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JAZZ TALKS:
Representations & Self-Representations of African American Music and Its Musicians From Bebop to Free Jazz

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this thesis is the representation of jazz music and its musicians, and the ways in which American (black and white) critics, novelists, and musicians interpret this music from the development of bebop to free jazz. My aim is to reveal the complexities of the dialogue between white and black representations of jazz, as well as among the self-representations of African American musicians. To this end, I discuss the discourses of jazz that are embedded within the broader cultural, political and ideological debates in this specific period, illustrating how the meaning of jazz is mediated through these conversations. Although *jazz talks* through the music itself, I argue that the representation of jazz largely depends on *who talks about it.*

The introduction briefly sketches the context of earlier African American writings on music, from Frederick Douglass through the Harlem Renaissance and beyond. Chapter 1 deals with bebop and the ways in which it was seen as more or less expressive of a specific African American consciousness, and how critics shaped the general view of it. Chapter 2 further explores the African American views of music through James Baldwin short story, "Sonny's Blues." Chapter 3 traces the ways in which white writers used jazz for their own ends, focusing on some key terms such as 'hip' and 'cool.' Chapter 4 explores the complex relation between jazz and the new politics of black liberation through a number of key albums and figures, while Chapter 5 gives a more extended examination of these ideas through the figure of Charles Mingus. My conclusion attempts to look again at one of the themes of the thesis – who has the power to represent jazz – through a discussion of Ken Burns' *Jazz*.

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I am forever grateful for my parents, Fahri and Melek Mazman. Thank You For Being Who You Are!

The music of my race is something more than American idiom. What we could not say openly we expressed in music.[1]

INTRODUCTION

In one of the few existing pieces of film in which Charlie Parker appears, he is shown being given a *Down Beat* award for 1952 with Dizzy Gillespie. Asked if, "You boys got anything more to say," Parker says, in what appears to be a rehearsed comment, "Well, they say music speaks louder than words, so we'd rather voice our opinions that way, if you don't mind."[2] In many ways this exchange sums up some of the issues I will be discussing – the relationship between African American musicians and the critics, and the most appropriate ways of voicing opinions about music and other issues in a period of great artistic and political change, during which writing about jazz has been crucial in determining its reception and understanding and has largely taken place in a white-dominated publishing context of books, journals and magazines. My title, "Jazz Talks," echoes Parker's comment, and its suggestion that jazz is more immediate and authentic than the words used about it, but my full title also points to the fact that jazz has inevitably been mediated through print. One of the aims of the thesis is therefore to explore white representations of African American music and musicians, but also to offer the musicians' perspective and

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[1] Duke Ellington, cited in Ortiz M. Walton, *Music: Black, White and Blue*, New York: William Morrow, 1972, p.79.

[2] The segment can be seen in Gary Giddens and Kendrick Simmons' video documentary *Celebrating Bird* (Sony Video Software, 1987).

show how they counterpoint white-driven interpretations through interviews, oral histories, personal conversations, liner notes. a limited number of TV appearances and jazz autobiographies, although many of the autobiographies were also produced, edited and published within the bounds defined by a white-dominated culture industry.

As well as the music itself, the *representation* of jazz has played an important role in our understanding of it. As Peter Townsend writes in his book *Jazz in American Culture* (2000): "representations of jazz are more indications of the ideologies implicit in the medium, whether in film or written literature, than of jazz itself."[3] Along with the media representations of jazz, the ideological bases of jazz scholars and critics are also particularly important. American and European scholars have discussed the question of how far jazz reflects an African American inheritance or a new creation. Could jazz be used to highlight the black contribution to American society as a whole or is it merely a decorative and superficial aspect of black life? More specifically: What is the racial/cultural character of jazz? Do we consider it as black, white or both? Is jazz American per se, or should it be considered as African American expression? And in the context of the period under discussion in the thesis, what is its relationship to newly conceived ideas of freedom?

[3] Peter Townsend, *Jazz in American Culture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p.93.

All those questions are highly problematic because they raise further questions not only about what is really meant by the term "African American music," but also about American music and thus American culture itself. Is it an amalgamation of black and white cultures? And how do other African American musical expressions – excluding jazz and the blues – relate to the questions posed above?

The period under discussion is one in which African American artists and activists both responded to and effected profound changes in the conception of freedom (or perhaps more correctly, important new public manifestations of existing African American ideas of freedom), but in terms of the representation of jazz the role of white entrepreneurs, supporters and commentators was still crucial. This is not to say that white views were necessarily negative towards jazz or to black aspirations. In fact, one of the characteristics of this white discourse, particularly that of the liberal and radical critics, is that it seems to put the African American artist at the centre, and yet we still rarely hear their actual voices or views. Hence the attention given in my thesis to some of the key debates and public arguments, where we do hear the artists expressing their opinions. For similar reasons, I give importance to the role of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, and the peculiar importance of Charles Mingus as someone who, as well as performing and publishing his music, writes and publishes an autobiography.

One of the things that is at issue in this period, and in my thesis, then, is the ownership of the music, and how far this relates to racial politics and history. In focusing on race, it is not my intention to assume that jazz is essentially a 'Black Art' as the proponents of the Black Aesthetic argued. Rather it is to throw light on the ways in which what is undoubtedly hybrid music is still nevertheless fundamentally related to racial inequalities in its representations. Music has certainly been seen as the quintessential expression of Negro, Black and then African American identities over the years, by both whites and African Americans. On the African American side it is worth pointing briefly here to a few key moments, in order to bring out just what has been claimed for music and how jazz fitted into these claims, in order to obtain some context for the discussions of the 1940s and later.

Frederick Douglass was one of the first African American writers to discuss the significance of music. In his first autobiography, writing is used as a mark of humanity, and a symbol, which makes available to him a "pathway from slavery to freedom."[4] However, Douglass also acknowledges that slave songs are much more expressive of the realities of slavery than writing: "I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do."[5] Douglass himself was a fugitive slave who gained his freedom by running away from the plantation and also through his mastery of his master's language. His later comments on the music suggest the importance, as well as the inexpressible qualities of the music: "I did not,

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[4] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.39.
[5] ibid, p.24.

when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs."[6] As such, he addresses to the significance of the songs of the slaves and he employs them to convey their past experiences: "To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery... the songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart."[7] Furthermore, these songs represent for Douglass a tool of psychological freedom for the slaves as he states: "every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains."[8] Paul Gilroy also makes the similar assertion that African American music owes a great deal to the early black experience in his book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, which has set it up in a different relation to language and writing than in American culture as a whole:

> Music, the grudging gift that supposedly compensated slaves not only for their exile from ambiguous legacies of practical reason but for their complete exclusion from modern political society, has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words – spoken or written.[9]

When Douglass wrote about the songs of the slaves he helped fashion the emerging model for recognizing what kind of songs slaves sang, why they sang them, and most significantly how listeners were truly to hear them. Although, it is not clear what the music was that Douglass heard, he played an important role in recognizing and examining the songs of the slave, which came to be called the spirituals by the white commentators. African Americans built a new structure for existence in the alien land where their cultural and historical

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[6] ibid, p.24.
[7] ibid, p.24.
[8] ibid p.24.
[9] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London and New York: Verso, 1993, p.76.

continuation depended upon music. By singing themes of Christianity, slaves mentally escaped captivity and achieved freedom in the Promised Land. These spirituals reflect African American culture in relation to Christianity, and tend to focus on religion as offering slaves an area of refuge from the cruelty they had experienced.

Spirituals were further elevated as the heart – or soul – of African American experience by W.E.B. Du Bois, the first black intellectual explicitly to locate African American music as an essential theme of black cultural importance and integrity. In his 1903 book, *The Souls of the Black Folk*, Du Bois directly addresses the structure of the American society and its dilemma: "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."[10] He coins the concept "double consciousness" as a way to define the particular complications arising from African Americans' adaptation to an American identity: "One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[11]

What is significant about Du Bois' text for my purposes, though, is its distinctive approach to black music. He introduces each chapter with a portion of a spiritual – or "sorrow song" as he calls them, and in the final chapter presents these songs as the 'soul' or inspiration behind African American culture. Significantly he prefaces each chapter not only with the lyrics but the music notation of the song, as a way of insisting, presumably, on the importance

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[10] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), New York: Dover Publications, 1994, p.v.
[11] ibid, p.2.

of *sound* and its immediacy, rather than words and print – even though, of course, ironically, all he can offer here is Western notation to represent that ungraspable spirit. For Du Bois the meaning of these songs is apparent: "sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins."[12] It was these spirituals or "sorrow songs," as he referred to them, which Du Bois presented as the transcendent representation of African American self-consciousness within the context of American history. Moreover, Du Bois believes that these songs, which resonated with the contradictory impulses of hope and sorrow, embodied both the historical consciousness and experience of African Americans in the New World.

It is important that Du Bois intentionally constructs and places black culture, and specifically music, at the centre of American culture in his text. Du Bois locates black spirituals not only as a crucial element for the definition of an African American aesthetic but also as a central dimension of American culture as a whole. The political striving he talks about is the struggle for citizenship and national belonging, and the use of the spirituals in his book should be related to the earlier tours of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. This group, nine singers and a pianist, all former slaves, who were elegant in dress and manner, and performed their slave songs and spirituals in churches and on concert halls, inspired Du Bois, as he recounts in his book, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (1924): "[s]till the world listened only half credulously until the Fisk Jubilee Singers sang the slave songs 'so deeply into

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[12] ibid p.162.

the world's heart that it can never wholly forget them'."[13]

However, it is important to note that Du Bois picked the arranged version of these songs as they are orchestrated by the treasurer of Fisk University, George L. White, (who was indeed white) to put them into the heart of American culture. Du Bois describes the process of the arrangement of the slave songs by honoring White whose "life-work was to let those Negroes sing to the world as they had sung to them."[14] Moreover, this process is a cross-cultural interaction because, while White "taught [his students] to sing," in the mean time, they "taught him to sing, and... the glory of the Jubilee songs passed into [White's] soul."[15] Therefore, Du Bois celebrates the hybridity of African American songs created in connection with European American methods, which he calls a word of warning to be given "to this Nation in blood-brotherhood."[16] He employs slave songs as a sign of development, which can be seen in different historical periods: "The songs are indeed the shifting of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words, and in it we can trace here and there signs of development... [t]he first is African music, the second Afro-American, while the third is a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land."[17]

> And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song – the rhythmic cry of the slave – stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but not-withstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.[18]

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[13] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America*, Boston: the Stratford Co., 1924, p.276.
[14] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p.156.
[15] ibid, p.156.
[16] ibid, p.163.
[17] ibid, p.159.
[18] ibid, p.156.

According to Du Bois, spirituals provide recognition to the African American populace as they are considered a "wonderful gift of the black man to America."[19]

The fact that Du Bois wanted the sorrow songs and the slave songs to be recognized as authentic sources for the national music of America reflects what Ronald Radano refers to as his subtle "destabilization of racial categories of black and white."[20] Moreover, although, Du Bois celebrates the impact of the slave songs on American music, he distinguishes the authentic from the inauthentic in African American musical culture. For him, the difference is based, in Eric Porter's terms, "less on African American uses of European forms than on white appropriation and marketing of black forms."[21] As Du Bois states in the final chapter of *The Soul of Black Folk*:

> [T]he songs of white America have been distinctively influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody, as "Swanee River" and "Old Black Joe." Side by side, too, with the growth has gone the debasements and imitations – the Negro "minstrel" songs, many of the "gospel" hymns, and some of the contemporary "coon" songs, – a mass of music in which the novice may easily lose himself and never find the real Negro melodies.[22]

Therefore, Du Bois is very careful to categorize "sorrow songs" as those that maintain the integrity of the slave experience. As Radano affirms "For Du Bois, the Fisk song-texts were both a marker of a profound moment of change and a harbinger of the new black civilization, of a fully realized consciousness of vast critical potential, clearly distinguished from, and more powerful than, the

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[19] ibid, p.280.
[20] Ronald Radano, "Soul Texts and the Blackness of Folk", *Modernism/Modernity* 2.1 (1995): 86-89.
[21] Eric Porter, *What is this Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2002, p.4.
[22] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p.159.

separate and pure semi-consciousness of an uncompleted black folk."[23] In other words, it is not that the Fisk versions are watered down and less authentic, but that they represent the authentic spirit as it develops. Radano also signals the importance of the spirituals to white Americans because they comprise "the alter ego of the white self, representing the supplement or the missing link of American national identity"– a theme we will see repeated in the claims for jazz at various points during this thesis.[24]

Thus, for Du Bois, it is essential that the cross-cultural exchange between black and white Americans should create the American national music and culture and go beyond the mimicry of the black melodies in blackface minstrelsy. Like the success of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Antonin Dvorak's symphony *From the New World* of 1893 can also be seen as recognition of the spirituals by the whole American nation, though Dvorak's symphony can be criticized for inaccuracy in its representation of African American folk music. In an interview for the *New York Herald* he asserted that: "I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States."[25] Du Bois certainly recognises the political importance of folk culture as an increasing sphere of influence on high culture. Thus, his representation of African American music is a symbol of the continual development of blacks in the United States. By employing "sorrow songs" as the true folk songs of America, he attempts to bridge the gap between black and

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[23] Ronald Radano, "Soul Texts," p.74.
[24] Ronald Radano, "Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Songs," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996): p.522.
[25] Antonin Dvorak, "Real Value of Negro Melodies," *New York Herald* (1893)

white Americans as this can only be realised, according to Du Bois, through the acknowledgement of African American culture by white Americans.

While Du Bois and other upwardly-aspiring African Americans wanted a recognition from white America of the significance of the sorrow songs as a vernacular source for American music, they tended to ignore what was by the twenties a much more significant form of vernacular expression, the blues, and its cousin jazz. These forms were often disowned by the black middle class, who believed to some extent that "the growth of racism could be attributed to black failure to adhere to white bourgeois standards of economic individualism, self denial and good taste."[26] The values and the opinions of the members of the black middle class were reflected in one of Cleveland's black newspapers, *The Advocate*, in 1915: "Don't think black – nor act black. Every slight, every seeming insult, every failure which some of us meet is attributed directly to the color of our skins. We never think of our *Inefficiency*, *Inconstancy*, lack of initiative or numerous other faults which are everywhere apparent to students of the race problem."[27]

Du Bois' views were shaped on one side by his racial pride and on the other by his efforts to bring middle-class respectability to the "sorrow songs." One of the reasons why Du Bois ignored the blues and jazz might be explained by his attempts to bring serious musical elements to the black folk materials as he did for the spirituals. The blues simply did not project the type of "cultured" image that Du Bois desired. He favoured black artists who "embraced white Western

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[26] Kenneth L. Kusker, *Ghetto Takes Shape*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1978, p.106.
[27] Originally published in *The Advocate*, Cleveland, September, 18, 1915. Quoted in Kenneth L. Kusker, *Ghetto Takes Shape*, p.107.

traditions and the professionally trained arrangers of folk music, who could make music more "respectable," rather than the untutored people who created the music."[28]

Like Du Bois, Alain Locke was well acquainted with European culture and his choice of writers mirrored his racial pride balanced by his middle-class values. Locke, as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, followed Du Bois in seeing the spirituals as the "most characteristic product of Negro genius to date."[29] He stated: "I think we would be agreed that the spirituals symbolize, as nothing else can do, our racial past. They are as well the taproot of our folk music."[30] Even though Locke found that African American folk expression was important in creating the sources for a higher musical establishment, he also largely ignored the blues and jazz. As such, Locke's *The New Negro* of 1925 reflects some of the mixed feelings prevalent about jazz.

Locke himself tended to see folk forms as having value for what they might become rather than what they were: "Negro folk music, properly maturing, has the capacity to produce new musical forms as well as new musical idioms; that is indeed the task of the trained musician who has the sense and devotion to study seriously the folk music at its purest and deepest sources."[31] This reflected his general aspirational view that American Negro culture needed to raise itself

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[28] Steven C. Tracey, *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, p.21.
[29] Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* and *Negro Art: Past and Present* (1936), New York: Arno Press, 1969, p.18.
[30] Alain Locke, "Spirituals" in *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture*, ed. Jeffry C. Stewart, New York: Garland, 1983, p.123.
[31] Quoted in Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001, p.210.

and develop out of the limitations of its African and slave past to achieve parity with the higher cultures of Europe. Thus, in his approach to African art, he stresses its capacity to contribute to the canon of high art (implicitly, that of the European Western tradition). Interestingly, though, the trained musicians who will help Negro music to "mature" will do so best by going back to its "purest" and "deepest sources" so there is a circularity reflective of much of the feelings about originality and the "primitive" in the period.

For Locke and others, the clear way forward – and upward – was through a classical treatment of the spirituals, and there is no sense that the real development he desires might actually be taking place elsewhere, as in Duke Ellington's music.[32] The only direct treatment of jazz in *The New Negro* is J.A Rogers' "Jazz At Home," and his language reflects the general ambivalence. While at the moment the music "vulgarizes," if diverted into "nobler channels" it could develop into something that "democratizes." It certainly represents "rejuvenation, a recharging of the batteries of civilization with primitive new vigor."[33]

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[32] In his 1936 book *The Negro and His Music*, Locke recognised the changing face of jazz music and its position in American society in the mid 1930s. Locke was disappointed by the fact that white musicians and critics outdid their black contemporaries in the marketplace. He writes, "It has been white musicians and critics who for the most part have capitalized on jazz, both commercially and artistically." Locke proposed a possible reason why black musicians had failed to become commercially and artistically successful. According to him, white musicians equipped themselves "with a guiding thread of theory" and were therefore "able to go further by logic in the development of the more serious aspects of jazz" than black musicians who were "moving too much under the mere guidance of instinct," p.89. Indeed, Locke, in Ogren's words, "located the controversial qualities of jazz in the white dominated commercial music industry – not in black performance traditions," Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p.125. On black primitivist modernism in music, see Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.59-95.

[33] J.A Rogers, "Jazz At Home," in *The New Negro* (1925), ed. Alan Locke, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997, p.224. Rogers believes that "jazz has a great future" as long as it is refined into an indigenous American "classical music," p.21. See Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., ed., *Black Music*

However, several emerging new African American intellectuals and writers, such as Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown and Zora Neale Hurston were keen to draw on the vernacular world, with less of a need to justify it as elevating or spiritual. The ever-present danger, though, was of falling into the primitivist representations of white commentators, something Du Bois noted. The primitivism, here, was often illustrated through African American vernacular forms of speech, dance and music, originating in the vibrant and sensual interiors of bars and clubs. Du Bois believed that lower-class blacks and their values reinforced negative stereotypes of African Americans. Further, many powerful black intellectuals, including Locke and Du Bois, also believed that literature was the most effective means to dispel white racist notions that African Americans were morally and cognitively subhuman. To this extent, music, with its vulnerability to being experienced within primitivist and atavistic frameworks, was more problematic than literature, while also being more immediately connected to the most fundamental aspects of the culture. (To refer again to my title, it 'talked' rather than wrote).

