, when they asked Dan Desdunes to become their director. The band soon became known as the Dan Desdunes Band, and nearly all of the pieces that they played were arranged by Desdunes himself.³² Members of that band claimed that these arrangements were twenty years ahead of their times. Desdunes was able to convince many excellent touring musicians who passed through Omaha to relocate to Omaha and join his band. Furthermore, his connections at the Chamber of Commerce helped him to attract such musicians to his band by enabling him to find jobs and housing for them.³³

In 1910 Desdunes' association with the Chamber of Commerce enabled his orchestra, known at this time as the Desdunes Prize Band, to become the first black band to perform at the Ak-Sar-Ben parade.³⁴ Desdunes' successful networking also led to his orchestra's participation in the Chamber of

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Commerce's annual "Good Will" trips, which were designed to encourage people to do business in Omaha. Desdunes' band became such a popular feature of these tours that in 1918, his band was named the official band of the trip.³⁵ The Chamber of Commerce paid the band musicians quite well for the tour, and it was considered an honor for a musician to be selected by Desdunes for the "Good Will" trips.³⁶

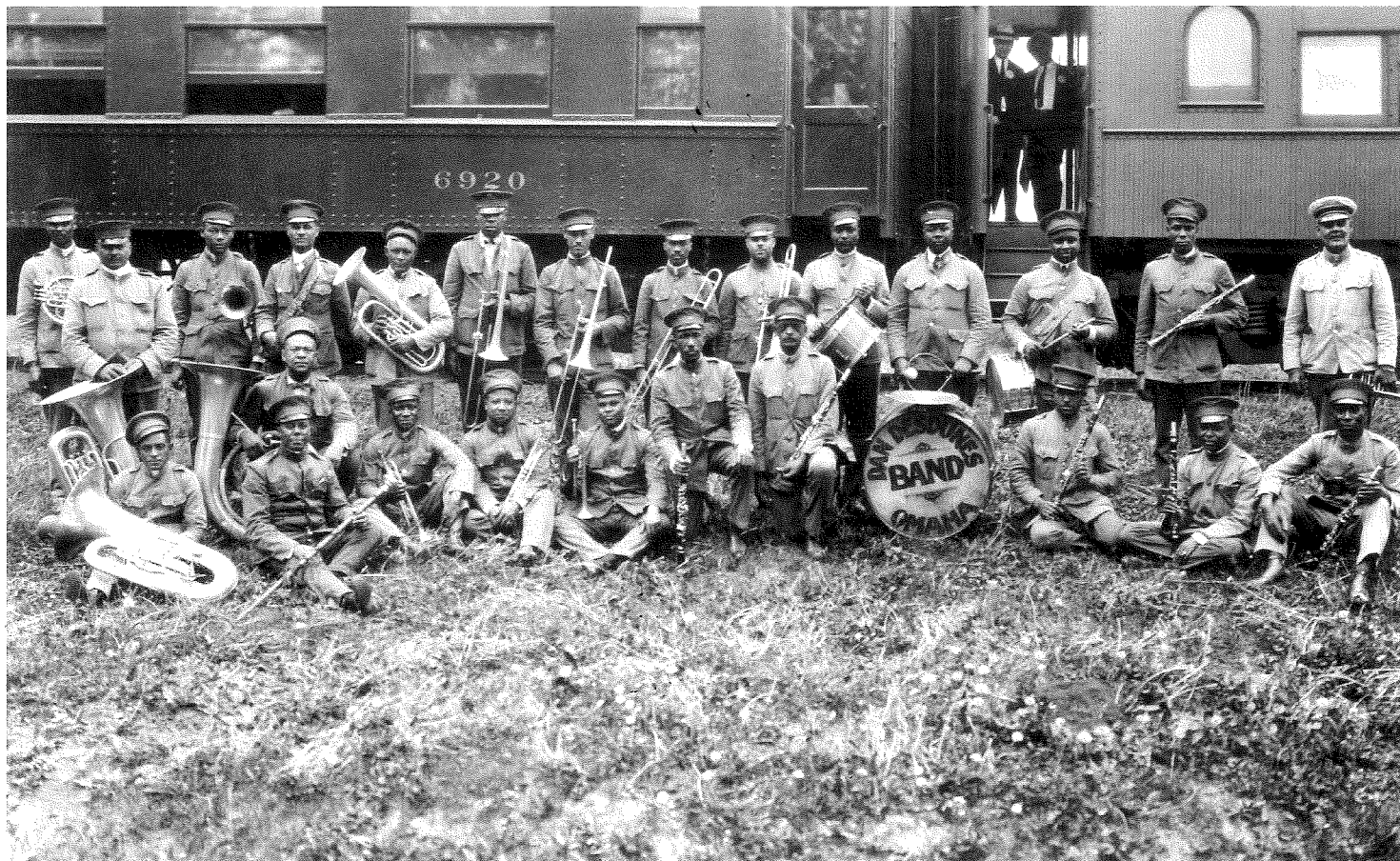
Desdunes' band became known as the First Regimental Band and was celebrated for its fine musicianship and showmanship.³⁷ An example of this showmanship occurred during the 1914 Ak-Sar-Ben Parade when rain suddenly began to pour heavily. As most people in attendance scattered to find shelter, the First Regimental Band continued to march and began playing a song called "How Dry I Am."³⁸