For Langston Hughes, unlike Du Bois and his other contemporaries, lower-class blacks' primitivism was connected with primal life forces. He embraced a new black consciousness by blending the African American vernacular and folk customs of rural migrants with the sophisticated urban creations of educated blacks. He was inspired by the rich musical climate of the lower class blacks which enabled him to begin to produce his own blues-based poems. His approach of incorporating folk materials into his poems was reminiscent of the

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in the Harlem Renaissance, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990 for a wider survey of the music scene.

traditionalist intellectuals like Du Bois and Locke who used the spirituals as a vernacular source. However, Hughes's blues poetry aimed to alter the relationship between elite and lower class African Americans. While not denying the significance of the spirituals as a vernacular source for the United States, he recognised the importance of the newer vernacular forms emerging from the urbanizing black working class. In his essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes writes:

> Certainly there is, for the American Negro artist who can escape the restrictions the more advanced among his own group put upon him, a great field of unused materials ready for his art. Without going outside his race, and even among the better classes with their 'white' culture and conscious American manners, but still Negro enough to be different, there is sufficient matter to furnish a black artist with a lifetime of creative work."[34]

In a letter to Carl Van Vechten published in *Vanity Fair* (1925), Hughes depicted the blues as "being very sad, sadder even than the spirituals, because their sadness is not softened with tears, but hardened with laughter, the absurd, incongruous laughter of a sadness without even a god to appeal to."[35] Here, he defined a blues aesthetic by claiming that its lyrics and structure do not induce sadness so much as they help to disperse sad feelings by means of facing them with humour. As a musical idiom, Hughes pointed out; the blues is a recognizable genre of American and especially African American cultural expression. In his review of W.C. Handy's *Blues: An Anthology* in *Opportunity* (1926) he argued that: "The folk blues are pictures of the life from which they come, of the levees, of the back alleys of dissolute streets, the red light districts

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[34] Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *Nation*, (June 23, 1926): 693.
[35] Quoted in Emily Bernard, ed., *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten 1925-1964*, New York: New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001, p.40.

and the cabarets of those with not even a God to look to."[36]

Moreover, he recognized a blues aesthetic not only in musical contexts but also in its visual or literary incarnations. For Hughes, the blues could have embodiments outside of musical contexts. Hughes remarked frequently on the distinction between the spirituals and the blues. He wrote in his article "Songs Called the Blues" (1941):

> The spirituals are group songs, but the blues are songs you sing alone. The spirituals are religious songs, born in camp meetings and remote plantation districts. But the blues are *city* songs rising from the crowded streets of big towns, or beating against the lonely walls of bed-rooms where you can't sleep at night. The spirituals are escape songs, looking toward heaven, tomorrow, and God. But the blues are today songs, here and now, broke and broken-hearted, when you're troubled in mind and don't know what to do, and nobody cares.[37]

Despite the fact that he regarded the blues (either in 1926 or 1941) as typically urban and characterized it as the performance of a sole individual, Hughes insisted on labeling the blues as folk music rather than a popular commercialised musical style. Unlike his contemporary Sterling Brown, who elevated the Southern rural folk, and presented the North and the city in his poetry, together with jazz, as a debasing of Negro values, Hughes intentionally depicted the blues in the city. He wanted to highlight the existence of the new vernacular form; the blues, even though the lower-class origin of the blues went against middle-class propriety. His developments as a poet and a writer basically originated from the black masses. The critical debate over Hughes' poems was also about his use of the blues and its "low-life" incidents as poetic subject matter. Paul Allen Anderson writes in his book *Deep River: Music and*

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[36] Langston Hughes, "Review of *Blues: An Anthology* by W.C. Handy," *Opportunity*, (August, 1926): 258.

[37] Langston Hughes, "Songs Called the Blues," in *Write me a Few of Your Lines: A Blues Reader*, ed. Steven C. Tracey, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, p.391.

Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought (2001): "Hughes's interpretation of the blues grants no redeeming glimpse at a transfigured future. The contrast with Du Bois' dialectical and ultimately utopian interpretation of "the sorrow songs" as a catalyst to social transformation is striking."[38] He maintained a more favourable position toward the vernacular by basing many of his poems on the blues, as he transformed the lower-class black oral tradition into a vital and viable written form.

It is fair to say that during the years when African American music was developing into perhaps the most significant form through jazz it was not being adequately represented in print. In this respect African American writers were not much better than the white commentators. Thinkers like Du Bois and Locke turned more of their attention to spirituals and viewed this music especially as a stepping-stone to more 'sophisticated' expressions. This does not mean that Harlem Renaissance writers were not insensitive to jazz, but we can surely say that it was not at the centre of their analysis of African American culture and creativity. True, there was much more of a commitment to seeing music as the core and soul of African American sensibility, but jazz was largely overlooked in comparison with the privileged forms of spirituals and the blues. Ideas and motifs that did arise in dealing with these forms, such as how far the music is a communal or individual expression, and how far it is a hybrid form, reflecting an American present or quintessentially related to African roots do of course get taken up in later discussions of jazz (and in this thesis), and there are, of course, some important exceptions, such as statements by the musicians themselves, but

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[38] Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River*, p.183.

we could say that is not until the late 1940s and the penetrating use of jazz by Ralph Ellison that we see a really fundamental engagement. And it is in Ellison's response to LeRoi Jones\Amiri Baraka's groundbreaking *Blues People*, the first full-length study of black music by an African American that we see a fascinating and overdue debate taking place within the African American community. Since then commentators like Stanley Crouch and Albert Murray have taken up Ellison' conservative stance (stressing the American rather than black dimensions) in contrast to Baraka's continued, though ever changing commitment to radical politics and aesthetics. And these splits were brought particularly to the fore with Ken Burns' much-discussed film *Jazz*, to which I will return in my conclusion.

This thesis focuses on a momentous period in American post-war history and culture – from the end of World War II to the beginning of the Black Power Movement. I will explore some of the diverse representations of jazz and jazz musicians in white and black American writings and music criticism. I will also show how African American musicians such as Max Roach and Charles Mingus have challenged mainstream definitions of jazz and other African American musical resources, and how they have helped to create an alternative to the dominant American discourse on jazz during this specified period.

My thesis analyzes its cultural materials from this general perspective; it also borrows several specific ideas from previous works on the representation of jazz. Jon Panish, in *The Color of Jazz* (1997), has examined how colour-blind ideologies in the jazz discourse marginalized African American musicians'

contributions to jazz and depoliticized their work from 1945 to 1965. Panish's book is important for its perceptive insights into the ways that jazz figured differently in white and black literary texts. In his book, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?* (2002), Eric Porter argues convincingly for the inclusion of musicians as intellectuals, not simply as performers. While many books on jazz often document the representations of white commentators, Porter shows that musicians' articulations, particularly those of black performers, are generally overlooked. Iain Anderson's *This is Our Music* (2007) and Ingrid Monson's *Freedom Sounds* (2007) present account of jazz activism and aesthetic agency during the post-war years as well as the cultural and racial paradoxes that this activism created. Although the discussion in this thesis can be considered as part of this broader literature, its main contribution, I hope, lies in bringing together the multiple dimensions developing over the whole period through ideas of freedom in order to unpack the complexity of the representations of jazz by following a chronological path.[39]

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the white critics who represented bebop in the 1940s and 1950s, with a particular focus on Barry Ulanov and Leonard Feather, and how they established the field of U.S. liberal jazz criticism, mapping our understanding of bebop music and its culture in *Down Beat* and *Metronome* as well as in their books. I explore how African American writers challenged this white critical establishment of the 1940s and 1950s and the idea – and ideal – of 'colour-blindness' that developed during this

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[39] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997; Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*; Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, and Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

period. I also trace how the representation of the blues and bebop fundamentally differ from one black intellectual to another in relation to the racial discourses in the U.S. society by focusing on LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka and Ralph Ellison in particular.

Chapter 2 further explores intellectual arguments regarding the blues and bebop, and their representations in African American culture that are addressed at the end of Chapter 1. I employ James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" (1957) as a case study that reflects upon the transformations in the post-WW II era. The representation of the blues and bebop in Baldwin's text enables me to give specific examples of the changes in African American music and more generally African American urban life in the 1950s.

Chapter 3 examines white representations of jazz in cultural texts of the 1950s and the 1960s. I compare how post-war white writers and intellectuals seized jazz as a source of 'personal freedom' and 'individual self-fulfillment' with reference to the Beat writers, particularly looking at Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues*, Norman Mailer's "The White Negro," Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and Ross Russell's *The Sound*, while on the other hand, I also look at how African American writers conceived jazz as a form of group memory and source of communal values, as in Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues." This chapter offers a critique of avant-garde artists and bohemian intellectuals and their understanding of African American culture.

Chapter 4 explores the idea and practice of 'freedom' in jazz and its connection to the Civil Rights Movements in the 1960s by exploring the ways that the spokesmen of jazz initiated and participated in controversies and debates on jazz and its connection to the word 'freedom.' I trace how, with the rise to prominence of the Civil Rights Movement, African American music was used as a forceful activist tool for equality and justice in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. I look at specific jazz albums such as Max Roach's "We Insist: Freedom Now Suite," which spoke to a generation not content with the status quo in terms of music and social equality. By studying the 1960s free jazz movement, I argue that free jazz musicians seized jazz as a source of political and economic freedom rather than as an individual self-fulfillment and personal freedom as the Beat writers of the 1950s had done.

Chapter 5 focuses on the words and music of Charles Mingus and the paradoxical aspects of race as they are reflected in his life. I will argue how he develops his music as a form of resistance and a vehicle for equality during the 1950s and the 1960s. I will also examine some of the symbolic representations that Mingus used to create a race narrative in his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*, and in his other writings, both as a means of self-representation and his concern for control over modes of production as part of the African American experience in the white culture industry and its institutions.

My conclusion will pull together the themes of the thesis through a discussion of a more recent example of the continuing battle for representation in and of jazz in Ken Burn's *Jazz*.

Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn. They teach you there's a boundary line to music. But, man, there's no boundary line to art.[1]

CHAPTER I

52nd STREET THEME: BEBOP, ITS MUSICIANS and CRTICS

During the 1930s with Swing, jazz had become America's most popular music. This popularity was maintained throughout the late-1930s and the mid-1940s until bebop appeared in the late 1940s as a style of jazz that presented a contrast to the big bands. Bebop typically involved a small group of musicians mostly four to six players, rather than the 10 or more associated with the big bands. This small band structure allowed more solo opportunities for the players. There were more complex melodies and chord progressions in bebop, as well as more stress on the role of the rhythm section in contrast to music of the swing big bands. David H. Rosenthal outlines the difference between swing and bebop: "Technically, bebop was characterized by fast tempos, complex harmonies, intricate melodies, and rhythm sections that laid down a steady beat only on the bass and the drummer's ride cymbal. Bebop tunes were often labyrinthine, full

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[1] Charlie Parker, cited in Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, ed. *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men Who Made It* (1955), New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966, p.405.

of surprising twists and turns. All these factors – plus the predominance of small combos in bebop – set the music apart from the Swing bands of the 1930s."[2]

In recent years, bebop has become an important locus of controversy for the music scholars who work on jazz history. While some critics pay attention to the artistic development of the music, others write about the particular political implications that bebop had in the context of the African American struggle against oppression. For instance, Eric Lott describes bebop as a reflection of the political demands of the "Double V" campaign and the militant aspirations of its working-class audience.[3] On the other hand, Thomas Owens' book, *Bebop: The Music and the Players* (1995) focuses on musical style and mainly ignores the racial and political significance of the music.[4] In general the critics have accepted that bebop is crucial for the stylistic evolution of jazz and American music. However music scholars and critics have not reached a consensus on the political implications of bebop, i.e. whether this stylistically complex music implied a social revolution or was simply represented as such by the jazz writers who loaded bebop with an overly politicized message? In order to reflect on this controversy, in the next part, I will discuss the different interpretations of bebop music with reference to its political and cultural context.

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[2] David H. Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz and Black Music 1955-1965*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University, 1992, p.135.
[3] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style" in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995, p.246.
[4] Thomas Owens, *Bebop: The Music and the Players*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. Other key studies includes, Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1997; Dave Oliphant, ed., *The Bebop Revolution in Words and Music*, Austin: University of Texas press, 1994; Ira Gitler, *Jazz Masters of the Forties*, New York: Collier Books, 1971 and Leonard Feather, *Inside Be-bop*, New York: J. J. Robbins, 1949.

Bebop as a musical phenomenon is a development of earlier musical forms and an expression of its 1940s African American cultural, social, political and intellectual setting. Yet, the *image* of bebop is rather an outcome of the ongoing public conversations and writings of jazz critics, all of whom, in the early stages of the debate, were white. With hindsight we can observe that the image of jazz in general has been changed over the decades from "race music" to "America's classical music" and from "entertainment" to "art music" according to the critical debates around it. As Bernard Gendron puts it, "no form of mass culture seems to have crossed the boundary between 'entertainment' and 'art' as decisively or irreversibly as jazz."[5] Indeed, this crossover is the most visible in the different representations of bebop in the white mainstream media.

When bebop's qualities were being discussed in the mainstream press for the first time, the style was branded in the public imagination with such stereotypes as "berets, goatees, dark glasses, meerschaum pipes, Islam, and flatted fifths."[6] Indeed, it was the *Time* magazine article "Be-bop Be-bopped" (1946) that first provided a definition of bebop to the public, describing it as "hot jazz overheated, with overdone lyrics full of bawdiness, references to narcotics, and doubletalk."[7] Later, in a 1948 *New Yorker* article, Richard O. Boyer wrote that many of the founders of bebop music "pretend that they are Arabs."

> Many of the Negro adherents of bebop are converts to Mohammedanism... Thelonious sometimes forgets that he was born on West Sixty-third Street and announces that he is a native of Damascus... Dizzy appreciates this flight from harsh reality, and occasionally even joins it himself. Now and then, he wears a turban when he is abroad...

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[5] Bernard Gendron, "Moldy Figs" and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)" in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995, p.33-34.
[6] Francis Davis, *Bebop and Nothingness: Jazz and Pop at the End of the Century*, New York: Schirmer Books, 1996, p.13.
[7] "Be-bop Be-bopped," *Time*, (March 25, 1946): 52.

> The large number of beboppers who have become Mohammedan converts want to escape from their American environment... They read translations of the Koran, study Arabic, which some of them can even write, and proselyte unceasingly.[8]

One notable feature of the article lay in the use made of bebop musicians' comments on the blues and New Orleans jazz. Gil Fuller described bebop as a logical expression of modern life: "We're tired of that old New Orleans beat-beat, I-got-the-blues pap."[9] Dizzy Gillespie added, "That old stuff was like Mother Goose rhymes. It was all right for its time, but it was a childish time. We couldn't really blow on our job – not the way we wanted to."[10]

Even though Boyer carefully noted that what bebop musicians really rejected were the labels, and "critics who referred to them, with the most complimentary intent, as modern primitives playing an almost instinctual music," many of the later critics read these comments as an expression of beboppers' wholesale rejection of the blues and New Orleans jazz itself.[11] Eric Porter writes that these comments "should be understood as a response to primitivist language that many jazz critics, particularly those who championed the Dixieland revival, used to describe the music."[12] For instance, French primitivist critic Hugue Panassié saw bebop as apart from and outside the jazz tradition.[13] While there were great discussions between the critics about whether bebop was jazz or not, the younger generation of African American musicians refused to play what "white people expected them to play" and rejected the "Uncle-Tom" roles with

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[8] Richard O. Boyer, Profiles, "Profiles: Bop" *The New Yorker*, (July 3, 1948): 26-29.
[9] ibid, p.29.
[10] ibid, p.29.
[11] ibid, p.28.
[12] Eric Porter, "Dizzy Atmosphere: The Challenge of Bebop" *American Music*, Vol.17, No.4, (1999): 431-432.
[13] Hugue Panassié, *Hot Jazz: The Guide to Swing Music* (1934), New York: Greenwood Press, extended edition, 1970, p.73-74.

which they were usually associated with.[14] Scott DeVeaux warns us that, "If this debate seems curiously irrelevant to the modern observer, it is largely because contemporary conceptions of the term *jazz* have been shaped in bebop's image."[15] Therefore it is crucial to discuss the jazz criticism of the 1940s and how it reconstructs the representation of jazz in the full context of its time.

Long before Boyer's article was published, there was already an ideological warfare between two clearly defined positions in the world of jazz criticism, the modernists or "progressives" and the traditionalists (also called revivalists) or "moldy figs," which became evident back in 1942.[16] On the one hand, Barry Ulanov and Leonard Feather along with the other "progressive" jazz critics of *Metronome* and *Down Beat* dismissed New Orleans jazz as technically "backward and corny" and the 'moldy figs' writers as "hysterical cultists and musical ignoramuses" in order to defend their own position as modernists, and as supporters of swing music and the ongoing *progress* in jazz. On the other hand, the traditionalists, among whom were Roger Pryor Dodge, Rudi Blesh, and William Russell, counterattacked *Metronome* and *Down Beat* with the charges of "crass commercialism, faddism, and Eurocentrism" and blamed swing musicians, and the music of the big bands, for commercializing the "real"

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[14] Dave Hepburn and Nard Griffin, "Bebop: Music or Madness," *Our World*, (January 1949): p.34.

[15] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography" in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p.494.

[16] According to Leonard Feather, the term, "moldy figs," was first used as an epithet by Sam Platt, a naval officer, who wrote to *Esquire* in June 1945, complaining about the self-righteousness of the traditionalists. Leonard Feather, *The Jazz Years: Eyewitness to an Era*, New York: Da Capo, 1987, p.88. According to Dan Morgenstern, Barry Ulanov labeled the traditionalists as "moldy figs" in his 1942 article "It's Not the Book, It's the Attitude," *Metronome* March 1942: II. See also Bernard Gendron, "Moldy Figs" and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)," and Barry Ulanov "Moldy Figs vs. Moderns," *Metronome*, (May 1947): 15-23.

jazz and abandoning the principles of the only "authentic" jazz, New Orleans style.[17]

According to Blesh, swing music was simply an abandonment of the authentic African American elements of jazz "in favor of white elements more intelligible and acceptable to white society."[18] Therefore, for him, swing music, though "outwardly the symbol of triumph, is inwardly that of the failure of Emancipation."[19] Writing from a Marxist perspective, as his sub-title might suggest, Sidney Finkelstein, in his 1948 book entitled, *Jazz: A People's Music,* responded to Blesh's argument by viewing his restrictive emphasis on New Orleans jazz as a limitation to the aspirations and development of African American people in the modern world. According to Finkelstein, as part of the African American struggle to win their freedom in America it was necessary for black musicians to break out of New Orleans style jazz, because, "in breaking away out of New Orleans, jazz became a possession of all America; Negro and white; North and South; Eastern seaboard and Pacific coast."[20]

According to Gendron, the Dixieland war played an important role in the transformation of jazz from being seen as entertainment to being seen as art music.[21] However, he also carefully points out that it is not possible to observe how this transformation was originally reconstructed and constituted without

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[17] Bernard Gendron, "'Moldy Figs' and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)," p.32.
[18] Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz*, p.262.
[19] ibid, p.262.
[20] Sidney Finkelstein, *Jazz: A People's Music*, New York: Citadel Press, 1948, p.90-91.
[21] Bernard Gendron, "'Moldy Figs' and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)," p.33.

studying "the swirling discourses of the jazz press" around bebop music.[22] Therefore it is crucial to look at the relationship between the modernist jazz discourse and how it helped to construct the image of bebop within its criticism.

In 1946, just after the war between the New Orleans revivalists and the swing modernists was being scaled down, a second dispute started with the emergence of bebop music. There were again the schismatic splits in the jazz world, with the supporters of the new music, this time led by Ulanov and Feather on the one side, and the traditionalist writers on the other. The new arguments between these "two schisms in which spokespersons for the new were set off against those for the old" were very similar to the ones in the Dixieland war.[23] Indeed, according to Gendron, "the Dixieland war, as it waned, transformed itself so subtly into the bebop war that many contemporaries failed to distinguish between them."[24] What is interesting is that the bebop war, in Gennari's words, "came at a time when musicians, critics, and listeners were looking both back and forth in time."[25] As Dan Morgenstern puts it, "One of the great paradoxes of jazz history is that the music's rich past was being rediscovered at the very same time when its present began to undergo its most radical change. While Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker were jamming in Harlem, Bunk Johnson was being recorded in New Orleans."[26] Indeed, Blesh was mainly responsible for this rediscovery, as he organized concerts and produced records by revivalist jazz

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[22] Bernard Gendron, "A Short Stay in the Sun: The Reception of Bebop (1944-1950)" *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin*, Vol. 24, No. 1/2, (1994): 137.
[23] Bernard Gendron, "Moldy Figs," p.32-33.
[24] ibid, p.33.
[25] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, p.119.
[26] Dan Morgenstern, "Introduction" in *Hot Jazz and Hot Dance: Roger Pryor Dodge Collected Writings, 1929-1964*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.vi.

players like trumpeter Thomas "Mutt" Carey, trombonist Edward "Kid" Ory, and clarinetist Albert Nicholas throughout the 1940s.[27]

According to John Gennari's acute analysis of 1940s jazz critical discourse, jazz critics and aficionados defined themselves "by whether they thought jazz was in decline or was still progressing forward."[28] For instance, Blesh, who, as I showed earlier, was one of the most strong partisans of traditional New Orleans jazz, claimed in his book *Shining Trumpets* (1946) that jazz had reached its classical moment in 1926 and had been in decline ever since. Blesh viewed black jazz music as a product of the African American man's "primitive soul." He claimed that it was the very purity of this "primitive soul" and the almost instinctive nature of the music that made jazz musicians like Louis Armstrong so great.[29] On the other hand, Barry Ulanov, in his book *A History of Jazz in America* (1952), took a modernist stance and claimed that jazz has always been on a progression, fleshing out the earlier arguments that he had made in *Metronome*.[30]

To prove their points in 1949 Blesh and Ulanov organized a battle of the bands on Rudi Blesh's *This Is Jazz* radio program, which usually featured live performances of revivalist musicians. Titled *Bands for Bonds*, with the sponsorship of *the Herald Tribune*, it featured Ulanov's own selection of modern jazz musicians led by Lennie Tristano, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie

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[27] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.130-144.
[28] ibid, p.120.
[29] Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets*, p.12-13.
[30] Barry Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America* (1952), New York: Da Capo Press, 1972. See Barry Ulanov's *Metronome* articles, "Jazz of Yesteryear," (May1944): 19; "Moldy Figs vs. Moderns," (July 1947) p.15 and 23 and "The Heartless Modernists?!" (January 1947): 50.

and Max Roach going up against the resident band (Sidney Bechet, soprano sax; Buster Bailey, clarinet; Sidney De Paris, trombone; Walter Page, bass and George Wettling, drums). The idea of the programme was to stop the "partisanship in jazz," although how staging such a contest would do this is hard to imagine. Indeed, the pitting of two black men against each other, promoted and enjoyed by whites is reminiscent of the other entertainment open to African Americans, the boxing ring – and may even suggest Ralph Ellison's use of this idea in his novel, *Invisible Man*.[31] According to the rules of the contest, Blesh's and Ulanov's bands played their own versions of the same jazz pieces and the jazz listeners would decide "what they preferred."[32] Of course, the show did not put an end to the debate. While the listeners chose the modern group in a postcard ballot, *the Herald Tribune*, where Blesh worked as a critic, reported that "Classical Jazz had won a complete and undisputed victory!"[33] While the musicians of this session worked in harmony and, in Blesh's words, "were extremely friendly," Ulanov and Blesh did not reach a consensus.[34] Indeed, this incident shows a very clear example of how the white critics as patrons and champions of their own enthusiasms failed to characterize jazz in the context of

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[31] See Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, New York: Penguin Books, 1952, p.17-32. The battle royal, in the first chapter of the book, consists of the young African American men, including the unnamed protagonist, fighting blindfolded in a boxing ring while white Southerners watch in enjoyment. Symbolically, the passage introduces the theme of struggle among African Americans for an elusive award that often remains out of reach. By participating in the battle royal, the narrator learns that life is a struggle for survival, but at this point the protagonist still believes in the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, urging African Americans to "social responsibility" without "social equality," p.30. Booker T. Washington, Up From slavery (1901), New York: Signet Classic Printing, 2000. See also John S. Wright, "To the Battle Royal: Ralph Ellison and the Quest for Black Leadership in Postwar America," ed. Lary May, *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.246-267 and Danielle Allen, "Ralph Ellison on the Tragi-Comedy of Citizenship," ed. Lucas E. Morel, *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004, p.37-58 for further discussion.

[32] Robert Reisner, *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*, London: Quartet Books Limited, 1962, p.53.

[33] ibid, p.228.

[34] ibid, p.53.

its own cultural history which linked bebop to its African American roots. Based on their fundamentally distinct ideological positions, Ulanov and Finkelstein represented jazz on radically different terms to Blesh and the other traditionalist writers which resulted in an artificial competition between New Orleans jazz musicians and beboppers.

Along with other jazz critics such as Leonard Feather, Marshall Stearns and Ralph Gleason, Ulanov was part of a group that supported what Gennari refers to as "jazz's postwar consensus liberal ideology," in that they wanted to see jazz as increasingly free of racial conflict.[35] Ulanov was the first to promote and support Charlie Parker in *Metronome*, which he edited from 1943-1955. He worked closely with many jazz musicians, producers, and critics including Billie Holiday, Nat King Cole, Charlie Mingus, Lester Young, Dave Brubeck and Leonard Feather. However, although he was one of the first supporters of bebop music, Ulanov often projected an apolitical and non-ideological image of bebop and, according to Gendron, "seemed to prefer jazz that was more cerebral, more influenced by European avant-garde music, and in contrast to bebop, less embroiled in showmanship, unusual argot and dress and suspect life-style."[36] It was no accident that Ulanov championed the so-called progressive jazz musician Lennie Tristano for three years (1947-1950) as the future of jazz music rather than Gillespie or Parker.[37] Here, Ulanov's different views on Tristano and Gillespie may provide useful insights on the discourse of the 1940s white jazz criticism.

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[35] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p. 57.
[36] Bernard Gendron, "A Short Stay in the Sun," p.145.
[37] "Musician of the Year – Lennie Tristano" in *Metronome*, (August 1949):14-15 and 32-33. Tristano also published a tribute song "Coolin' off with Ulanov" to Ulanov in 1947.

Ulanov's close friendship and positive reviews for Tristano provided him with important milestones in his career, including major album sales.[38] On the other hand Ulanov generally criticized Gillespie and did not sufficiently recognize his importance among the trumpeters of the time. Ulanov writes of Gillespie in his book *A History of Jazz In America* (1952) as follows:

> In Dizzy's case the difficulties were doubled. He was trying to sell a new music, one that seemed patently uncommercial, beyond the ears of the people who would have to pay to see and hear it, who would ultimately have to underwrite it... He had bands, many of them, large and small, good and bad, important and frighteningly unimportant... Certainly the Gillespie band did not prove in 1947 that it was the musical equal of the handful of top bands of the past...[39]

The fact that Ulanov did not appreciate Gillespie's music could be understood simply as a matter of taste. However, on a deeper analysis it is significant to note that Ulanov specifically mentioned the 1947 Gillespie band, in which Gillespie successfully experimented with Afro-Cuban music, wedding the Afro-Cuban rhythmic approach to the emerging bebop language with Cuban American percussionist and composer, Chano Pozo. In Gillespie's words, "I worked on developing modern jazz of a different kind, more like mixing hot peppers in a dish of black-eye peas or macaroni, rather than wrinkle steak. That's my idea of 'soul,' and it's really more modern, more global. I was

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[38] See Barry Ulanov, "Musician of the Year: Lennie Tristano," *Metronome*, LXIV (Jan., 1948): 19.

[39] Barry Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, p.279-280. Gillespie explained the reason why Ulanov criticized him in his book in a 1977 interview with Arthur Taylor: "When we made this record date [the 1949 Metronome All-Stars studio recording for Victor], Barry Ulanov was the editor of *Down Beat*. Yard bird was there. Both Miles and Fats at that time were so influenced by my playing that all of us were almost playing the same thing. When our solo time came up, bap, that was it, one time. The white boys sometimes didn't make it, and they would take it over again. One number they went about the fifth take. I walked over to Barry Ulanov and said, "Next is the last time I am making this." He sort of laughed it off. They played again, and it still wasn't right. By that time I was packing up my horn and I left. Barry Ulanov came out with a book on jazz after that and tried to eliminate my name altogether. Every now and then he would mention a word; it was a personal thing. That was one of his biggest mistakes, because it will be a long time before they can eliminate my contribution to the music." Dizzy Gillespie, in Arthur Taylor, ed. *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews* (1977), New York: Da Capo Press, 1993, p.126-127.

influenced by Latin."[40] Here Gillespie carefully explains his contribution to the language of jazz, and its potential to reach other people outside the US culture. Ulanov might at least have mentioned this new type of development in Gillespie's music in his book. However Ulanov ignored the Afro-Cuban revolution in jazz and saw Latin American accents in jazz as threatening to "engulf jazz."[41] He preferred to champion Tristano and Stan Kenton who attempted to develop a musical style that combined jazz and classical music. While the experimental musician Kenton, in Ulanov's words, "has made a significant contribution to jazz," and "1947 will go down in jazz history as the year Lennie Tristano's remarkable formulations were released on records," Gillespie was just a musician who had small or big bands, some "frighteningly unimportant."[42]

Furthermore Tristano's music generally featured moderate tempos, vibrato-less playing, and a much more restrained approach compared to bebop. He had controversial views on how modern jazz should be arranged. Most significantly he was critical of the incompatible rhythm sections in jazz and was vocal in his dislike. He explained the role of the drummers by concluding that the drums were generally too dominant in jazz:

> I have been playing 25 years, and I never heard anyone's foot keep steady time. If it approximates it for a couple of choruses, that's all. There's always a point where it slows down or moves... Now my idea is to use a bass drum for accents, and the sock cymbal for effect. The cymbal beat is an intrinsic part of jazz. You just cannot do without it. It adds a sound of liveliness to the soloist... the creative line in drumming is with the left hand. That gives him much less to do and eliminates my

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[40] Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *Dizzy: To Be or Not to Be*, p.311.
[41] Barry Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, p.312.
[42] ibid, p.311 and 279. Cited in Eunmi Shim, *Lennie Tristano: His Life in Music*, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007, p.46.

> having to put all my subdivisions against his left foot. It's become a hideous thing. Everything has gotten tighter. Drums are tyrannical.[43]

Dizzy Gillespie's music, on the other hand, tells a different story to Tristano's, especially in his recordings based on collaborations with Afro-Cuban musicians. He employed Afro-Cuban poly-rhythms and harmonies to change his direction and enrich its content in such well known compositions as "Pickin' the Cabbage," "A Night in Tunisia," and "Woody 'n You ("Algo Bueno"). Indeed, Gillespie had been interested in Cuban music since he befriended Mario Bauza in Cab Calloway's band just after the blooming political interest in the African Diaspora among the African American community. As such, Gillespie's embracing of Afro-Cuban music reflects this important ideological and cultural shift in the United States in 1940s.[44] His interest in Afro-Cuban rhythms and harmonies was not only a product of a wide array of musical experiments and hybrids but can be seen as a political stance and an indication of his genuine commitment to fusing Afro-Cuban music with jazz as an expression of his identification with African diasporic music and culture. Gillespie realized that Chano's percussion style came in a direct line from the Yoruba people of West Africa, the ancestors of Gillespie's maternal great-grandmother. He also recognized that the music of American slaves were polyrhythmic, but later

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[43] Eunmi Shim, *Lennie Tristano: His Life in Music*, p.100. On Afro-Cuban jazz and Latin jazz, see Isabelle Leymarie, *Cuban Fire: The Saga of Salsa and Latin Jazz*, London: Continuum, 2002, Scott Yanow, *Afro-Cuban Jazz*, San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000 and John Storm Roberts, *Latin Jazz: The First of the Fusions, 1980s to Today*, New York: Schirmer, 1999.

[44] Donald L. Maggin, *Dizzy: The Life and Times of John Birks Gillespie*, New York: Harper Entertainment, 2005, p.104-105 and 217. See Guthrie P. Ramsey, JR., *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2003, p.96-131 for further discussion on jazz and African Diaspora. See also Ingrid Monson, ed. *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, New York and London: Routledge, 2003, p.329-353 and Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London and New York: Verso, 1993, p.76.

became, like the music of slave owners, monorhythmic.[45] He described the importance of transforming the polyrhythmic structure of Afro-Cuban music to jazz in his autobiography:

> Our ancestors still had the impulse to make polyrhythms, but basically they developed a monorhythm from that time on, and it was very easy to adapt. That was in the United States. We became monorhythmic, but the Afro-Cubans, the South Americans, and the West Indians remained Polyrhythmic. They didn't give up theirs. Our beat in the United States was so basic, though, that other blacks in the hemisphere could easily hear it.[46]

Furthermore, even though Gillespie felt that the amalgamation of bebop and Afro-Cuban music characterized the future of jazz, he delegated very clear roles to American and Cuban musicians in the achievement of this synthesis: bebop, Gillespie claimed, "will be an amalgamation of two styles, so blended you won't be able to call it bop or Afro-Cuban... It will be Americans playing the bop and Cubans the rhythms which will make it truly a music of the *Americas*."[47] Therefore, if we consider Gillespie's emphasis on the use of drums in jazz as a way of recalling the African American musical tradition and its connection to an African Diaspora, Tristano's objection to the dominance of drums could be seen as a way of breaking away from the African Diaspora. Therefore Ulanov's dislike of Gillespie's music and his continuous support for Tristano as well as Kenton indeed implied more than just a matter of aesthetic

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[45] See Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.317-318, Donald L. Maggin, *Dizzy: The Life and Times of John Birks Gillespie*, p.218-220; Jairo Moreno, "Bauza-Gillespie-Latin/Jazz: Difference, Modernity, and the Black Caribbean" *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1003:I, (Winter 2004): 93 and David F. Garcia, "'We Both Speak African': Gillespie. Pozo, and the Making of Afro-Cuban Jazz" *American Music Newsletter, Vol. XXXVII, No.1*, (Fall 2007): 1-2 and 13-14.

[46] Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.318. Gillespie said in a 1974 interview with Mike Longo: "Our music in the United States and that of the African concept of rhythm have one difference – the African is polyrhythmic and we are monorhythmic. It is just recently that we have begun to understand that rhythm is not just 'one,' but can be as many as six or seven lines of rhythm combined," Dizzy Gillespie, interview by Mike Longo, September 1974, p.485.

[47] "Diz to Put Bop Touch to More Standard Tunes," *Down Beat*, (March 11, 1949): 3 [emphasis added].

preference as it can be seen as a way of supporting a perception of jazz more associated to Western classical music rather than its African roots. Compared to Gillespie and Parker, the image of Tristano himself, and the nature of his music were more in line with Western classical music tradition, fitting well into Ulanov's perception of this new music.

Tristano also supported Ulanov's views by writing two articles for *Metronome* in which he gave brief formulations of "the intermediary character of bebop" and its relevance to European music.[48] It is significant, in terms of my larger questions about who has the opportunity as well as the right to shape the debates on jazz, that here we have a white musician, publishing in his own right in the same place as the critics – unlike all the black musicians, who are written *about*, and tend only to get the chance to comment in later autobiographies or memoirs if so at all. Like Ulanov, Tristano dismissed the African American bebop musicians' unusual language manner and dress code. Likewise, in the search for a modernist alternative to bebop, *Down Beat* chose a white musician Stan Kenton as the winner of their 1947 Reader's Poll.[49] We can trace this familiar story back to the 1930s, when the mainstream U.S. media identified Benny Goodman, as the "King of Swing." Ulanov, despite his predominantly liberal leftist stance in the media, and his continuous support for race integration, championed Tristano, siding with ultra-modernism and the progressives, and downplayed all the other important bebop musicians. In a way, Ulanov acted out a well-known cliché, by focusing on a white musician against the most significant representators of the bebop movement, such as Parker, Gillespie and

[48] Lennie Tristano, "What's Wrong with the Beboppers" in *Metronome*, (June 1947): 16 and "What's Right with the Beboppers" in *Metronome*, (July 1947): 14 and 31.
[49] Bernard Gendron, "A Short Stay in the Sun," p.146.

Monk.[50] Gendron explains, "Faced with a bebop movement dominated by African-American musicians, the virtually all-white jazz journals seemed always to be in search of 'great white hopes' – white modernists, like Tristano and Kenton, with whom a mostly white readership would feel more at home."[51] More significantly, while white musicians like Tristano had opportunities to write articles on jazz music, the actual voices of the African American musicians were selectively used and recycled in white writings, and only very occasionally in these years do we hear them at any length. Amazingly one has to go back to Duke Ellington's response to liberal music critic John Hammond in *Down Beat* in 1939 to find a fully-fledged and single-authored article.[52]

Like Ulanov, Leonard Feather may be guilty of exaggerating the merits of his own favorite white jazz musicians. Indeed, his 1950 headline for *Melody Maker*, "Tristano – 20 Years Ahead of the Beboppers," was a good example of this.[53] Feather was one of the first to challenge what he saw as the myth of black superiority in jazz music, and he was also the strongest critic of the notion that African American musicians were superior to white musicians "because of their natural endowment."[54] It is important to stress, though, that this stance was for him part of a pro-black position politically, in that, it insisted blacks should be

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[50] In regard to jazz critics' preference of Stan Kenton over him, Gillespie said, in an interview with Arthur Taylor in 1970, "Take Stan Kenton, for instance: a big phony, really, because he had a big band at the same time I did. People used to walk up to me and think they were saying something nice, like: 'I like you and Stan Kenton.' I'd be looking at them like this, and I'd question their taste. History will either off you or make you valid. History has wiped Stan Kenton out completely. They thought he was a master, they thought he was greater than Duke Ellington, and that motherfucker couldn't even keep time. I went on a tour with him as a soloist, and when I came on, he left and you didn't see him no more." Dizzy Gillespie, in Arthur Taylor, ed. *Notes and Tones*, p.126-127.

[51] Bernard Gendron, "A Short Stay in the Sun," p.147.

[52] See Duke Ellington, "Situation Between the Critics and Musicians is Laughable – Duke Ellington," *Down Beat*, (April 1939): 4-9.

[53] Leonard Feather, *Melody Maker*, (April 22, 1950).