Dan Desdunes and the First Regimental Band,

which played mostly marches and classical music, developed a large following in the white community. Around 1915 Desdunes was hired to instruct an all-white band based in Louisville, Nebraska.³⁹ The First Regimental Band was often invited to perform for prominent white Americans who were visiting Omaha. For example, the band's performance reportedly "thrilled" President Woodrow Wilson on his 1916 visit to Omaha. Moreover, Gen. John J. Pershing praised them as "one of the best trained bands I have ever heard."⁴⁰

Dan Desdunes was also a celebrity in the Omaha black community. Lloyd Hunter, who later became an important Omaha bandleader, was inspired by him to become a musician.⁴¹ Desdunes did celebrity endorsements for *The Monitor* including the following statement from January 19, 1918, entitled "Dan Desdunes Knows A Good Thing":

A 1924 event in Wilber, Nebraska, featured "Dan Desdunes' (sic) Band and Minstrel Show of Omaha. Colored Entertainers Supreme." NSHS RG813-445



The Dan Desdunes Band in 1925. Douglas County Historical Society

Dan Desdunes, the popular leader of the First Regimental Band, knows good things besides music. He is buying a Thrift Stamp every day and says he is going to keep it up. This means that Dan is saving 25 cents a day. He exchanges every sixteen Thrift Stamps with the additional 12 cents necessary for a War Savings Stamp which pays 4 ½ per cent interest. Everybody who follows Dan Desdunes' example will not only help lick the Kaiser, but will save a neat little sum of money.⁴²

Desdunes also played a prominent role in the history of Boys Town. In December 1917 Father Edward J. Flanagan, an Irish immigrant priest, established this home for boys who faced poverty, neglect, homelessness, or incarceration. The home was to be racially integrated and nonsectarian.⁴³ These ideals appealed to Dan Desdunes, who began working at Boys Town (originally known as Father Flanagan's Boys' Home) as a volunteer bandmaster and music teacher immediately after its founding.⁴⁴

In the early days of Boys Town, two of the most serious problems that Father Flanagan encountered were obtaining adequate funds and breaking down

prejudices toward the boys in his custody.⁴⁵ In order to help remedy both problems, Dan Desdunes offered to train some of the boys to perform in a traveling minstrel show. Flanagan and Desdunes believed that this performance troupe would not only earn money for Boys Town but also demonstrate for many people who normally would not encounter Flanagan's orphans that these boys were often talented, well-behaved children. Desdunes trained them for weeks on end and unveiled their inaugural performance in January 1921. By April 1922 he had trained a thirty-two-piece band and had embarked with them on a summer-long fundraising tour.⁴⁶ Father Flanagan considered this venture to be quite a success, and such tours became a fixture at Boys Town.⁴⁷ The tours became so popular that they expanded them to include trips through other regions of the country. One summer they went as far east as New York and during another summer as far west as the Pacific Ocean.⁴⁸