[54] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.57.

seen exactly as whites and not segregated in categories. Indeed, Feather was very much involved in NAACP-style racial uplift during the 1940's, and was against the idea of 'primitivism' in jazz. He was aware of the dangerous implications behind the racially essentialist notion of black jazz, which romanticized past jazz performances, thereby limiting the African American musicians' place in the new jazz community.[55] However, while Feather rejected the myth of racial difference and primitivism in jazz – and in general –, his liberal impulse and desire for racial integration seemed to blind him to the realities of the musical scene. In other words, he simply failed to see – or simply ignored – the racial discrimination being practiced in the jazz world. As Gennari writes, "Colorblindness was the ideology that grounded Feather's Jewish liberalism."[56]

An example of how Leonard Feather disputed the claims made for the superiority of early jazz for the sake of his ideological framework of progressivism and liberal optimism can be found in his 1944 article for *Esquire*:

> The experienced and discerning jazz listener, whose ears are attuned to more advanced ideas in orchestration and improvisation, laughs at the attempts to deify the badly dated relics of the 1920s... Today you can listen to each of the five trumpet players in Lionel Hampton's band, and every one of them will take a chorus which, had it been discovered on some obscure old record, would be hailed as genius by the Jelly Roll network.[57]

Feather's landmark book *Inside Be-bop* (1949) later published under the name of *Inside Jazz* in 1951 was the first book on bebop music. This work is significant for its expression of post-WWII integrationist colour-blind ideologies and modernist discourses that were transformed during the debates

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[55] See Hugues Panassié, *Hot Jazz* and Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets*.
[56] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.56.
[57] Leonard Feather, "Jazz Is Where You Find It," *Esquire* 35, (February 1944): 129-130.

of the bebop war. Disregarding the keen interest in bebop eccentric personalities, berets, goatees, dark glasses, Islam, and Afro-centricism by the popular press, Feather embarked upon what he calls "the more serious aspects of the music."[58] The book directly reflected Feather's liberal views, according to which race differences would fade away, and in Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr.'s words, it "could be read as a political statement in itself: no race theories here."[59]

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, "When," focuses on the stylistic evolution of the music and its dominating figures such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie (Feather clearly missed the importance of Thelonious Monk for bebop music in this part).[60] Following the "When" comes the "How," an illustrated analysis of the musical characteristics of bebop and the concluding part is devoted to "Who," a biographical dictionary of the personalities in bebop music. Interestingly, for the 1977 Da Capo edition of the book, he later admitted that J.J. Robbins and Sons, Inc, the first publisher of the book, changed its name to *Inside Jazz* because the term bebop was seen in "the popular American imagination as racially coded."[61] Ironically, in the forward to *Inside Be-bop*, Feather thanks Richard O. Boyer for his "excellent profile of Dizzy."[62] However, as I described earlier, Boyer's article mostly deals with the image of bebop as parallel to what was in the public imagination of U.S.

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[58] Leonard Feather, *Inside Jazz* (originally published as *Inside Be-bop*) (1949), New York: A De Capo Press, 1977, citation from un-paginated front matter.
[59] Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music*, p.123.
[60] Feather writes, "Monk, like all the other musicians who contributed to what eventually became bebop, is an original thinker who undoubtedly contributed to the development at Minton's, but it cannot be too strongly emphasized, for the benefit of those who hear him in person or on records, that he is not a bebop pianist, nor do his solos have any of the mystic qualities attributed to them by some non-musical admirers." Leonard Feather, *Inside Jazz*, p.10.
[61] Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music*, p.124.
[62] Leonard Feather, *Inside Jazz*, p.1.

society. Moreover, Boyer represents bebop musicians as rebels who wanted "to escape from their American environment" and he introduces Dizzy Gillespie to his readers as a musician "who sometimes wears a turban to make people think he's a Mohammedan."[63] Gennari points out that

> As jazz criticism's liberal conscience, Feather peppered nearly all of his writing – even his ostensibly value-free, fact-driven jazz encyclopedias – with the grim details of racism ('no study of jazz can be complete without a consideration of the socio-historical factors that determined the associations and frustrations of the man who created it') but also with a self-satisfied reckoning – often a literal counting – of the number of interracial associations producing high-quality jazz."[64]

Indeed, in *Inside Be-bop*, Feather makes reference to these interracial associations when he talks about the early swing bands and the prevalence of racial discrimination in the jazz world until bebop came into view: "By 1939, a few scattered attempts at real mixed bands began along 52nd Street. The important thing was that musicians were getting to know each other; there was no longer a fence that kept white culture on one side and a Negro culture on the other."[65] To claim that the bebop era was free of racial conflicts clearly reflected Feather's wishful thinking rather than the reality. Feather scarcely notes or explores the relationship between bebop and growing African American militancy in the post-WWII period. There might be two reasons why Feather did not want to mention these important details. First, as a liberal integrationist, Feather probably aimed to rescue bebop from its negative image in the eyes of the American public in order to claim that jazz was free of racial conflict, and constituted an area where American democracy actually worked. Secondly, as a modernist, he wanted to facilitate what Ramsey describes as "jazz's march

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[63] Richard O. Boyer, Profiles, "Profiles: Bop," p.28.
[64] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.56. Gennari cites Leonard Feather, *The Book of Jazz*, New York: Horizon, 1957, p.47.
[65] Leonard Feather, *Inside Jazz*, p.4.

toward becoming America's so-called classical music."[66] Feather, as a liberal wants to acknowledge race but only to show the progress in moving beyond it.

While ignoring the relationship between African American militancy and the bebop sub-culture, he points out that bebop musicians listened "intently to music outside the world of jazz."[67] He points out that "Like so many modern jazz musicians... [Charlie Parker] has studied Schoenberg, admired Debussy's *Children's Corner*, Stravinsky and Shostakovitch."[68] Notwithstanding Feather's claim, though, Parker told Boyer in 1948 that he had already developed his ideas when he was in Kansas City: "Bebop is what I brought from Kansas City."[69] Similar to Ulanov's, Feather's attempt to situate bebop somewhere within European categories of high art is no accident. As Bruce Johnson writes in his essay, "Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: Problems of Jazz Discourse" (1993), "Two Modernist formulations which have been imported into jazz analysis are the 'High/Low' cultural binary, and the notion of artistic autonomy."[70] Similarly, Simon Frith also points out the problem that the postwar jazz critics had with the classification of bebop: "At first glance the distinction between... high and popular culture, seems sharper, but even here there are problems – how should post-war jazz be classified."[71]

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[66] Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music*, p.125.
[67] ibid, p.4.
[68] ibid, p.15.
[69] Richard O. Boyer, "Profiles: Bop," p.28-29.
[70] Bruce Johnson, "Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: Problems of Jazz Discourse," *Popular Music*, Vol.12/1 (1993): 5.
[71] Simon Frith, "Hearing Secret Harmonies," in *High Theory/Low Culture: Analyzing Popular Television and Film*, ed. Colin McCabe, Manchester: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986, p.54.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that in his book Feather does not mention the bebop musicians' interest in the blues and gospel, or any other African American expressive tradition. He would be well aware of the negative image of the blues, which were often associated with lower class African American people and might have considered it dangerous to associate the blues with bebop. In contrast, Feather wants to represent bebop as a universal art form and therefore needed to label jazz as high rather than low culture. Ramsey writes, "If bebop symbolized the militancy and turbulence of the postwar moment, as Gillespie and others have suggested, Feather was either unaware of (or simply ignored) that notion."[72] By doing so Feather finally is able to solve the problem of post-war jazz criticism, disconnected bebop music from its social and cultural factors, from which it originated, and situated it within the modernist category of high art rather than representing it as part of the African American expressive tradition.

My objection here is not to the classification of bebop or more generally jazz as high art, but rather to the idea that because bebop is an art form its strongest affinities are with Western Classical Music, an idea with which I strongly disagree.[73] Despite their genuinely progressive position on the race issue, some of the key white jazz critics, such as Ulanov and Feather, tried to purify bebop of its racial connotations and attach it to the Western musical tradition, thereby failing to represent bebop within the context of an African American social and cultural tradition. Moreover, by overemphasizing its universal qualities, they

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[72] Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music*, p.126.
[73] See Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.223 for more on the relationship between classical music and bebop.

failed to appreciate the specific political resonance that bebop had in the context of African American struggles against oppression.

To find an alternative to the 1940s white jazz critics' representations, it is interesting to look at how Langston Hughes portrayed the African American musician's sub-cultural way of life in his poems and magazine columns. Hughes, of course, was not a jazz critic publishing in the jazz periodicals, but in order to appreciate the complicated social, cultural and political aspects of bebop, and especially in the absence of African American writers in the journals, one needs to consider the wider literature to understand it as a cultural phenomenon rather than limiting the research to jazz criticism and history. Hughes had a long and intimate association with jazz, of course, going back to his engagement with the blues and jazz in the historical and artistic context of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s right through to the 1960s and his collaboration with Charles Mingus among others.[74] He was among the very few writers, along with Sterling Brown, to establish the blues and jazz as subject matters for poetry. He was inspired by the rich musical climate of poor black communities in Harlem during the 1920s which allowed him to begin to produce his own blues/jazz-based poems such as "Weary Blues," "Jazzonia" and "Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret."[75]

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[74] Like other Harlem Renaissance writers Hughes was attracted by the energies of lower-class black life, but as I sketched in the Introduction this attraction and the depiction of the excitement of jazz drew charges from those concerned with racial uplift of celebrating only the "primitive" qualities of lower-class blacks. Over a long career Hughes embraced a new black consciousness by blending African American vernacular and folk customs of rural migrants and the sophisticated urban creations of educated blacks. See Paul Allen Anderson. *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001, p.167-219 for further discussion.

[75] See Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959.

Hughes also showed the ability, in contrast to Sterling Brown, for instance, to respond to the changes in African American music and understand how it related to a new political situation. He responded with particular sympathy to bebop and located it as part of the African American musical tradition, while most of the white critics were still arguing whether bebop was a serious art (as a part of "the historical avant-garde") or a source of entertainment. When his *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) was published, Hughes presented bebop as a new type of jazz music that drew its power and essence from a composite vernacular of African American musical forms. He writes, in the preface to *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, that bebop "has progressed" from "[early] jazz, ragtime, swing, blues, and boogie-woogie."[76] Of course Hughes' idea of "progress" here implies not much more than a change and his response to these changes is not necessarily to take sides on the styles. Like the blues, bebop emerged during a period when the oppression of the African American people in Harlem was critical, and Hughes' sustained experiments with jazz forms, specifically bebop, reflect this. As with his earlier poems, Hughes developed a form of poetry that would allow him to compress a wide range of images to create an impression of life in Harlem, but this time with the stylistic influence

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[76] Langston Hughes, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951, citation from un-paginated front matter. Nicholas M. Evans writes that the poem "Trumpet Player: 52nd Street" "is effectively an ethnographic sketch of African-American jazz musicians' subcultural way of life, and in particular the ambience of the Fifty-Second Street jazz scene, in New York in the mid-1940s, "Langston Hughes as Bop Ethnographer in 'Trumpet Player: 52nd Street'" (1994) in *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin*, Vol. 24, No.1/2, p. 129. See also Walter C. Farrell, Jr. and Patricia A. Johnson. "Poetic Interpretations of Urban Black Folk Culture: Langston Hughes and the 'Bebop' Era," *MELUS*, Vol.28, No.3; Ethnic Literature and Cultural Consciousness, (Autumn, 1981): 52-72; Steven C. Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2001, p.224; Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.111-139 and Peter Townsend, *Jazz in American Culture*, p.126-128.

of modern jazz and the reflection of hip language of the 1940s.[77] He saw in bebop a great deal of political significance and believed that bebop signified "the resistance of African-American musicians to racial oppression."[78] In a 1949 "Simple" column in *The Chicago Defender*, Hughes portrayed bebop as a response to police violence, offering the idea that urban unrest was one of the reasons for the social origins of bebop music. He writes,

> 'You must not know where Bop comes from,' said Simple, astonished at my ignorance.
> 'I do not know,' I said. 'Where?'
> 'From the police,' said Simple.
> 'What do you mean, from the police?'
> 'From the police beating Negroes' head' said Simple. 'Every time a cop hits a Negro with his billy club, that old club says, 'BOP! ... BOP! ... BE-BOP! ... MOP! ... BOP! ...' That's where Be-Bop came from, Beaten right out of some Negro's head into those horns and saxophones and the piano keys that play it...
> 'That's why so may white folks don't dig bop,' said Simple. 'White folks do not get their heads beat *just fore being white*. But me – a cop is liable to grab me almost any time and beat my head – *just* for being colored...
> '...If they do not hit me, they have already hurt my soul. *A Dark man shall see dark days*. Bop comes out of them dark days. That's why real Bop is mad, wild, frantic, crazy – and not to be dug unless you've seen dark days, too. Folks who ain't suffered much cannot play Bop, neither appreciate it. They think Bop is nonsense – like you. They think it's just *crazy* crazy. The do not know Bop is also MAD crazy, SAD crazy, FRANTIC WILD CRAZY – beat out of somebody's head! That's what bop is. Them young colored kids who stated it, they know what Bop is.'[79]

Here Hughes saw bebop as a political statement about post-war racism that is explicitly political and sharply critical of the status quo by suggesting the origin

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[77] "I play it cool – And dig all jive. That's the reason – I stay alive. My motto, As I live and learn, is: *Dig And Be Dug – In Return*," "Motto" in Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems*, p.234.
[78] Nicholas M. Evans, "Langston Hughes as Bop Ethnographer in 'Trumpet Player: 52nd Street'," p.130.
[79] Langston Hughes, "Bop," *The Best of Simple*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1961, p.117-118. See also Robert O'Brien Hokanson, "Jazzing It Up: The Be-Bop Modernism of Langston Hughes," *Mosaic*, Vol.31, (1998): 61-82 and John Lowney, "Langston Hughes and the 'Nonsense' of Bebop," *American Literature* 72, (2000): 357-385 for more discussion on Hughes' poetic representation of bebop.

of bebop might be found in the sound of a police's nightstick against a black man's head.

Amiri Baraka was one of the first African American writers to compete with white critics on their own territory, and it is ironic that, as he describes in his autobiography, he first gained entry to this world by working in the offices of "Record Trader" – a magazine for "moldy figs," i.e. those diggers of the old jazz.[80] Although he was dismissive of these tastes but through this work he was able to meet figures like Dan Morgenstern, Martin Williams and Nat Hentoff, and by the early 1960s he was writing reviews consistently for *Metronome,* which he describes in the autobiography as wanting "to come on more radical than the dreary *Down Beat.*"[81] Baraka sharply challenged the white critical establishment by insisting on, and to some extent demonstrating jazz's centrality to African American culture in his influential book *Blues People* published in 1963. In Nat Hentoff's words, the book "is the first attempt to place the entire continuum of the black man's music in this country in the context of his cultural history as an American."[82]

Furthermore, Amiri Baraka was one of the writers, who began to consider bebop as a means of social revolution. According to Baraka, bebop's stylistic complexities rendered the music a political tool as compared to previous jazz styles. Bebop, due to its heavy emphasis on solo improvisation and its stress on

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[80] Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1997, p.203.
[81] ibid, p.253. In fact his first jazz writing was published in 1959 in Nat Hentoff and Martin Williams's *Jazz Review,* and in 1961 his "The Jazz Avant-Garde" was published in *Metronome,* (September 1961): 56-58.
[82] Nat Hentoff, "The Square Route to Blues Is White," *New York Herald-Tribune Book Week,* (October 20, 1963): 5.

the role of the rhythm section reflected African Americans desires to pull jazz away from the commercialization of the pre-composed music of swing bands, and turn it back to its African American origins.[83] Thus, for Baraka, bebop marks a self-conscious shift away from jazz as entertainment music to jazz as artistic and political statement, and Baraka saw it as a rebellion against the white control of swing. In Chapter 10 of *Blues People*, Baraka makes a bold distinction between the big bands of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Fletcher Henderson and the other African American musicians of the twenties and the thirties and white "imitations" and "commercializations" of these musicians by Benny Goodman, Paul Whiteman, Artie Shaw and the others. He writes, "Swing, the verb, meant a simple reaction to the music (as it developed in verb usage, a way of reacting to anything in life). As it was formalized, and the term and the music taken further out of context, swing became a noun that meant a commercial popular music in cheap imitation of a kind of Afro-American music."[84] For Baraka it was the reaction against the sterility and formality of these "imitations" in Swing music that characterized bebop musicians. In this respect, Baraka saw bebop's energy as not only a stylistic evolution in jazz music but also an opposition to the stability that white dominant culture claimed to possess. For Baraka, "Swing had no meaning for blues people, nor was it expressive of the emotional life of most young Negroes after the war."[85] Baraka writes,

> When the moderns, the *beboppers*, showed up to restore jazz, in some sense, to its original separateness, to drag it outside the mainstream of American culture again, most middle class Negroes (as most Americans) were stuck; they had passed, for the most part, completely into Platonic

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[83] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.181-182.
[84] ibid, p.213-214. See also Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb" in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1995, p.76-99.
[85] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.181.

> citizenship. The willfully harsh, *anti-assimilationist* sound of bebop fell on deaf or horrified ears, just it did in white America.[86]

In his essay, "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies" Gennari rejects this notion that bebop was a significant expression of African American militancy. Gennari argues that the general gap between swing and bebop was in large part a disagreement between the new and the established audiences of jazz music who were simply looking for different things in music. He writes, "The established audience was looking for familiar rhythms and melodies for purposes of dance, nostalgia and ritualistic fulfillment. The newer audience was looking for bold experiments in harmony and fresh approaches time and tempo for purposes of the new aesthetic accomplishment."[87] Gennari also refuses Baraka's construction of the bebop movement as a political statement. According to Gennari, bebop was central not simply to Baraka's personal history but also to his image of the march toward the Black Arts Movement.

> Having grown up with bebop and having derived from it a sense of the possibility of an assertive black male ego, Baraka very much wanted this music to be seen as a threshold in black-white relations, as a cultural fault line marking the distinction between slavery and freedom. Among other things, this enabled Baraka, at the very moment when he was emerging as a prophetic figure in black letters and politics, to claim a personal history that coincided with a liberationist thrust in the black arts.[88]

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[86] ibid, p.181-182 We need, though, to be aware of the timing of Baraka's book and its place in Baraka's thinking about what was happening in the early 1960s. *Blues People* was written before LeRoi Jones became active in the Black Nationalist movement, was converted to Islam, and changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka. It is a book written when he was in his "transitional period" that marked a time of changing allegiances, from bohemian to *black*, and as he became more and more dissatisfied with his white friends as Civil Rights activities intensified. See William J. Harris' introduction to *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, Emeryville: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991, p.xvii-xxxiii.

[87] John Gennari, "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies" in *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol.25, No.3, Literature of Jazz Issue, (Autumn, 1991): 491.

[88] ibid, p.491.

Like Gennari, in *Swing Changes: Big Band Jazz in New Deal America* David Stowe rejects the notion that bebop was an expression of black militancy, arguing that it was primarily the perspective of later critics, who projected the politics of bebop's reception on to the music itself and subjectively shaped the representation of bebop. Commentators on jazz often represented swing as a white phenomenon and bebop as African American, but "Even at the level of cultural style, the continuities between swing and bop are more striking than any discontinuities."[89] "Rather than a radical departure from swing," he writes, "bebop is better understood as a variation of swing that emerged at an inopportune historical moment."[90] Indeed there is some truth to this assertion, as many bebop musicians, earlier in their career, were employed by various swing bands. Furthermore, after the peak of bebop's period of commercial success was completed in 1949, some bebop musicians started to establish their own big bands. One of the most commercially successful bebop musicians Dizzy Gillespie "also suffered through the downturn between 1949-1950."[91] Yet during this period Gillespie made his band more dance-friendly and tried to promote his music to the dancing audience. "Bop is part of jazz, and jazz music is to dance to. The trouble with bop as it's played now is that people can't dance to it. They don't hear those four beats. We'll never get bop across to a side audience until they can dance to it."[92] Many musicians also started to reject

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[89] ibid, p.204.
[90] ibid, p.184.
[91] Bernard Gendron, "A Short Stay in the Sun," p.156.
[92] Cited in Eric Porter, "Dizzy Atmosphere": The Challenge of Bebop," p.442. According to Max Roach, jazz audiences stopped dancing because "30 percent federal excise tax was levied against 'dancing' night clubs" in 1944. Roach asserts, "It was levied on all places where they had entertainment. It was levied in case they had public dancing, singing, storytelling, humor, or jokes on stage. This tax is the real story behind why dancing, not just tap dancing, but public dancing per se and also singing, quartets, comedy, all these kinds of things, were just out. Club owners, promoters, couldn't afford to pay the city tax. State tax. Government tax." Cited in Jacqui Malone, "Dancers and the Big Band" in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed.

bebop as a label for their music when the popularity of the music began to decline.[93] In 1949, Charlie Parker, on the other hand, criticized for Gillespie being too commercial: "Diz has an awful lot of ideas when he wants to, but if he stays with the big band he'll forget everything he ever played."[94] In 1950 in a response to Parker's comment, Gillespie defended his idea that bebop meant, 'entertainment' rather than 'art.' "If you've got enough money and can afford to play for yourself, you can play anyway you want to. But if you want to make a living at music, you've got to sell it."[95] In fact, contrary to Baraka's claim that the bebop musicians pulled jazz away from the commercialization of the music of swing bands, bebop was indeed inseparably linked to the marketing of the music. In Gennari's words, "bebop was produced, distributed, and consumed within the same network of capitalist relations as '30s swing and '20s early jazz."[96]

Also responding to Baraka's analysis, Scott DeVeaux challenges the relationship between bebop and the growing militancy in African American society in his book, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (1997). At first, DeVeaux celebrates Baraka's interpretation of jazz, in particular bebop, in that Baraka "gives race its proper place in the unfolding of the music."[97]

Robert G. O'Meally, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p.279. See also Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.232-233.