Dan Desdunes was heavily involved with Boys Town, its band, and its traveling shows during the twelve years that he volunteered at the home. He usually spent three days per week working with the



Desdunes volunteered at Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, where he trained a band for summer-long fundraising tours. The tours helped raise money for the struggling home, and helped break down prejudices against the boys, who were often assumed to be delinquents. Boys Town Hall of History

boys.⁴⁹ He composed original music for the band to perform, including a piece called "Rah, Rah, Blue-jay" which was performed at the Creighton-Utah football game on November 10, 1928.⁵⁰ As part of a 1927 drive to pay off Boys Town's mortgage, Desdunes composed the song "Dividends of Smiles."⁵¹ He wrote short comedy sketches in addition to plotting and choreographing two-to-three-hour variety shows for the traveling troupe.⁵² In 1927 he began directing the Father Flanagan Boys' Band through weekly hour-long performances that were broadcast on WOW Radio.⁵³

Like the First Regimental Band, Dan Desdunes and Father Flanagan's Boys' Band received praise from prominent citizens. The ensemble performed twice for President Calvin Coolidge. After the second performance, the president posed for a photograph with the band and stood next to nine-year-old Albert Kercheval, who went on to become an excellent jazz musician in Omaha for many years.⁵⁴ John Phillip Sousa claimed that no rendition of his composition "Stars and Stripes Forever" had ever touched him as much as the one played for him by Father Flanagan's Boys' Band.⁵⁵ Paul Whiteman said of this band that "in all my travels, and they have been far and many, I have yet to see a musical band composed of comparative youngsters go through some of the most difficult pieces like veterans."⁵⁶



Another view of the tour bus. Boys Town Hall of History

Dan Desdunes' final road trip with Father Flanagan's Boys' Band occurred April 10-12, 1929, as they performed in Stanton, Nebraska, and afterward did so live on WJAG radio in Norfolk, Nebraska.⁵⁷ Desdunes conducted this band for the last time on Saturday, April 20, 1929. At this performance, he mentioned to Father Flanagan that he was



In the 1920s, Paul Whiteman was known as the "King of Jazz" and led the country's most popular dance bands. He is shown here (with baton) with the Boys Town band on November 28, 1928. Desdunes is left of Whiteman, facing the camera. Father Flanagan is toward the right, also facing the camera. Boys Town Hall of History

developing a "slight cold." On the morning of Wednesday, April 24, 1929, Dan Desdunes died of spinal meningitis at the age of fifty-six. An enormous number of people attended his funeral, which the *Omaha World-Herald* described as an event where "prominent Omaha business men mingled with colored mourners."⁵⁸

Dan Desdunes received praise from a wide variety of people, but contemporary writings about him are often indicative of prejudices against black people and their contributions to culture. Jazz was commonly considered a dirty word in the early 1920s. But Boys Town was a progressive place, and *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal* proudly described how Desdunes prepared the boys to play "some real jazz music."⁵⁹ A later issue assured readers that, despite allowing the boys to have fun with jazz, Desdunes still provided a "proper" musical education. The article reported that "the boys like to play Jazz numbers . . . but Mr. Desdunes is too good a musician to allow them to become over-developed along these lines. He insists on some classical selections."⁶⁰ Upon Desdunes' death, the *Journal* commented that "there were other Negro instrumentalists in Omaha, but there were none

with more music. He went in for melody rather than the usual tin-panning."⁶¹ At that time, the *Omaha World-Herald* wrote: "Dan Desdunes was a Negro who filled a happy niche in life. He had the instinct of his race for music, plus a showmanship that was unique."⁶² A reporter for *The Monitor* remembered hearing a conversation at the 1915 Ak-Sar-Ben parade in which a bystander asserted that the "colored" band was the best band in the parade because "them fellers are just full of music. They can't help but play good music."⁶³