[93] Kenny Clarke said, "The music wasn't called bop at Minton's. In fact, we had no name for the music. We called ourselves modern. That bop label started during the war... That label did a lot of harm." Kenny Clarke, cited in Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, ed. *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men Who Made It* (1955), New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966, p.350. See also Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music*, p.96-97 and Eric Porter, "Dizzy Atmosphere," p.440.

[94] M. Levin and J. Wilson, "No Bop Roots in Jazz: Parker," *Down Beat*, (September 9, 1949): 26.

[95] "Bop at End of Road, Says Dizzy," *Down Beat*, (September 8, 1950).

[96] John Gennari, "Jazz Criticism," p.492.

[97] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, p.24.

However, what DeVeaux really criticizes is Baraka's reading of jazz history, "which typically is sketchy, unnuanced, and too transparently a prisoner to ideology."[98] Unlike Baraka, according to DeVeaux, "the zoot-suit-wearing rebels of underground" and bebop musicians are by no means identical. Here, DeVeaux usefully problematizes bebop musicians' relationship to the African American mass audience. "If bebop was a revolution," DeVeaux writes, "it was hardly a revolution aimed directly at the black masses, who insisted on a music that satisfied their taste for bluesy dance and entertainment."[99]

Although Gennari, Stowe and DeVeaux are not totally wrong in their assessments, they perhaps prematurely dismiss the political and cultural implications that bebop sub-culture had. Indeed, the bebop sub-culture did have a social meaning of nonconformity which was a conscious attitude on the part of its members to be different and separate, but that non-conformity had a different resonance within the African American community. Although Baraka's construction of the bebop movement may have overstressed the rupture between the jazz of the pre-World War II and post-World War II period, in the 1940s, a new militancy did indeed develop in the African American community to gain new rights and a new level of respect, and the members of this new jazz audience were aware of this new attitude. Thus, they celebrated not only the new stylistic evolution in jazz but also the new meaning that bebop represented.

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[98] ibid, p.24.
[99] ibid, p.26.

In an account of bebop's "politics of style," Eric Lott notes, "Brilliantly outside, bebop was intimately if indirectly related to militancy of its moment. Militancy and music were undergirded by the same social facts; the music attempted to resolve at the level of style what militancy combated in the streets."[100] But, DeVeaux asks, "what, exactly, constitutes the 'intimate if indirect relationship' of music to politics?"[101] In my opinion, the answer, at one level at least, is an obvious one. Primarily all African American jazz musicians were frustrated by the inequality and discrimination they faced in their everyday life. Not surprisingly, they also experienced a variety of challenges in the music industry, which was and still is controlled by whites.[102] Thus, in Eric Porter's words, "Eventually, this led a number of musicians to forego the restrictive atmospheres of the swing big bands in favor of the relative artistic and social freedoms that small-combo jazz afforded."[103] The bebop trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie's words also highlight this articulation between civic militancy and bebop:

> Within the society, we did the same thing we did with the music. Artists are always in the vanguard of social change, but we didn't go out and make speeches or say, 'let's play eight bars of protest.' We just played our music and let it go at that. The music proclaimed our identity; it made every statement we truly wanted to make.[104]

I understand Gennari and DeVeaux's concern for Baraka's political views and his ideological representation of jazz, seemingly straightforwardly associating bebop music with a burgeoning black political consciousness of the 1960s. In

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[100] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time," p.246.
[101] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, p.25.
[102] See Frank Kofsky, *Black Music, White Business: Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz*, New York and London: Pathfinder, 1998.
[103] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing called Jazz?*, p.57.
[104] Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.291.

that sense, they are right that bebop cannot be represented as a particular ideological stance. In fact Baraka, in a fascinating section in his autobiography when he looks back at what bebop meant, sees it in a much wider context, relating to 'cool' rather than militancy:

> Our cool went hand in hand with bop (not the later commercial definition), meant other than regular America... The black had shaped us, the yellow had taunted us, the white had terrified and alienated us. And cool meant, to us, to be silent in the face of all that, silent yet knowing. It meant knowledge. It meant being smart, intelligent, too. So we hooked up the weirdness and the intelligence. Dizzy's hornrim BeBop glasses, the artist's tam, these spelled some inner deepness to us.[105]

Statements like this are a reminder that Baraka's writings on jazz are not consistent, partly because jazz is so important in his thinking, so that his attitudes towards it reflect his changing political views.

However, I maintain my earlier conception that bebop did reflect changing political and cultural perspectives among African Americans in the 1940s, even though my ideas are not always in line with Baraka's views. In fact, bebop was a product of a 1940s American social, cultural and political scene. In Gary Giddins' words, "The Second World War severely altered the texture and tempo of American life, and jazz reflected those changes with greater acuteness by far than the other arts."[106] Bebop musicians of the 1940s challenged the assigned role of jazz musicians as entertainers. Baraka notes, "For one thing, the young musicians began to think of themselves as *serious* musicians, even artists, and not performers. And that attitude erased immediately the protective and

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[105] Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, p.93.
[106] Gary Giddins, *Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker*, New York: Beech Tree Books/Marrow, 1987, p.77.

parochial atmosphere of 'the folk expression' from jazz."[107] Bebop musicians tried to play jazz without losing self-respect and refused to accept the primitivist stereotypes to which they were often expected to conform.

In "On Bird, Bird-Watching and Jazz," a 1962 review of Robert Reisner's book on Parker, Ralph Ellison rejects this "thrust towards respectability" and the idea that they could deny the importance of performance and entertainment, with the inevitable echoes of the black minstrel tradition. "By rejecting Armstrong they thought to rid themselves of the entertainer's role. And by way of getting rid of the role they demanded, in the name of their racial identity, a purity of status which by definition is impossible for the performing artist."[108] The result, for Ellison, is "a grim comedy of racial manners" as white audiences accepted this new mode of performance as entertainment.[109] However, one should keep in mind that bebop musicians did indeed refuse a racist discourse about their music and tried to redefine black performance artistry on their own terms as a sign of a new African American social consciousness.

Ellison had a lifelong interest in jazz, and before he established himself as a writer, he was a jazz trumpeter. His 1964 volume of critical essays, *Shadow and Act* collects important earlier music related writings, and in his celebrated novel, *Invisible Man* he goes to jazz, specifically Louis Armstrong, for key insights. The character of Rinehart could be seen as a key figure who might represent the new African American consciousness of 1940s that Eric Lott has described.[110]

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[107] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.187.
[108] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, New York: Vintage Books, 1964, p.225.
[109] ibid, p.225.
[110] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time"

This is not to say that Ellison used bebop and its culture as an inspiration in the book. Indeed, in contrast to Baraka, Ellison's many essays on jazz exhibited an antipathy to what developed out of bebop music and the generation of musicians that emerged out of the ending of the swing era. In fact, he reveals his dislike openly in his 1959 article "Sound and the Mainstream": "[Bebop] was itself a texture of fragments, repetitive, nervous, not fully formed; its melodic lines underground, secret and taunting; its riffs jeering – 'Salt peanuts! Salt peanuts!"[111]

Here, it is important to note that both the resonances and the critical differences between Ellison and Baraka are remarkable. While Ellison suggested that jazz music was anything but the main source of mainstream U.S. culture, Baraka constructed bebop as jazz music almost fundamentally separate from the white mainstream. In Gennari's view the difference "has to do with matters of generational experience and personal taste," as Baraka came to jazz in the late 1940s, whereas Ellison was involved in jazz by the 1930s.[112] Christopher Powers writes, "Swing was the jazz that Ellison learned to love, to which he danced and which inspired his writing: but the power behind swing was the blues."[113] Ellison was critical of bebop music because he probably saw bebop music as a deformation in the blues tradition, which was, for him, a collectively expressed art, which had strongly influenced American culture.[114]

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[111] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 203. See also Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray*, ed. Albert Murray and John F. Callahan, New York: Vintage Books, 2001, p.193-194.
[112] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.279.
[113] Christopher Powers, "Why Did Ralph Ellison Dislike Bebop?" in *Blue Notes: Jazz History, Fiction, and Poetics*, p.15.
[114] See Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.256-57

On the other hand, Baraka claims that the significant aspect of bebop music was an artistic attempt to bring jazz back to the blues continuum, which was mainly lost during the swing era. He writes, "Bebop also re-established blues as the most important Afro-American form in Negro music by its astonishingly contemporary restatement of the basic blues impulse. The boppers returned to this basic form, reacting against the all but stifling advance artificial melody had made into jazz during the swing era."[115] Indeed, it was the *attitude* or the *stance* that seemed to be the key to Baraka's idea of the blues impulse. He writes, "Parker's modern placement of blues is as classic as any Negro's and at least as expressive as Bessie Smith's. What changed was the address, the stance, the attitude."[116] While Baraka places the blues at the centre of black music and proposes a historical continuum of African American musical tradition, he represents the blues and bebop as the "authentic" black music genres that can only function through resistance and protest against the oppressive American culture.[117]

For instance, in his play *Dutchman*, which appeared in 1964, his character represents bebop soloist Charlie Parker and the blues singer Bessie Smith as the explicitly racial and political symbols, the images that make the distinction between "blackness" and "whiteness,"

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[115] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.194. Later in 1979 Baraka would give this class dimension, "What made bop strong is that no matter its pretensions, it was hooked up solidly and directly to the Afro-American blues tradition, and therefore was largely based in the experience and struggle of the black sector of the working class. Amiri Baraka, "War/Philly Blues/Deeper Bop" in *Selected Plays and Prose of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones*, New York: Morrow, p.241.

[116] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.194.

[117] See Amiri Baraka, "The 'Blues Aesthetic' and the 'Black Aesthetic': Aesthetics as the Continuing Political History of a Culture," *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol.11, No.2 (Autumn, 1991): 101-109 and "The Changing the Same" (1966) in *Black Music*, New York: Quill, 1967, p.11-21 and p.180-213 for more on the unity of African American music.

They say, 'I love Bessie Smith.' And don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, 'Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass.' Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she's saying, and very plainly, 'Kiss my black ass.' And if you don't know that, it's you that's doing the kissing. Charlie Parker? Charlie Parker. All the hip boys scream for bird. And bird saying, 'Up your ass, feebleminded ofay! Up your ass." And they sit there talking about the tortured genius of Charlie Parker. Bird would've played not a note of music if he just walked up to East Sixty-seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw. Not a note![118]

Here, Baraka not only reproduces the binary opposition between the white and the black races, but he also associates bebop and the blues with anger and violence. In so doing he signifies in an extreme fashion on the Parker quotation with which I opened this thesis – that jazz itself can best do the talking. What is also significant in this text is Baraka's conjunction of Bessie Smith with Charlie Parker – in other words, arguing that the blues, like bebop, is far from quietistic and passive in essence. For Baraka, although the white audience appreciated Parker's music, they never understood it. He simply was wrong since he associated "authenticity" of the music mostly with black ethnicity. In other words, what the music of Smith or Parker means is exactly that which black people can only hear or know. Thus, Baraka's representation of Parker can almost be interpreted as an answer to Ralph Ellison's comments on Parker in "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," where he criticized Parker for being the white audience's hero: "Bird was indeed a 'white hero.' His greatest significance was for the educated white middle-class youth whose reactions to the inconsistencies of American life was the stance of casting off its education, language, dress, manners and moral standards..."[119]

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[118] Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1964, p.34-35.
[119] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.228.

It seems to me that both of these representations of Charlie Parker were wrong. On the one hand, Baraka's view of Parker is overpoliticized, indeed identifying him as a symbol of the distinction between "blackness" and "whiteness." On the other, Ellison judged Parker in terms of the fetishized and stereotyped image of the musician as existentialist hero, a tragic, suffering victim of the society.[120] On the contrary, Charlie Parker was an important figure for his generation of musicians as a performer and a thinker. As Art Blakey remarks: "A symbol to the Negro people? No. They don't even know him. They never heard of him and care less. A symbol to the musicians, yes."[121] I will further explore the representation of Charlie Parker in Chapter 3.

In a more recent study on the relationship between the blues and bebop, Scott DeVeaux argues that bebop musicians were "ashamed" of the blues, as I discussed earlier, just as were many African American elites. DeVeaux notes, "For better or for worse, the blues symbolized certain restrictive social realities that younger musicians in particular were anxious to escape or transform."[122] DeVeaux is correct in representing the blues as an image of musical and social limitations for bebop musicians. However, in my opinion, one of the important aspects of bebop lay in fact in its renewed emphasis on the blues tradition. As Savery states, "it is clear from listening to Parker's first session as a leader that

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[120] Parker has a special status as a hero. His life became a key component of the literary story and the mythology of jazz in the WW2 era. Amongst the many works of fiction that draw on Charlie Parker's life are John Williams' *Night Song* (1961), his manager and biographer Ross Russell's *The Sound* (1961) and Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* (1958).

[121] Robert Reisner, *Bird*, p.51 Miles Davis also remarks: "He was an intellectual. He used to read novels, poetry, history, stuff like that. And he could hold a conversation with almost anybody on all kinds of things... He was real sensitive. But he had this destructive streak in him that was something else... [H]e used to talk a lot about political shit and he loved to put a motherfucker on, play dumb to what was happening and then zap the sucker." Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles*, p.76.

[122] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, p.360.

'Billie's Bounce' and 'Now's the Time" are blues pieces."[123] Dizzy Gillespie also confirms the importance of the blues for his music and for the rest of the bebop generation in his autobiography: "Beboppers couldn't destroy the blues without seriously injuring themselves. The modern jazz musicians always remained very close to the blues."[124] The reason why there is still a dispute on this issue is due to the common confusion caused by the bebop musician's rejection of playing the blues in traditional ways. On the one hand, they perceived the blues as a symbol of the limitations placed on their musical careers and their social lives due to the expectations of many record companies that demanded jazz musicians play the blues in their recording sessions for greater commercial success. On the other hand, bebop musicians continued to play the blues within their own totally different cultural context, rejecting the primitivist expectations and dictations of the white culture industry and audience. For instance, in a 1941 recording session for Decca, the Kansas City band of Jay McShann, which featured Charlie Parker as a soloist, had problems with the recording executive Dave Kapp for their apparent inability to record songs with commercial appeal.

> We came out with stuff like *Yardbird Suite* with the big band, and [Kapp] says, 'Listen, I cannot sell that. Now we've wasted three hours here. You all played a lot of stuff which is good, but I can't sell it. I want something that I can sell.' Had I been smart, had the money, I would have had them take off fifteen or twenty of those tunes and just held them. But I didn't have the money in those days, and things were pretty tight. So he asks us, 'Can you do any blues?' We said, 'Yes.' We did a blues. 'Do a boogie?' We did a boogie. He said, 'Do me one more blues, and I'll take one of those other tunes.'[125]

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[123] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, and *Sonny's Blues*" in *Understanding Others: Cultural and Cross-Cultural Studies and the Teaching of Literature*, eds. Joseph Trimmer and Tilly Warnock Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1992, p.170-171.
[124] Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.294.
[125] Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bebop: An Oral History of the Translation in Jazz in the 1940s*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.65.

As I hope I have shown, the association between the blues and bebop has been a problematic one for the music critics, the music industry and particularly for the jazz musicians. In order to further reflect on the interaction of the blues and bebop, in the next chapter, I will discuss Baldwin's 1957 short story, "Sonny's Blues" as a case study that reflects upon the transformations in the post-WW II era. The representation of the blues and bebop in Baldwin's text will also enable me to give specific examples of the changes in African American music and African American urban life more generally in the 1940s. Moreover, the text also helps me to develop more arguments on blues music/tradition and bebop sub-culture and their representations in African American culture.

It was Bessie Smith, through her tone and her cadence, who helped me to dig back to the way I myself must have spoken when I was a pickaninny, and to remember the things I had heard and seen and felt. I had buried them very deep.[1]

CHAPTER II

JAMES BALDWIN'S BEBOP: MUSIC AND ITS MEANINGS IN "SONNY'S BLUES"

Emmanuel S. Nelson writes that "self-discovery is never an entirely private battle; it can be achieved only in spiritual communion with others."[2] Thus, one can only understand oneself through a dedicated and sympathetic understanding of the other, and this is a theme, which James Baldwin developed throughout his writings. In general Baldwin focuses on interpersonal relationships in the context of a larger racist society, and while many of his characters are creative artists, few are jazz musicians. The crucial exception is to be found in his important early short story "Sonny's Blues," originally published in *Partisan Review* in 1957, where we observe all of these concepts (the discovery of self and the community), developed in a fine narrative focussing finally on a musical

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[1] James Baldwin, "The Discovery of What it Means to Be an American" (1959) in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfictions 1948-1985*, p.172.
[2] Emmanuel S. Nelson, "James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community," *Melus*, Vol.10, No.2, (Summer 1983): 28.

performance.[3] In the story, Baldwin links the idea of otherness and community to his vision of self. As Robert Penn Warren observes: "What Baldwin has most powerfully created is a self. That is his rare and difficult work of art."[4] In what follows I want to show how he links this idea of a developing self with a sense of community through jazz as I will also compare Baldwin's approach in this short story briefly to works by some other African American writers such Ralph Ellison and LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka.

The story mainly concerns two African American brothers and their struggle to understand one another. Each of them could be said to signify a characteristic of African American men in the 1950s. The older brother, a former soldier in the U.S. Army and now an algebra teacher who lives with his wife and children in Harlem, is the unnamed narrator who presents the story. He could be seen as what Gary T. Marx terms "the Negro White," that is an African American person who accepts the middle-class values and separates himself from lower class blacks and hipsters.[5] On the other hand, Sonny, his younger brother, who is a bebop musician, recovering from heroin addiction and released from the prison where he was sent due to his drug use, may be identified in Norman Mailer's terms as an "existentialist hipster hero."[6]

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[3] The edition I am using for this chapter is: James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (1957) in *Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose* (1993), eds. Art Langer and Nathaniel Mackey, p.48-78.

[4] Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* New York: Vintage, 1966, p.297. Although Warren is a white critic, who was associated with New Criticism which tended to see art as autonomous, his comment on Baldwin's art fits into my thesis. Indeed, the idea of a self would be totally opposed to the idea of the Black Aesthetic.

[5] Gary T. Marx, "The White Negro and the Negro White," *Phylon*, Vol.28, No.2, (2nd Qtr., 1967):168-177.

[6] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster" (1957) in *Advertisements for Myself* (1961), ed. Norman Mailer, p.268-288.