Many of the musicians who played in black orchestras in Omaha went on to become big names in the history of jazz. However, black Omaha bands can only be classified as jazz bands if this classification is based on the style of music preferred by the musicians in the bands. They were dance bands and marching bands that made money by playing what their audience wanted to hear. Most of the audiences in the Omaha territory were white and preferred marches, polkas, waltzes, schottisches, and "corn ball" or "corny" tunes.⁶⁴ Music in the style of Guy Lombardo and Lawrence Welk made up at least fifty percent of the repertoires of the top black dance bands of the 1930s and 1940s in Omaha.⁶⁵



Though Dan Desdunes died suddenly in 1929, his band continued to perform decades later. The band is shown here in the 1960s. Boys Town Hall of History

Bands are primarily businesses. In the first half of the twentieth century, the most profitable jobs for black bands were playing for white audiences. This was as true for Duke Ellington at New York's Cotton Club as it was for Omaha's Dan Desdunes at the Ak-Sar-Ben parades and the Chamber of Commerce Good Will Tours. In comparison to the American South or to the larger metropolises of the East, the Omaha territory had a relatively small black population. Kansas City musician Buster Smith grew up in Texas and claims that, in Texas, black territory bands played "always for colored audiences."⁶⁶ Rarely did Omaha territory bands have the opportunity to perform for black audiences. Outside of Omaha, this only happened in a few cities such as Des Moines, Denver, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Kansas City. In such instances, the bands were free to play the jazz and blues numbers they preferred.⁶⁷ In Omaha, not just the majority of the most profitable jobs involved performing for white audiences, as in the South and the East, but the vast majority of all jobs.

Most commonly, black Omaha bands performed at dances for entirely white audiences in communities such as Norfolk, Nebraska; Manhattan, Kansas; and Honey Creek, Iowa. Omaha saxophonist Preston Love noted in his autobiography that audiences in such towns "were intrigued by the prospect of a swinging, jazzy 'colored' band."⁶⁸ Many whites

expected hours of waltzes, polkas, and "corn ball" tunes from people they thought of as born entertainers. Businesses thrive by giving customers what they want. This led to Duke Ellington's jungle-themed floor shows at the whites only Cotton Club, band names like Lincoln, Nebraska's, Harold Jones' Brownskin Syncopators, and black Omaha bands rarely playing music about which they were passionate.⁶⁹


Being a successful bandleader requires special talents, but to succeed as a black bandleader in Omaha, Nebraska, in the first half of the twentieth century required overcoming additional formidable challenges. The black bandleaders who did this well not only had to be knowledgeable musicians and business managers, but they also had to deal with a white power structure and culture that rarely accepted or respected them. Dan Desdunes did this expertly and was instrumental in creating an environment in Omaha in which future black musicians could prosper as well.

One young musician who benefited from Dan's guidance was his son, Clarence Desdunes, who too became an important early bandleader in Omaha. Clarence was born in New Orleans on February 17, 1896, and graduated from high school in Omaha.⁷⁰ He began studying violin as a child in New Orleans and, just after high school, he spent four years studying music in Europe. Like his grandfather,

Clarence was also a writer. He wrote a regular column in *The Monitor* about music, and on September 2, 1920, made this point:

The black man has the brains as well as the spiritual endowment necessary to understand and appreciate music in a high degree; he can point with pride to the musicians who emphatically deserve to be called artists, and another quarter century of artistic striving will bring them into the front ranks of artistic achievement.⁷¹

Clarence Desdunes' writings were not limited to *The Monitor*. In 1922 he published a book on violin performance.⁷² He also led a band in Omaha, which featured the two most famous trombone players to ever emerge from that city: Elmer Crumbley and Charlie Green. Crumbley later described Clarence as "a marvelous bandleader and a fine violinist."⁷³ Clarence moved back to New Orleans and formed the Joyland Revelers in 1927.⁷⁴ This band was successful and toured extensively. Although they played mainly in the South, they were popular in Omaha. Clarence died in 1934.⁷⁵

Daniel Desdunes affected many generations of musicians in Omaha. Although he died in 1929, the Dan Desdunes Band continued to perform under that name until it disbanded in the 1990s.⁷⁶ Many Omaha musicians born well after 1929 performed in the Dan Desdunes Band. Harrison J. Pinkett wrote of Desdunes' death that it "brought to a close a career worthy of emulation by all men who seek to labor and to serve."⁷⁷ 

NOTES

¹ George Lipsitz, Introduction to *A Thousand Honey Creeks Later*, by Preston Love (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), xviii.

² Ibid., xix.

³ Preston Love, interview by author, Nov. 7, 2001.

⁴ "Grand Charity Ball! For Benefit of The Old Folks Home," *The Monitor*, Nov. 3, 1917. For information on the first jazz recordings see Scott Alexander, "The First Jazz Records," *Red Hot Jazz Archive*, <http://www.redhotjazz.com/jazz1917.html> (accessed Mar. 12, 2010).

⁵ "Grand Charity Ball! For Benefit of The Old Folks Home."

⁶ H. J. Pinkett, "An Historical Sketch of the Omaha Negro" (Unpublished manuscript, Apr. 22, 1937), 70.

⁷ Ibid., 67. Some sources list his birth date as 1870. Pinkett was Dan Desdunes' friend, so 1873 is likely the date Desdunes gave as his birth year. He died in 1929 and his *Omaha World-Herald* obituary lists him as fifty-six years old.

⁸ Charles E. O'Neill, S.J., Foreword to *Our People and Our History*, by Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), xiv.

⁹ Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, *Our People and Our History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973).

¹⁰ Amazon.com, "Nos Homme et Notre Histoire," http://www.amazon.com/Hommes-Histoire-Rodolphe-Lucien-Desdunes/dp/0559086318/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1243105051&s_r=1-2 (accessed March 12, 2010).

¹¹ Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 141.

¹² *The American Experience: New Orleans*, DVD, directed by Stephen Ives (PBS Home Video; Hollywood, Calif.: Distributed by Paramount Home Entertainment, 2007).

¹³ Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 141.

¹⁴ Keith Weldon Medley, *We as Freeman: Plessy v. Ferguson* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 95-96. This act is one of many "Jim Crow Laws" enacted in the post-Reconstruction South beginning in 1876. For more information, see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951); Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951). The railroad companies generally opposed legislation of this nature because it compelled the companies to enforce the law as well as to pay for the additional facilities that the law required.

¹⁵ Medley, *We as Freeman*, 135.

¹⁶ Brook Thomas, ed., *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 5-6.

¹⁷ Medley, *We as Freeman*, 135, 157; Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 143.

¹⁸ Thomas, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 5.

¹⁹ Harvey Fireside, *Separate and Unequal: Homer Plessy and the Supreme Court Decision that Legalized Racism* (New York: Carroll and Graff Publishers, 2004), 25; Thomas, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, xii.

²⁰ Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 144; Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes died in Omaha on August 14, 1928. "Deaths," *The Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), Aug. 17, 1928, 2. Multiple authors have written that Rodolphe was visiting his son at the time of his death. It is likely that he moved to Omaha after he retired because the Omaha City Directory lists him as renting a residence in 1918, and he is listed as owning a home at 2213 North 25th Street from 1919 until his death.

²¹ Pinkett, "An Historical Sketch," 67, 68.

²² Jari C. Honora, *Daniel F. Desdunes* (Unpublished and undated essay from Boys Town Hall of History that cites "Dan Desdunes-Vertical File" at Tulane University's Hogan Jazz Archive).