Early in the narrative Baldwin develops each of these characters so as to emphasize the differences between them. Here, Baldwin not only makes clear that the differences depend on the seven years' gap between the brothers but also the gap separates, in Panish's terms, "the more idealistic pre-war generation from the more cynical post-war one."[7] Even though they come from the same family they choose completely different paths of life. The older brother prefers to find comfort in a conventional and respectable occupation, unlike his brother, Sonny, who prefers to be a part of the bebop subculture, which is a rejection of middle-class values and conformity, as well as an expression of a new self-awareness in an African American community in the North during the1950s.

Before dealing further with the story, though, we should first discuss the social and political context of bebop music and subculture. As I discussed in the previous chapter, many scholars describe bebop as an aesthetic movement closely related to post-war US society. Pancho Savery claims that bebop music was part of the new attitude that challenged the status quo.

> When Bebop began in the 1940s, America was in a similar position to what it had been in the 1920s. A war had been fought to free the world (again) for democracy; and once again, African Americans had participated and had assumed that this "loyal" participation would result in new rights and new levels of respect. When, once again, this did not appear to be happening, a new militancy developed in the African American community. Bebop was part of this attitude.[8]

Amiri Baraka saw bebop in the context of "the sense of resentment" that African Americans felt during World War II, when they still could not gain equal rights in the United States, even though many African Americans fought against Nazis

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[7] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz*, p.84.
[8] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, and *Sonny's Blues*," p.170-171.

and their fascist ideologies in Europe.[9] For instance, in a 1942 letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, James G. Thompson called for a Double V Campaign to achieve two victories: over the Axis powers in World War II and over racial prejudice in the United States.[10] Eric Lott describes how bebop's "aesthetic of speed and displacement" reflected the political demand of this "Double V" campaign – victory abroad and victory at home – and the militant aspirations of its working-class audience in the 1940s.[11] As I argued in the previous chapter, bebop musicians were not self-conscious politicians or militants directly involved with the radical movements in the U.S during the 1940s. However, the bebop movement was clearly rooted "in social and cultural contexts that nurtured its positioning as an oppositional or subversive discourse."[12] As Lott claims, bebop was intimately related to African American militancy because "zoot, lip, junk and double-time became the stylistic answer to social contradictions (having mainly to do with generational difference and migration) experienced by the makers and followers of bop."[13]

Furthermore, just one year after the Double V campaign, the "Zoot-Suit" riots between soldiers and Mexican American youths, identified because of the zoot suits they favoured, took place in Los Angeles and occurred elsewhere in that year. The zoot-suit was also associated with African American urban youth when it appeared on the 1940s' scene. For example, Malcolm X in his autobiography recounted the importance of his first zoot-suit, worn in New

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[9] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.181-182.
[10] Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: the Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, p.164.
[11] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time," p.246.
[12] Joe Panish, *The Color of Jazz*, p.11.
[13] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time," p.245.

York, and noted the style's racial connotations as the preferred choice of hip black men and entertainers.[14] Reflecting this bebop subculture, many bebop musicians represent themselves as artists and not as traditional entertainers by wearing a zoot-suit as a symbol. Though, popular entertainers like Louis Jordan also wore flamboyant zoot suits, so it also suggests that the flamboyance and exaggeration of the style meant that the beboppers could be associated with change and urban edginess. Douglas Henry Daniels sees similarities between zoot suiters and beboppers as they "both were a rebellion against accepted dress and musical styles and, moreover, they sometimes went beyond fashion and entertainment statements, embodying an intellectualized political position."[15]

Savery argues that, "in African American culture, bebop is as significant as the Harlem Renaissance," being "a revolt against the way African American music had been taken over, and diluted, by whites."[16] Thus, bebop music was created for economic reasons as well. Before World War II, the jazz-oriented swing bands occupied most of the music industry and white jazz musicians, Paul Whiteman and Benny Goodman, were given the name "The King of Jazz" and "The King of Swing" respectively.[17] Further, many African American musicians were paid much lower salaries than their white counterparts. Therefore the evolution from traditional jazz to bebop was also in part due to the need to create a music that would be too complicated for white musicians to duplicate

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[14] Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1964, p.52-53.
[15] Douglas Henry Daniels, "Los Angeles Zoot: Race 'Riot,' the Pachuco, and Black Music Culture," *Journal of African American History*, (January, 2002): 99.
[16] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, and *Sonny's Blues*," p.170.
[17] Ben Sidran, *Black Talk*, New York: A Da Capo Paperback, 1971, p.184. Goodman hailed as the "King of Swing" in 1935.

and from which they would not therefore gain financial reward.[18] As Grover Sales puts it, "Bebop was a natural by-product of this smouldering resentment against white copycats getting rich off black music."[19] Moreover, Baraka points out that bebop music and style represented an "anti-assimilationist" challenge not only to the mainstream US society and its political and economical contractions but also to the African American middle class and their values.[20] Thus, there was also a conflict of lifestyles between respectable African American people and middle-class black hipsters. This is brought out well in what the narrator in "Sonny's Blues" says about his brother and the whole generation who are involved in bebop subculture: "I didn't like the way he carried himself, loose and dreamlike all the time, I didn't like his friends, and his music seemed to be merely an excuse for the life he led. It sounded just that weird and disordered."[21]

To return to the story, the narrator's inability to understand Sonny's life confirms that he has no clue about bebop and most crucially about the whole post-war African American generation. The story begins with the narrator's discovery from the newspaper that Sonny has been arrested. Since he is out of touch with his brother, he gets the details from another addict who is Sonny's friend. "I saw this boy standing in the shadow of doorway, looking just like Sonny... He'd been Sonny's friend... I'd never liked him," and the dialogue between them makes it clear that the narrator is far from understanding what his

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[18] Mary Lou Williams attributes to Thelonious Monk: "We'll never get credit for what we're doing... We're going to create something that they can't steal because they can't play it." Cited in Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin' to You*, p.340-341.
[19] Grover Sales, p.131, quoted in T.J. Anderson, III, "Body and Soul: Kaufman's Golden Sardine," *African American Review*, Vol.34, No.2, (2000): 329-346.
[20] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.181.
[21] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.58.

brother is going through and what is happening in the 1940s and 1950s in general.[22]

In an important flashback to an earlier conversation about Sonny's future, Sonny reveals that he wants to be a jazz musician. The response comes from the older brother who seems to speak using the discourse of the pre-war African American bourgeoisie that denied jazz music because of its socio-cultural status: "I simply couldn't see why on earth he'd want to spend his time hanging around night clubs, *clowning* around on band-stands, while people pushed each other around a dance floor. It seemed – beneath him, somehow. I had never thought about it before, had never been forced to, but I suppose I had always put jazz musicians in a class with what Daddy called 'good-time people'."[23] However, his first response is to sympathize with his brother and he tries to connect with Sonny by confirming that he understands him. Nevertheless, the generation gap between them puts the older brother in a more difficult position:

> "Are you serious?"
> "Hell, yes, I'm serious."
> He looked more helpless than ever, and annoyed, and deeply hurt.
> I suggested, helpfully: "You mean – like Louis Armstrong?"
> His faced closed as through I'd struck him. "No. I'm not talking about none of that old-time, down-home crap."
> Well, look, Sonny, I'm sorry, don't get mad. I just don't altogether get it, that's all. Name somebody – you know, a jazz musician you admire."
> "Bird."
> "Who?"
> "Bird! Charlie Parker! Don't they teach you nothing in the goddamn army?"[24]

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[22] ibid, p.49-50.
[23] ibid, p.62 [my italics].
[24] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.62.

Here, Baldwin strategically associates the older brother with Louis Armstrong and the younger with Charlie Parker to emphasize the distinctions between them. Savery writes: "In light of this historical context, Sonny's brother's never having heard of Bird is not just a rejection of the music of Bebop; it is also a rejection of the new political direction Bebop was representative of in the African American community."[25] Here, I agree with Savery's point as Baldwin clearly illustrates the fact that the gap between traditional jazz and modern jazz (bebop) reflects the new audience's desire, not only for bold experiments in harmony and fresh approaches to time and tempo for their own aesthetic sake, but for a kind of music which represents their alienation from and struggle within the mainstream American society. With its denial of middle class values and the old image of jazz musicians – *the clowning* – and its hip style of dress and the political stance, bebop is not only music, but also a new subculture as a declaration of a new African American identity.

Baldwin was no doubt familiar with the contradictory images that Armstrong and Parker represent on the stage, as he associates the older brother with Louis Armstrong and develops the character of Sonny as the fictional equivalent of Parker. Indeed there are explicit similarities between Sonny and Parker in that they are both heroin addicts and both make music to express their pain and as a means of escape to their brutal realities. Furthermore, Sonny, similar to his hero Parker, is acknowledged in the story as an important figure in the African American community, claiming *freedom*, rebellion and complexity against the background of disappointing economic and social conditions for the African

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[25] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, and *Sonny's Blues*," p.170-171.

American community in urban life.[26] One might, here, suggest that Baldwin is guilty of reconstructing a false dichotomy, representing Sonny (as the fictional equivalent of Parker) as tortured musical genius just as his white contemporaries did in their texts. However, the development of the story suggests otherwise. Furthermore, Baldwin is also aware that Louis Armstrong's role as an artist was clearly no less significant than Charlie Parker's and that Parker's aspirations as an entertainer are no less evident than Louis Armstrong's. Both of these two musicians are important figures in African American culture and community, and are often linked as such, even though they chose to express themselves in drastically different ways.[27]

Here, I should further discuss Louis Armstrong and the way his sound and image was represented by bebop musicians. During the bebop era, many beboppers criticized earlier African American musicians for reinforcing the minstrel and plantation image of black people, in that they acted the way white people wanted. Bebop musicians tried to play jazz without losing self-respect, as they felt had happened in the jazz age and swing era, and refused to accept the primitivist stereotypes, to which they were expected to conform.[28] Because the new music challenged both the entertainment industry and the public, and as the musicians claimed that they were artists rather than entertainers, bebop was

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[26] See Tracy Sherard, "Sonny's Bebop: Baldwin's 'Blues Text' as Intercultural Critique," *African American Review*, Vol.32, No.4, (1998): 693. See also Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.175-237; Ben Sidran, *Black Talk*, p.78-116 *and* Eric Porter, "Dizzy Atmosphere."

[27] In his biographical account of Charlie Parker, for example, Gary Giddins writes that "Parker, like Armstrong before him, engineered a total shift in the jazz aesthetic," *Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker*, New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987, p.10.

[28] Eric Porter, "Dizzy Atmosphere," p.428.

recognized as "the first authentically modern phase in jazz tradition."[29] By contrast, Louis Armstrong was merely considered as part of the old guard who needed to be swept out with the new musical evolution. He was seen as "Uncle Tom" and "the white man's nigger" by some of the bebop musicians.[30] Thus there was an antipathy felt towards Armstrong and his stage performance by the bebop generation. For instance, in his autobiography Dizzy Gillespie writes:

> Louis Armstrong couldn't hear what we are doing. Pops wasn't schooled enough musically to hear the changes and harmonics we played... I criticized Louis for other things, such as his "plantation image." We didn't appreciate that about Louis Armstrong, and if anybody asked me about a certain public image of him, handkerchief over his head, grinning in the face of white racism, I never hesitated to say I didn't like it. I didn't want the white man to expect me to allow the same things Louis Armstrong did.[31]

Moreover, Armstrong himself disliked and spoke negatively of bebop music and musicians.

> ...them rebop boys, they're great technicians. Mistake – that's all rebop is. Man, you gotta be a technician to know when you make them... New York and 52nd street – that's what messed up jazz. Them cats play too much – a whole of notes, weird notes... most of the so-called modern music I heard in 1918. That stuff means nothing. You've got to carry the melody.[32]

This raises the larger question of the relationship between modernism and bebop. I discussed before how bebop is given credit for having transformed jazz from popular dance music to experimental art music. It was, and still is, a common theme to find a division in the jazz world, as there is a split between

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[29] Mark S. Harvey, "Jazz and Modernism: Changing Conceptions of Innovation and Tradition" in *Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz*, ed. Reginald T. Buckner and Steven Weiland, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991, p.134.
[30] Richard N. Albert, "The Jazz-Blues Motif in James Baldwin's Sonny's Blues," *College Literature*, Vol.11, No.2, (1984): 180.
[31] Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.386. Miles Davis also writes, "I loved Louis, but I couldn't stand all that grinning he did," Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles*, photo insert
[32] Louis Armstorng and Thomas Brothers, *Louis Armstrong: In his Own Words/Selected Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.216-17.

the entertainment orientation of swing and the artistic orientation of bebop. However, Bernard Gendron suggests that there were similar debates between swing modernists and New Orleans revivalists. They wanted "to make it possible, indeed to make it seem very natural, to refer to jazz as an "art" music and to construe certain genres of jazz as 'modernistic', 'experimental', 'formally complex', and 'avant-garde', even before bebop made its appearance."[33] As I argued earlier, in the same way, the construction of bebop in high cultural terms made it easier to rescue jazz from its negative representation, as it had often been associated with primitivism and lower cultural vales.[34] The music was perceived as a "vulgar" and "low" popular form (rarely as an art), largely because of its strong link to African American culture, and an African heritage.

Savery points out that Sonny's response to the mention of Louis Armstrong is one of the key points in the story, as Sonny does not value "that old-time, down-home crap," which he associates with musicians such as Armstrong, while the narrator rejects Sonny's "goodtime" music.[35] It is clear that Baldwin demonstrates the conflict between one jazz generation and another and one social (cultural) class and another – the bourgeois aspirations of the older brother and the more grounded life of Sonny – by using the image of Armstrong/Parker as a metaphor. However, here, Baldwin is not taking sides as he not only criticizes the narrator because of his unawareness of the newest changes in African American culture, but also his characterization of the hipster bebop musician critiques Sonny's negative attitude towards traditional jazz.

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[33] Bernard Gendron, "Moldy Figs," p.33-34.
[34] See Leonard Feather, *Inside Jazz*.
[35] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, and *Sonny's Blues*," p.167.

Ralph Ellison, in his 1962 essay "On Bird, Bird Watching, and Jazz" suggests that the bebop generation's refusal of the traditional entertainer's role, which came from the minstrel tradition, was understandable. Nevertheless by choosing Louis Armstrong and his music to attach, "they confused artistic quality with questions of personal conduct."[36] Ellison continues:

> By rejecting Armstrong they thought to rid themselves of the entertainer's role. And by way of getting rid of the role they demanded, in the name of their racial identity, a purity of status which by definition is impossible for the performing artist. The result was a grim comedy of racial manners; with the musicians employing a calculated surliness and rudeness ...and the white audiences were shocked at first but learned quickly to accept such treatment as evidence of "artistic" temperament. Then comes a comic reversal. Today the white audience expects the rudeness as part of the entertainment.[37]

Ellison also compares Armstrong to Parker. Parker, according to Ellison, never deals with the slip from the tragic to comic mode that Armstrong, a self-conscious clown rather than a sell-out, achieves.[38] Moreover, Armstrong is mentioned at the beginning of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), at the point at which the narrator relates himself to Armstrong: "Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he *is* invisible."[39] Here, Armstrong's image serves as a metaphor, to represent the invisibility of the narrator. In the novel, the narrator, who has just come from the South, struggles to inaugurate revolutionary activity among African American community to achieve equal rights. However, although he finds his identity as an African American, he ends

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[36] Ralph Ellison, "On Bird, Bird Watching, and Jazz," p.225 and "The Golden Age, Time Past," p.211. See Robert G. O'Meally, "Checking Our Balances: Louis Armstrong, Ralph Ellison and Betty Boop," *The Source: Challenging Jazz Criticism*, Vol.1 (2004): 43-58 and Krin Gabbard, "Paris Blues: Ellington, Armstrong, and Saying It with Music" in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p.297-312 for further discussion on Ellison's representation of Armstrong.

[37] ibid, p.225.

[38] ibid, p.227.

[39] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, p.11.

up in a basement and refers to a particular Armstrong recording of "(What Did I Do to be so) Black and Blue?" (1929), to throw an ironic light on racial issues in such lines as "My only sin is in my skin/What did I do to be so black and blue?"[40]

There is an intriguing story behind "Black and Blue." The song was written by Andy Razaf and Fats Waller for the Broadway musical *Chocolates'* in 1929. During the rehearsal, Dutch Schultz, one of the well known Jewish gangsters in New York, asked Razaf to add a final tune to the musical, "something with a little "colored girl" singing how tough it is being "colored."[41] Although Razaf himself did not know Dutch Schultz personally he was definitely acquainted with his reputation as a murderous mobster. Razaf told the story to his partner Fats Waller and, eventually, they composed the song with these new criteria in mind. During the musical, Edith Wilson first sang the song and as Razaf started singing, there was loud laughter in the audience, indicating that his daring venture had paid off.[42] Indeed, the most important aspect of "Black and Blue" lies in its lyrics, especially in the following part: "I'm white inside, it don't help my case/Cause I can't hide what is on my face, How will it end? Ain't got a friend, My only sin/Is in my skin, What did I do/To be so black and blue?." By singing the song out of its original context in the recording or a concert, it becomes a pure social commentary. With these lyrics, in Barry Singer's words, Razaf's "Black and Blues" "resolutely fractured the repressed traditions of black

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[40] Louis Armstrong, *Satch Plays Fats: A Tribute to the Immortal Fats* Waller, Colombia Records, Great Jazz Composer Series, 1955
[41] Barry Singer, *Black and Blue: The Life and Lyrics of Andy Razaf*, New York: Schirmer Books, 1992, p.217.
[42] ibid, p.218.

entertainment expression" in the United States.[43] Over the years, many scholars have referred to the song as America's first "racial protest song" -- but it is one which, according to Razaf's story, could be acceptable to whites, or was negotiating the small available area of freedom of expression expertly, as Ellison's character needs to learn to do.[44]

For my purposes, though, Armstrong's performance of the song is more crucial. Armstrong most recently recorded "Black and Blue" in a 1955 tribute album to Fats Waller. As I suggested earlier, that was the period in which Armstrong's facial expression was criticized by many bebop musicians. However, there is a dramatic use of irony in the song wherein the image of Armstrong is clearly contrasted with the signifying effect of the lyrics. Here, the narrator in Ellison's *Invisible Man* realizes that Armstrong was making a subtle social critique of the U.S. race environment by being invisible behind his minstrel type of facial expression. In contrast with the unnamed narrator's assumption in *Invisible Man*, Armstrong was aware that he was invisible while he was ironically asking for recognition of the humanity of African American people with his minstrel type of performance style. Indeed, in 1957, Armstrong openly protested against Governor Faubus of Arkansas, who banned African American children from entering a school, telling a reporter that he might cancel the tour of Russia for the U.S. State Department, "because the way they are treating my people in the South, the government can go to hell."[45]

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[43] ibid, p.218.
[44] ibid, p.218.
[45] Garry Giddins, *Satchmo: The Genius of Louis Amsrtrong*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1988, p.127.

Interestingly, in 1956, Armstrong played "Black and Blue" in front of Kwame Nkrumah, the prime minister of Ghana. During the 1950s, the U.S. State Department sent jazz musicians – including bebopper Dizzy Gillespie – abroad to demonstrate American democracy in action. Louis Armstrong was one of the musicians in the State Department tour. During his visit in Ghana, Armstrong performed at the Old Polo Ground, where almost one hundred thousand people showed up for the concert including the country's leader Kwame Nkrumah and many of the ministers in the Ghanaian cabinet. Throughout his stay in Ghana, Armstrong was overwhelmed with the empathy he felt for the Ghanaian people.[46] During the performance, Armstrong suddenly stopped playing in the middle of a song and said: "I know it now. I came from here, way back. At least my people did. Now I know this is my country too."[47] According to Garry Giddens (one of the biographers of Louis Armstrong), the significance of these words was clear: "After all, my ancestors came from here and I still have African blood in me."[48] Penny M. Von Eschen suggests that: "It was perhaps Armstrong's sympathy with the struggles of black people in a state slowly marking its way out of colonialism that inspired him to play Fats Waller's "Black and Blue."[49] As Armstrong sang "Black and Blue," the prime minister had tears in his eyes.[50] There is a great irony here. Louis Armstrong performed "Black and Blue" in his most criticized stage pose with the "handkerchief over his head, grinning in the face of white racism," (or in Ellison's words in his "*make-believe* role of clown,") while he was representing American democracy

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[46] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, London: Harvard University Press, 2004, p.60.
[47] Robert Raymond, *Black Star in the Wind*, London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1960, p.241.
[48] Garry Giddins, *Satchmo*, p.125.
[49] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World*, p.61-62.
[50] Garry Giddins, *Satchmo*, p.125.

abroad, but also, apparently experiencing a solidarity that was quite at odds with his ambassadorial mission.[51]

Bebop has been examined by many scholars as an isolated phenomenon of popular culture or 'high art music' rather than viewed as part of an African American artistic tradition which took its roots from a continuous innovation of other African American cultural expressions such as the blues, ragtime, New Orleans dance music and swing.[52] For instance, French critic Hugue Panassié was one of the writers who rejected the very idea of bebop as part of the jazz tradition.[53] Indeed, by not considering bebop as part of the jazz tradition, the critics also refused the very idea that bebop could be a part of the African American vernacular tradition.[54] Amiri Baraka took a different stance, by claiming, "In jazz tradition, no reliance on European tradition or theory will help at all."[55] Though bebop, as a rejection of the status quo, was a sharp break in jazz history it was still part of the African American vernacular tradition and one should conceive of bebop according to the "standards of judgment and aesthetic excellence that depend on our native knowledge and understanding of the underlying philosophies and local cultural references that produced blues and jazz in order to produce valid critical writing or commentary about it."[56] Scott DeVeaux reminds us, for instance, that Parker and Gillespie themselves

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[51] Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.386 and Ralph Ellison. *Shadow and Act*, p.227.
[52] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, p.3.
[53] See Hugue Panassié, *Hot Jazz: The Guide to Swing Music* (1934), New York: Greenwood Press, 1970.
[54] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.138-142.
[55] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, New York: Quill, 1967, p.20. See also Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry," *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol.22, (2002): 49-70.
[56] ibid, p.20.

also began their careers playing improvisations in the swing bands.[57] Here, the significance of Louis Armstrong should be emphasized again. Armstrong was one of the important innovators in the jazz tradition along with the contribution of his unique improvisational style on the recording sessions of *Hot Five and Seven* he introduced scat singing, which is vocalizing as employed by many jazz singers who create the equivalent of an instrumental solo using only the voice. According to the legend, Armstrong dropped the lyric sheet while singing during his recording of "Heebie Jeebies" in 1926.[58] Armstrong's scat singing not influenced only singers like Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald, but also the singing of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker during the rise of bebop in New York.

In "Sonny's Blues" the flashbacks give the story its structural principle since the narrator employs this narrative tool to return to his past whenever something in the present reminds him of his earlier relationship with his younger brother Sonny. For instance, the reason why the narrator looks after his brother, even though they do not share any common interest, is explained in the details of these flashbacks. We learn that the narrator's uncle is killed by drunken white men in a car while they are trying to scare him. His mother tells the story and expects him to take care of Sonny even though she knows that her request is not possible to accomplish:

> You got to hold on to your brother," she said, "and don't let him fall, no matter how evil you gets with him. You are going to be evil with him many a time. But don't you forget what I told you, you hear?
> "I won't forget," I said. "Don't you worry, I won't forget. I won't let nothing happen to Sonny."

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[57] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, p.7.
[58] Louis Armstrong, Best of *Hot 5 and Hot 7 Recordings* (2002), Sonny Music.

> My mother smiled as though she were amused at something she saw in my face. Then, "You may not be able to stop nothing from happening. But you got to let him know you's *there*.[59]

Moreover, we should also acknowledge that the narrator recently lost his little daughter. The great personal loss and the guilt for not fulfilling his mother's request lead him to look for Sonny. Provoked by these facts, he observes his students and for the first time realizes that their laughter is disillusioned rather than good-humoured. In that very moment, he starts to gain a better understanding of his own personality as he gains a more profound insight into African American people's anguished life. Baldwin implies that as the narrator feels empathy for the people surrounding him, he gains access to a genuine identity and achieves self-knowledge.

However, in another conversation, which takes place in the present day time frame of the story as the brothers watch an emotionally impressive street choir singing an old spiritual "God Be With You Till We Meet Again," Sonny, referring to one of the singers in the group, says "it struck me all of a sudden how much suffering she must have had to go through – to sing like that. It's repulsive to think you have to suffer that much."[60] Sonny, here, shows an empathy which has transformed his music. The brother responds in a practical manner by saying, "But there's no way not to suffer – is there, Sonny?" [61] The narrator has essentially missed Sonny's point. We understand that the narrator still has not come to an understanding of the African American community where music is crucial as a communal communicational tool to share the experience. Sonny's response "I believe not, but that's never stopped anyone

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[59] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.60.
[60] ibid, p.71.
[61] ibid, p.71.

from trying, has it?" shows what he understands about the relationship between music and the African American community.[62]

In another significant flashback when Sonny stays with the narrator's wife Isabel, and Sonny sits by the piano, for days and nights, Isabel tells the narrator: "it wasn't like living with a person at all, it was like living with sound."[63] Her recollection of Sonny's music reveals her lack of understanding: "And the sound didn't make any sense to her, didn't make sense to any of them – naturally. They began, in a way, to be afflicted by this presence that was living in their home. It was as though Sonny were some sort of god, or monster."[64] Here, even though the narrator has yet to come to an understanding of Sonny's music, he still feels that Sonny's music is somehow important for them: "The silence of the next few days must have been louder than the sound of all music ever played since time began."[65] The narrator begins to realise things about Sonny that cue him into complex levels of cultural understanding.

Baldwin's representation of Sonny as "some sort of god, or monster" is no accident. He clearly implies that European Americans' representations of jazz, whether white hipsters or 'squares,' were wrong because they did not identify the music with an African American culture and tradition. Baldwin criticizes the white hipsters' representation of Parker as existentialist hero, as in Norman Mailer or Jack Kerouac or as it is here "some sort of god" and, because of Parker's heroin addiction and his racial identity the "square" people's image of

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[62] ibid, p.71.
[63] ibid, p.64.
[64] ibid, p.65.
[65] ibid, p.66.

Parker as a "monster."[66] Of course here Baldwin also challenges white intellectuals' celebration of jazz as an expression of masculine strength or sexual power.[67] His characterization of a hip black bebop musician might be "tough" and marginalized, but he is sensitive enough to respond to a spiritual that he hears from the streets of Harlem. Regardless of his distance from his family, there is still a deep connection, a tradition that binds them together. While Sonny is a heroin addict, he is still "a good boy" who had never "turned hard or evil or disrespectful, the way kids can, so quick, especially in Harlem."[68]

For Baldwin, the hate and rage that arises in response to white racism can tear a person apart as it did for his character Rufus in *Another Country*.[69] In his essay, "Notes of a Native Son," first published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1955, Baldwin describes his own feelings as "dread, chronic disease... which is a kind of blind fever": "There is not a Negro alive who does not have this rage in his blood – one has the choice, merely, of living with it consciously or surrendering to it."[70] The necessity of making this choice had forced itself upon him, but eventually "As for me, this fever has recurred in me, and does, and will until the day I die."[71] Baldwin managed to get away, he escaped from the inner effects of his own smoldering anger: "that my life, my real life, was in danger, and not from

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[66] See Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," p.268-288 and Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957), London and New York: Penguin Books, 1972.
[67] For instance, Kerouac associated Parker with Buddha in his 1959 book of poetry *Mexico City Blues*. Choruses 239 to 241 are dedicated to Parker. "Charlie Parker looked like Buddha. Charlie Parker, who recently died... 'Wail, Wop' Charlie burst. His lungs to reach the speed. Of what the speedsters wanted. And what they wanted. Was his eternal Slowdown." Scott Saul writes that "In 'Sonny's Blues,' James Baldwin took a nearly opposite tack from Norman Mailer. While 'The White Negro' explained the hipster as a pathological individual whose violence was necessary to the culture as a whole, Baldwin sought to normalize the hipster by drawing him into the meshes of family, vocation, and tradition," *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.72.
[68] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.57.
[69] James Baldwin, *Another Country*, New York and London: Penguin Books, 1962.
[70] James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son," p.133.
[71] ibid, p.133.

anything other people might do but from the hatred that I carried in my own heart."[72]

In *Another Country*, the jazz drummer Rufus's music seems incapable of offering enough to counter his sense of worthlessness, and his failed relationship with the white woman Leona. His brutality eventually sends her to an asylum, an event that plagues Rufus, leading him to jump from the George Washington Bridge early in the narrative.[73] Like Rufus, Sonny struggles with the direction his life is headed as he tries to make a living as a struggling bebop musician. However, Sonny does not fail and finds a voice for his repressed pain and smoldering fury. Here, Baldwin offers a choice for black hipsters, and suggests that self-creation is important: one does not have to be self-destructive or a heroin addict and one can be healed from his/her pain through community.

Music, for Baldwin, is something not only African Americans need in order to gain social and political freedom but also something white Americans must understand in order to find their "true" identity. Baldwin linked the destiny of America to the destiny of the African American population. White Americans

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[72] ibid, p.135.

[73] The representation of jazz in *Another Country* is interesting in that in the first chapter two different scenes are presented, one in the present where jazz is failing in its communicative role ("The music was loud and empty, no-one was doing anything at all, and it was being hurled at the crowd as a malediction... they blew what everyone had heard before") and one which Rufus remembers positively, in which the audience is responsive (and mixed "The colored people were having a good time because they sensed that, for whatever reason, this crowd was solidly with; and the white people were having a good time because nobody was putting them down for being white"). As the young saxophonist plays his impassioned solo, which seems to be asking: "Do you love me?" the other musicians support him in their different ways "but each man knew that the boy was blowing for every one of them." James Baldwin, *Another Country*, p.5-6 and 8. Archie Shepp composed a song entitled "Rufus," a reference to Baldwin's character in the book, for his first album, *Four for Trane* (1964). See Ben Sidran, *Talking Jazz: An Oral History, 43 Jazz Conversations*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1995, p.252-253.

must understand African Americans in order to achieve true liberation. In his influential book-length essay *The Fire Next Time* (1963), Baldwin writes,

> White Americans seem to feel that happy songs are happy and sad songs are sad, and that, God help us, is exactly the way most white Americans sing them... [They] do not understand the depths out of which such an ironic tenacity comes, but they suspect that the force is sensual, and they are terrified of sensuality and do not any longer understand it.... Such a person interposes between himself and reality nothing less than a labyrinth of attitudes. And these attitudes, furthermore, though the person is usually unaware of it (is unaware of so much!), are historical and public attitudes. They do not relate to the present any more than they relate to the person. Therefore, whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves.[74]

Here, Baldwin's essential message was simple: America did not have a "Negro problem" but a white problem. For Baldwin, without the acknowledgment of black citizenship, it is impossible to achieve American democracy. Even more, without understanding African American humanity, white Americans can never realize their own. For Baldwin, the solution is possible only through true understanding, acceptance and love. White Americans must learn to accept and love themselves and others, but in order for this to happen, blacks must also play an important role: "And if the word *integration* means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our [white] brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it... We cannot be free until they are free."[75] Thus, even though "White Negroes" such as Mailer and Kerouac assumed that they had more affinity with black hipsters, they simply miss the point in their stress on existential individualism. And the way they represented jazz and black life lost its true meaning and became little more than a reflection of their own desires and fantasies. Contrary

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[74] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 42-43.
[75] ibid, p.17.

to his contemporaries, Baldwin, here, offers the concepts of community, love, and tradition for the African American hipster rather than simply an alternative way of approaching sex and death. I will explore the details of the white writers' representation of jazz and its musicians in the next chapter, but here I will move to an examination of the relationship between bebop and the blues in the story.

The core element of the story is revealed here, and that is 'genuine *Love*.' This love can only be achieved through an identification of the individual with the experience/s of another person or group of people, and by taking into consideration the tradition/s and heritage of that community, in this case African American music. Therefore, in order to understand who he really is, the narrator needs to develop a communal identity first. He must come to terms with his communal past and identify himself with an African American experience. However, first the individualistic narrator needs to gradually discover his brother's life and music.

Baldwin, as a strategy, uses the blues as a key metaphor for achieving genuine love and identity. For him the blues is the key element for an African American person to gain his identity, just as he discovered his own identity when he was writing his first novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1956) in Paris.[76] While writing it he listened to Bessie Smith records, and, in Baldwin's words, "in Europe she helped to reconcile me to being a 'nigger.'"[77] In the story, Baldwin used bebop as a revision of the blues that allows for commentary on the disappointing social condition of African American people. As Baraka writes:

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[76] See Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual*, Harvard and London: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 236 for further discussion.
[77] James Baldwin, "The Discovery of What it Means to Be an American," p.172.

"What made bop strong is that no matter its pretensions, it was hooked up solidly and directly to the Afro-American blues tradition, and therefore was largely based in the experience and struggle of the black sector of the working class."[78] Therefore, Baldwin's story deals not only with the crossroads between the blues and jazz, but deals with the *need* for a new form of black cultural expression that relates to the urban lives of African Americans, and, significantly, to the larger context of African American history. Baldwin, here, not only recognizes that modern jazz is part of an African American cultural tradition, in which live performance is central to the creation of music, but also the metaphorical potential that a bebop improvisation might represent the historical experience of racism, group solidarity, and a new development of African American expressive culture.

In the final scene of "Sonny's Blues," the narrator agrees to go to the jazz club with Sonny, and the brothers finally talk about Sonny's drug addiction. This scene is significant because it reveals the extent of the narrator's change, particularly when compared with the flashback of his last conversation with his mother: "You got to hold on to your brother, and don't let him fall, no matter how evil you gets with him."[79] Moreover as the brothers talk about the nature of suffering and how different people try to overcome it – through music, through drug use, or through denial, – the narrator begins to understand that neither his way (the denial of his brother and the bebop generation) nor Sonny's drug addiction are effective ways to *free* them from the disappointing social condition they have been facing in urban life. Moreover in the same conversation between

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[78] Amiri Baraka, "War/Philly Blues/Deeper Bop" in *Selected Plays and Prose of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones* (1988), New York: Morrow, p.241.
[79] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.60.

the brothers, Sonny describes his loneliness and alienation to the narrator and reveals the reason for his drug addiction in a way in which the music seems to be a way "to listen" to himself or to what he, as an artist, wants to say about his identity:

> "It's terrible sometimes, inside," he said, "that's what's the trouble. You walk these streets, black and funky and cold, and there's not really a living ass to talk to, and there's nothing shaking, and there's no way of getting it out – that storm inside. You can't talk it and you can't make love with it, and when you finally try to get with it and play it, you realize *nobody's* listening. So *you've* got to listen. You got to find a way to listen."[80]

Sonny, like the narrator, also realizes that the addiction is really just a false promise that has driven him to the depths of despair. Here, another theme of "Sonny's Blues" is revealed: tragedy and suffering can be transformed into a communal art form such as the blues or jazz. However, as Sonny implies, it requires listening and true understanding as the blues is used as a catalyst for the story.

Here, before I deal with Sonny's actual performance, it may be useful to look at a much earlier account of a blues performance in Langston Hughes' poem "The Weary Blues" (1923). In his poem Hughes presents the blues musician coming alive only when he plays the blues. When the musician is no longer at his piano, in Hughes words, he sleeps "like a man that's dead."[81] And whenever the musician plays the blues again "he made that poor piano moan with melody" which is coming from the "black man's soul."[82] Baldwin, like Hughes, sees that the individual suffering is the prior necessity – particularly, for instance, when

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[80] ibid, p.72.
[81] Langston Hughes, "The Weary Blues" in *Selected Poems* (1959), New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1999, p.33.
[82] ibid p.33.

the narrator describes the "awful relationship" between a musician and his/her instrument:

> He has to fill it, the instrument, with breath of life, his own. He has to make it do what he wants it to do. And the piano is just a piano. It's made out of so much wood and wires and little hammers and big ones, and ivory. While there's only so much you can do with it, the only way to find this out is to try; to try and make it do everything.[83]

Although, Baldwin was critical of some of Hughes' poems and was particularly dismissive of Hughes' "The Weary Blues," which, in his view, copied rather than attempted to develop the rhythm of the blues, both writers linked the blues to suffering.[84] Baldwin and Hughes seem to be saying that years of struggle living as an oppressed minority destroys vital parts of one's identity and that identity can be reclaimed only through the creation of an original art work, in this case, the blues.

However in "Sonny's Blues," the blues is not used only as an individual basis as a way to gain one's identity or to overcome or transcend one's misery in society but also as an art of communion and in this way could be compared with Sterling Brown's poem "Ma Rainey."[85] It is an expression where one uses the skill achieved by practice and experience in order to reach toward other members of the community. This is an important detail, which actually

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[83] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.72.

[84] In his review of *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Baldwin wrote in the *New York Times*, "Every time I read Langston Hughes I am amazed all over again by his genuine gifts - and depressed that he has done so little with them." James Baldwin, "Sermons and Blues" (Review: *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* by Langston Hughes), (March 29, 1959): 1. It is significant that Baldwin, similar to Hughes, also uses the blues as a resource in his works because they were part of the city and the people who were being altered by the city. See also Herb Boyd, *Baldwin's Harlem: A Biography of James Baldwin*, New York and London: Atria Books, 2008, p.37.

[85] Though it is outside the scope of this thesis, a comparison could be made of Brown's more communal and rural view of the blues and the wider range of blues types in Langston Hughes' work. In addition Hughes' response to the political climate of the Sixties in the long work *Ask Your Mama* demonstrates that Hughes' range is much greater than this brief discussion would suggest.

distinguishes Baldwin's representation of a hip jazz musician from Mailer's "existential hero." Compared to Mailer, Baldwin illustrates the link between the musician and the audience to associate the music with the African American experience. Therefore, the blues has a communal function as it tells the stories of African American people and helps them to heal from the misfortunes of their lives. During the performance in the jazz club, the narrator sees that "Sonny's fingers filled the air with life, his life. But that life contained so many others."[86] The music is transformative and makes the narrator remember the tragedies that happened to him, such as the death of his own daughter and the sorrow of his wife. Moreover he also makes a connection between the music and the other family members – the two dead family members: "I saw my mother's face... I saw the moonlight road where my father's brother died."[87] Most significantly the music resonates with a more general African American history and African American experience: "And I was yet aware that this was only a moment, that world waited outside, as hungry as a tiger, and that trouble stretched above us, longer than the sky."[88] Here, Baldwin reminds his readers that the brutal aspects of African American history, the racist violence and its effect on African American people, still exist in urban life. That experience and history transform from one generation to another with African American music as the music is used as a communicational tool in that particular community.