²³ Ibid., 3. According to records from St. Phillip the Deacon Episcopal Church in Omaha, Madia Desdunes died in Brooklyn, New York, in March 1930, less than one year after Dan died. "Burial Records" in *Communicant Register, 1887-1905*, p. x, St. Phillip the Deacon Episcopal Church, Omaha. Volume located in office of Episcopal Church of the Resurrection, Omaha. This research was provided by Professor Jo Behrens.

²⁴ Daniel Hardie, *Exploring Early Jazz* (San Jose, New York, Lincoln, and Shanghai: Writers Club Press, 2002), 20. In some other sources this band is called the Coustaute-Desdunes Orchestra.

²⁵ *Jazz: A Film By Ken Burns*, DVD, directed by Ken Burns (PBS Home Video; Hollywood, Calif.: Distributed by Paramount Home Entertainment, 2004).

²⁶ Lawrence Gushee, "The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz," *Black Music Research Journal* 14:1 (Spring 1994): 16.

²⁷ "Homeless Boys Mourn Dan Desdunes' Death: Musician Had Directed Father Flanagan's Boys' Band for the Last Twelve Years," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, June 1929, 3.

²⁸ Frank Cullen, Florence Hackman, and Donald McNeilly,

Vaudeville, Old and New: Volume 1 of Vaudeville, Old & New: An Encyclopedia of Variety Performers in America (New York: Routledge, 2007), 315-16.

²⁹ Bernard L. Peterson, *The African-American Theatre Directory 1816-1960* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 79.

³⁰ "Dan Desdunes Dies; Long A Band Leader," *Omaha World-Herald*, Apr. 25, 1929.

³¹ Pinkett, "An Historical Sketch," 68.

³² This band appears to have generally had between twenty-five and thirty members. A 1916 photograph shows twenty-eight members and a 1950s image of the band pictures twenty-six musicians. *The Monitor*, May 27, 1916, 1, and unpublished photograph from the late 1950s from the personal collection of Elmer J. Crumbley.

³³ "Omaha's 50 Year-Old Band: It Toots It Up on Trade Trip Up Into South Dakota," *Omaha World-Herald*, May 9, 1954, Douglas County Historical Society file.

³⁴ "Desdunes Prize Band In Parade," *The Enterprise*, Sept. 30, 1910.

³⁵ "Dan Desdunes," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, June 1926, 4, June 1929; "Omaha's 50 Year-Old Band: It Toots It Up."

³⁶ Preston Love interview.

³⁷ I do not know the exact date of this name change. The new militaristic name may have been a result of the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914. The change had already occurred when *The Monitor* began publication in July 1915.

³⁸ "First Regimental Band Makes Hit In Ak-Sar-Ben Parade," *The Monitor*, Oct. 9, 1915.

³⁹ Albert J. Kercheval, interview by author, Nov. 13, 2001; Pinkett, "An Historical Sketch," 69.

⁴⁰ "Homeless Boys Mourn Dan Desdunes' Death"; "Dan Desdunes Band," *The Monitor*, Aug. 4, 1921.

⁴¹ Dr. Lloyd T. Hunter, interview by author, Apr. 29, 2009.

⁴² "Dan Desdunes Knows A Good Thing," *The Monitor*, Jan. 19, 1918.

⁴³ Barbara A. Lonnborg and Thomas J. Lynch, *Father Flanagan's Legacy* (Boys Town, Neb.: Boys Town Press, 2003), 5-6.

⁴⁴ "Homeless Boys Mourn Dan Desdunes' Death." I do not know how Dan Desdunes and Father Flanagan became acquainted. Although Desdunes was from predominantly Catholic New Orleans, his family attended St. Phillip the Deacon Episcopal Church. "Dan Desdunes Dies."

⁴⁵ Father Edward J. Flanagan, page 83 of an untitled and undated manuscript from the Boys Town Hall of History.

⁴⁶ "Mr. Dan Desdunes Instructor Of Our Band," *Father Flanagan's Boys Home Journal*, April 1922.

⁴⁷ Flanagan, manuscript, 96.

⁴⁸ "Father Flanagan's Boys' Band Moulded Into Great Musical Group," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, April 1929.

⁴⁹ "Help," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, October 1924.

⁵⁰ "Band Tunes to Rah, Rah, Rah," *Omaha Bee-News*, Nov. 11, 1928.

⁵¹ Msgr. Francis P. Schmitt, "History of Music at Boys Town: Significance of the Boys Town Collection of Sacred Music," *Sacred Music* 117 (Spring 1990), Global Catholic Network, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/LITURGY/BOYTWN.TXT> (accessed Mar. 12, 2010).

⁵² "Sketch Written By Dan Desdunes," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, July 1926; Untitled article from *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, 1923. The article appears on page 9 of the issue, but the month was not available on the copy provided to me by the Boys Town Hall of History.

⁵³ Dan Desdunes, "Dividends of Smiles" sheet music from the Boys Town Hall of History (published in July 1927).

⁵⁴ "Father Flanagan's Boys' Band Moulded Into Great Musical Group."

⁵⁵ "Boys' Home Has One of the Best Juvenile Bands in U.S.," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, May 1927.

⁵⁶ "Paul Whiteman Directs Father Flanagan's Band," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, January 1929.

⁵⁷ "Show at Stanton," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, May 1929.

⁵⁸ "Homeless Boys Mourn Dan Desdunes' Death"; "Dan Desdunes Dies"; "Dan Desdunes' Funeral Attended by Hundreds," *Omaha World-Herald*, Apr. 30, 1929.

⁵⁹ "Our Band," *Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal*, April 1922.

⁶⁰ "Father Flanagan's Boys' Band Moulded Into Great Musical Group."

⁶¹ "Homeless Boys Mourn Dan Desdunes' Death."

⁶² "Dan Desdunes."

⁶³ "First Regimental Band Makes Hit In Ak-Sar-Ben Parade."

⁶⁴ "Corn ball" and "corny" were terms commonly used by black musicians in the dance band era to describe Guy Lombardo, Lawrence Welk, or Glenn Miller style music.

⁶⁵ Love, *A Thousand Honey Creeks Later*, 89.

⁶⁶ Don Gazzaway, "Conversations with Buster Smith," *The Jazz Review*, December 1959.

⁶⁷ Preston Love interview.

⁶⁸ Love, *A Thousand Honey Creeks Later*, 89.

⁶⁹ John Chilton *Who's Who of Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 178. Preston Love, interview. Von Richard Trimble, interview by author, Oct. 21, 2009. Luigi Waites, interview by author, May 8, 2009. Mason Prince, interview by author, June 29, 2009. Dr. Everett Reynolds, interview by author, Mar. 29, 2010.

⁷⁰ Honora, *Daniel F. Desdunes*, 3. Honora asserts that Clarence graduated from Technical High School, but that is unlikely because Tech High opened in 1923. He may have graduated from Commerce High School, which was the forerunner of Omaha Technical High School. [Omahatechhigh.com](http://www.omahatechhigh.com), "Omaha Technical High School," <http://www.omahatechhigh.com/About.asp> (accessed Apr. 30, 2010).

⁷¹ Clarence Desdunes, "Music and Musicians" *The Monitor*, Sept. 2, 1920.

⁷² Clarence Desdunes, *Violin Playing* (Omaha, Neb.: Clarence Desdunes Publisher, 1922). Tulane University has a copy. They photocopied sections and sent them to me.

⁷³ "Elmer Crumbley—his story as told to Franklin Driggs," *Coda* 1 (February 1959): 9.

⁷⁴ Al Rose and Edmond Souchon. *New Orleans Jazz* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 140.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁶ Preston Love interview. There does not appear to be a consensus on this date. Some musicians remember the group disbanding in the late 1970s and others claim the 1980s.

⁷⁷ Pinkett, "An Historical Sketch," 70.