According to Amiri Baraka, this connection between black music and African American experience is essential: "But also its sound, its total art face, carries the lives, history, tradition, pain, and hope, in the main of the African-American

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[86] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.77.
[87] ibid p.78.
[88] ibid p.78.

people, not accidentally or as a form of sterile hat tipping but as a *result*, significant result of all those categories. The music is part of black life that identifies it as what it is, African-American."[89] However, contrary to Baraka's attention to the link between the blues and bebop that represents the foundation of the new black identity and the liberation movement's new politics of "blackness," as portrayed in his play *Dutchman*, in "Sonny's Blues," this particular connection signifies the music's historical communal function rather than its political power.[90]

Baraka analyzed the blues as a site of African American resistance and a historical repository of black struggle. In other words, he distinguished the blues as a sign of blacks' status as the cultural outsider in America.[91] On the other hand, in the Baldwin story, as I argued earlier, the blues functions as an art of communion, which represents the aching story of the whole African American history from slavery to *freedom*. Saul writes that "in Baldwin's account, every black character – no matter how religious or secular, no matter how hip or square – is linked by a chain of suffering, one that binds them in mutual empathy."[92] Thus, for Baldwin neither Charlie Parker nor Bessie Smith were explicitly racial or political symbols and Louis Armstrong, without a doubt, was not "the white man's nigger."[93] These musicians were the people who were part of that community who experienced the segregation and similar racial violence

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[89] Amiri Baraka, "Interview with Amiri Baraka" in *The Beat Vision: A Primary Source Book*, ed. Marcela Breton, New York: Plume, p.320.
[90] Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*, p.34-35.
[91] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p. 294. See also "The 'Blues Aesthetic' and the 'Black Aesthetic': Aesthetics As the Continuing Political History of a Culture," *Black Music Research Journal* 11, No.2, (1991): 101-109.
[92] Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.73-74.
[93] Richard N. Albert, "The Jazz-Blues Motif in James Baldwin's Sonny's Blues" in *College Literature*, Vol.11, No.2, (1984): 180.

in everyday life. And they were, in an Ellisonian sense, some kind of preachers who "helped to give [African American] lives some semblance of wholeness."[94]

Ellison articulated the blues' wider significance best when he described the blues quality of fellow novelist Richard Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*.[95] In an essay entitled "Richard Wright's Blues" (1945), Ellison defined the blues not so much in musical terms but more broadly as "an impulse" in African American cultural life "to keep the painful details and episodes of brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism."[96] The blues impulse, then, conveys a heroic, survivalist sensibility towards the cold, hard, low-down facts of African American life but which is expressed in a tragicomic sense of lyricism. Similar

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[94] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.243. Like Ellison, Albert Murray refuses the idea that the blues directly reproduces its socio-political context. He insists that social historians put too much importance on the literal meaning of the blues' lyrics that suggest suffering or social critique. According to Murray, to a certain extent, one should treat the existential or metaphysical aspects of the blues rather than its political implications. Thus, for Murray, in the blues, there is a ritualistic stylization of experience that addresses the material conditions of life without speaking directly of them. Murray writes that the "primary emphasis is placed upon aesthetics not ethics. What is good in such circumstances is the beautiful, without which there can be no good time. What counts is elegance (not only in the music and the dance movement but in the survival technology inherent in the underlying ritual as well)." Thus, wherever the blues are performed, even in the recordings, the aesthetic elements of the African American life are transformed. And with that transformation the blues singer embodies the past and the future of his/her audience like a high priest in the temple, one "whose performance is not only to drive the blues away and hold them at bay", but to do so by evoking "an ambience of Dionysian revelry in the process." Like Ellison, Albert Murray also invokes the blues as a "central source for an indigenous American," and he criticizes the scholars who consider the blues as a form of protest. He rather takes the blues as a form of art and a key metaphor for the American culture, throughout which African American experience is diffused. Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1976, p.17, 42 and 68. See also Albert Murray, *The Hero and the Blues*, New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

[95] Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945.

[96] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.256-257.

to Ellison, Baldwin also writes that "in all jazz, and especially in the blues, there is something tart and ironic, authoritative and double-edged."[97]

However, Ellison and Murray often criticized Baldwin because of the way he described Harlem in most of his writings. For instance, in criticizing Baldwin's depiction of Harlem in *Another Country*, Murray wrote, "what Baldwin writes about is not really life in Harlem. He writes about the economic and social conditions in Harlem, the material plight of Harlem," not its full "life."[98] Indeed, for Baldwin, unlike for Ellison and Murray, Harlem is not a measure of "Negro renaissance" but rather where the full measure of equality, citizenship and democracy is denied. But, although Baldwin referred to African American music only obliquely in many of his novels, he, indeed, used a wide selection of music of form as a central expression of African American culture in "Sonny's Blues." Baldwin, moreover, believed in development as well as tradition. This is demonstrated in his representation of Harlem accompanied by a variety of sounds, including spirituals, gospel, the blues and jazz.[99] For Baldwin even

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[97] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, p.42.

[98] Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans: Black Experience And American Culture*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1970, p.149 See Horace A. Porter, *Jazz Country: Ralph Ellison in America*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001, p.61-72 and Herb Boyd, *Baldwin's Harlem: A Biography of James Baldwin*, p.191-192 for further discussion. See also David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography, and Amazing Grace: A Life of Beauford Delaney*, New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1998.

[99] It is interesting that Baldwin did not differentiate between musical styles. Rather he took them as one that carries the message from one generation to another. If we look at the historical meaning of the blues, we see that the blues was often associated with the lower class blacks and their unsophisticated social world. Furthermore the blues was also considered sinful, or the devil's music and people were always being discouraged from listening to the blues by the black churches. To rescue the blues and its negative representation, some researchers associated the blues with the sacred forms of black expression, the spirituals, in the 1970s. For instance, according to James H. Cone, the blues is the secular version of the spirituals, which he calls the blues as "secular spirituals." He maintains in his book *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (1972) that because not all African Americans might accept the divine promises of the Holy Bible as a satisfactory answer to the circumstance of the black existence, they prefer to sing secular songs as a solution to the dilemma of black suffering and as a way of securing psychological adjustment to continue to exist in America. He remarked in his conclusion: "We must view them [the blues and the spirituals] as two artistic expression of the same black

bebop, dismissed by Ellison, with all its complexity tells the story of low-down facts of African American life.[100] Indeed Baldwin's choice of Parker as the main representative of African American experience in Harlem is more accurate than Ellison's preference for Armstrong. Bebop's revolutionary changes to the basic structure of jazz and jazz as an experience were something deeply upsetting to Ellison's entire philosophy. Ellison believed that the lyrical ritual elements of jazz vanished with the bebop revolution and jazz was turned into a meaningless noise. In "Harlem is Nowhere" he complains that "The lyrical ritual elements of folk jazz have given way to the near-themeless technical virtuosity of bebop, a further triumph of technology over humanism."[101] Significantly, Baldwin connects the sound of bebop to the exuberance and lyricism of the jazz tradition, underlining the significance of bebop for that particular tradition.

In David Yaffe's recent book *Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing* (2006) Baldwin is criticized because of his representation of jazz music and musicians in "Sonny's Blues." Yaffe writes:

> When the narrator finally hears the music, it is during a performance of "Am I Blue?" by the Jewish Tin Pan Alley tunesmith Harry Aks, a song made famous by Ethel Waters, It was not a tune bebop musicians tended

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experience." However, it is not necessary to agree with Cone's essentialist invocation of a single metaphysical reality of black experience to gain from his definition a key insight into why the blues were condemned as the Devil's music: it is because they draw upon and integrate sacred consciousness and thus, cause a serious threat to religious attitudes. As a theologian, Cone merely demonstrates the blues with his theological perspectives, which are originated in a pervading ideological concern of religious-political principles. He employs his beliefs and theological viewpoints to rescue the blues from its negative representation. James H. Cone. (1972) *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*. New York: Orbis Books, 2003, p.97 and 130. See also Rod Gruver "The Blues as a Secular Religion" (1970) in *Write me a Few of your Lines: A Blues Reader*, ed. Steve C Tracey, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, p.222-31 and Giles Oakley, *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978, P.111.

[100] See Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.221-233 and Horace A. Porter, *Jazz Country*, p.32-42.

[101] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.300.

> to play, and in addition to Waters, the most well-known version was Louis Armstrong's, dismissed by Sonny as "that down home crap."[102]

Here, it seems more likely that Yaffe was simply wrong in his assumptions. On the contrary, the role of the song in the story and Baldwin's choice of Harry Akst/Grant Clarke tune "Am I Blue?" as a final number of Sonny's set is significant because that is the song in which Sonny achieves his own version of the blues. Likewise, during the performance of this song, the narrator realizes what the blues is about: "Now these are Sonny's blues."[103] It is true as Yaffe mentions, that "Am I Blue?" became famous through Louis Armstrong, dismissed by Sonny in the early part of the story, but, having strategically associated the older brother with Louis Armstrong and the younger with Charlie Parker to emphasize the distinctions, Baldwin, returns at the end of the story to these associations to show the readers the narrator's new understanding about the relationship between music and African American community, and cancels out the opposition as Sonny plays the song popularised by Louis Armstrong. Moreover, by playing that specific song, the core element of the story is completed. Baldwin's concept of "*Genuine Love*" can only be achieved through an identification of the individual with the experience/s of another person or group of people as it is in "Sonny's Blues." Both individuals, even though the brothers come from different backgrounds, understand each other and different aspects of the African American experience.

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[102] David Yaffe, *Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 45.
[103] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.77.

Yaffe further suggests that Baldwin's choice "Am I Blue?" illustrates an allegiance with certain Jewish intellectuals through jazz and it was not a song beboppers tended to play.[104] Contrary to Yaffe's description, "Am I Blue?" is a popular song of the sort that bebop musicians loved purposefully to twist into "all sorts of unconventional harmonic and rhythmic shapes."[105] Baldwin's intention is to underline that the essentials of the blues idiom are present in bebop musicians' reinvention of standardized compositions. As Savery points out, one main aspect of bebop was "renewed emphasis on the blues."[106] This may seem surprising, given the fact that the blues came to symbolize the primitivist expectations of the white audience during the bebop movement, but many bebop musicians refused to play the blues in expected ways, without rejecting them out of hand.[107] As Dizzy Gillespie states in his autobiography: "Technical differences existed between modern jazz and blues musicians. However, modern jazz musicians would have to know the blues."[108] To this extent, bebop was simply the latest evolutionary development in African American music and the form of the music was simply a response to the "artificial melody had made into jazz" by white big bands during the swing era.[109]

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[104] David Yaffe, *Fascinating Rhythm*, p.45.
[105] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz*, p. 83 See also Garry Giddins' essay "Charlie Parker (Flying Home)," Giddins shows Parker's ability to invent new musical ideas on George Gershwin's "Embraceable You" during a 1947 recording session for Dial Records.
[106] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, and *Sonny's Blues*," p.167.
[107] Eric Porter, "Dizzy Atmosphere," p.430.
[108] Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.294. See also Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.294 Baraka asserts: "Bebop also re-established blues as the most important Afro-American form in Negro music by its astonishingly contemporary restatement of the basic blues impulse."
[109] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p. 294. Max Roach also explains why bebop musicians change the harmonic and rhythmic structure of the standard songs: "When we got downtown, people wanted to hear something they are familiar with, like "How High the Moon," "What is This Thing Called Love?" can you play that? So to playing these things, the black musicians recognized that royalties were going back to these people, like ASCAP, the Jerome Kerns, the Gershwins. So one revolutionary thing that happened, they began to write parodies on the harmonic structures. Which was really revolutionary. If I have to play it, I will put my own

Richard Albert argues that Baldwin preferred "Am I Blue?" "rather than one of his favorites by Bessie Smith" to emphasize that "tradition is very important, but that change is also important (and probably inevitable) and that it builds on tradition, which is never fully erased but continues to be an integral part of the whole."[110] To this extent, we might guess the reason why Baldwin chose "Sonny's Blues" rather than "Sonny's Bebop" as a title. It is because Baldwin wishes to alert the reader to the fact that "the development" is as important as "the tradition" in African American culture. As Baraka states in his controversial essay: "The Changing Same" (1966): "THE BLUES IMPULSE transferred... containing a race, and its expression. *Primal* (mixtures... transfers and imitations.) Through its many changes, it remained the exact replication of The Black Man In The West."[111] Of course, Baldwin, perhaps in contrast to Baraka, never accepts a black essentialism, seeing race in terms of cultural differences. Indeed, for him, race is not more than a political reality and *genuine love* is more important than colour.[112]

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particular melody on that progression and people would ask, "Say, what is that?'" Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *Dizzy*, p.204.

[110] Richard N. Albert, "The Jazz-Blues Motif in James Baldwin's 'Sonny's Blues'" *College Literature* 11.2 (1985): 184.

[111] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, p.180.

[112]James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, p.64. Baldwin wrote after a meeting he had with Elijah Muhammed at the latter's South Side Chicago mansion: "I would have no choice, if it came to it, but to perish with them, for (I said to myself, but not to Elijah), 'I love a few people and they love me and some of them are white, and isn't love more important than color?'" Indeed, many of the future Black Arts Writers discredited Baldwin as an African American writer, not because he ignored Black issues, but because he was homosexual. For instance, Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* argues that homosexuality is a sickness, just as are "baby-rape or wanting to become head of General Motors," Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, New York: Dell Publishing, 1968. Baldwin responded in an essay "No Name in the Street," "I felt that he [Cleaver] used my public reputation against me both naively and unjustly, and I also felt that I was confused in his mind with the unutterable debasement of the male – with all those faggots, punks, and sissies, the sight and sound of whom, in prison, must have made him vomit more than once," p.546.

Baldwin reveals these commonalities in the story's concluding scene, in which the narrator comments on the band's performance of the song "Am I Blue?" "Creole began to tell us what the blues were about. *They were not about anything very new. He and his boys up there were keeping it new*, at risk of ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make *us* listen."[113] Here Baldwin applies, strategically, the collective first person pronoun "us" rather than using the singular "me," to take the reader's attention from the individual level to a more communal one, indeed, to the African American community as a whole. The narrator realizes that Sonny's blues allows him to establish a deeper connection to the struggles of African American people: "Sonny's fingers filled the air with life, his life. But that life contained so many others."[114] It is significant to note that Baldwin's use of jazz performance as a controlling metaphor to examine questions of heritage, society, and racial relations in America and a means of communication between people significantly contrasts to white American writers' use of jazz performance as a metaphor for anomalous, wild individual genius. This difference may derive from Baldwin's understanding of modern jazz as a collective, rather than individual, achievement. I will be dealing with these issues in the next chapter.

Baldwin uses the concept of freedom to express the connection between the music and African American history as the narrator realizes that the music might help African American people to gain their freedom in the USA: "Freedom

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[113] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.77 [my italics].
[114] ibid p.77.

lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did."[115] Scott Saul writes

> The art of the blues revives the community by allowing its members to share formerly private struggles... For Baldwin, the power of jazz lay not in the soloist's authority or even in the camaraderie across the bandstand: it was the music's capacity to suggest that collective emancipation as a kind of shared empathy.[116]

Freedom is a word loaded with significance in the late 1950s not only because it speaks to the Civil Rights Movement, but it also points forward to the Free Jazz movement of the 1960s.[117] Therefore Baldwin's concept of freedom, indeed, is a political one that has cultural and traditional implications. His concept of freedom may be gained through "cautious listening," "true understanding" and "genuine love" within the African American community.

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[115] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.78.
[116] Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.76.
[117] Pancho Savery, "Baldwin, Bebop, and *Sonny's Blues*," p.173.

The Negro looks at the white man and finds it difficult to believe that "grays" – a Negro term for white people – can be so absurdly self-deluded over the true interrelatedness of blackness and whiteness.[1]

CHAPTER III

BIRTH OF THE HIP: WHITE APPROACHES TO JAZZ

In this chapter, which focuses on Bebop, I shall argue that white and black Americans (critics, scholars, hobbyists, and writers) often differed fundamentally in their understanding of jazz as an African American cultural resource and show how this difference was closely linked to the issue of race and the changing perspectives on it in the social, economical and political spheres of the time. As I discussed in previous chapters, African American writers like Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Amiri Baraka, and James Baldwin were much more deeply inspired and informed by African American music's – in this case jazz's – substantive emotional, intellectual and cultural resources. In significant contrast to their black contemporaries post-WWII, white writers seized upon jazz as a source of personal freedom and self-fulfillment, and Beat

[1] Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, New York: Modern Library, 1995, p.109.

writers and "white Negroes" used jazz to fashion aesthetics of alienation and "nonconformism."

From the late-1940s through the mid-1960s, the intellectual, artistic and musical communities of New York came together in Greenwich Village, which was the setting where black and white members of these communities socialized, and interacted in the coffeehouses, most significantly in the jazz clubs. Mary Louise Pratt refers to places such as the Village as "contact zones" which are "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other."[2] According to Amiri Baraka this interaction between white and black Americans is significant as a rare occasion of "positive" interaction between black and white cultures and the artistic scene around Greenwich Village was the prime signifier of this new culture of race relations: "In Greenwich Village, for instance, a place generally associated with artistic and 'social freedom,' based on willing (though sometimes affected) estrangement from the narrow tenets of American social prescription, young Negro musicians now live as integral parts of that anonymous society to which the artist generally aspires."[3] In his famous – perhaps infamous – essay "The White Negro" (1957), Norman Mailer also states that the interaction between black and white Americans throughout American history was completed in Greenwich Village: "In such places as Greenwich Village, *a ménage-a-trois* was completed – the bohemian and the juvenile delinquent came face-to-face with the Negro, and the hipster was a fact in

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[2] Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession 91*, New York: MLA, (1991): 34. See also R. Mark Hall and Mary Rosner, "Pratt and Pratfalls: Revisioning Contact Zones," in *Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004, p. 95-110 for a critique.

[3] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p. 233. Of course Baraka's observation is only valid when he was known as LeRoi Jones and was in his transitional period (1963-1965).

American life."[4] Such reports suggest the importance of Greenwich Village, as well as Harlem, as a place where whites and African Americans could interact and socialize.[5]

As Greenwich Village became home to New York bohemians including the white hipsters and the Beat writers famous in the annals of nonconformity, the place earned a reputation as the place to live for the avant-garde and "the coolest of the cool." Crucially, artists and intellectuals – such as Jack Kerouac and Norman Mailer – took their sociological, political and artistic cues from African American bebop musicians who shared the atmosphere of the village, and Bebop music and culture has a significant role within this interaction. As Roy Carr puts it, "the hipster was born with bebop."[6] For the intellectuals of Greenwich Village the encounter between themselves and African American jazz musicians (with an appreciation and a romanticisation) was often formative.

Post-WWII white hipsters and their representation of jazz and jazz musicians needs to be seen in the context of earlier romanticising and primitivising views of African American culture.[7] As Andrew Ross explains in his book, the white appreciation and stereotypical imagination regarding black culture – in this case the representations of African American jazz music and musicians – is far from new as "such a conventional encounter, between black performance and white

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[4] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," p.273.
[5] See Lewis MacAdams, *Birth of the Cool: Beat, Bebop, and the American Avant-Garde*, New York: Free Press, 2001.
[6] Roy Carr, Brian Case, and Fred Deller, *The Hip: Hipsters, Jazz and the Beat Generation*, New York: Faber and Faber, 1986, p.11.
[7] Primitivist attitudes towards African American music can be found throughout jazz criticism, but see, for instance, Hugues Panassié, *Louis Armstrong*, New York: Scribners, 1971 and Robert Goffin, *Jazz: From the Congo to the Metropolitan*, New York: Doubleday, 1944.

appreciation, had, in part, governed social and cultural relations in the world of music entertainment ever since the first minstrel show over a century ago."[8]

Ross continues:

> Consequently, questions about imitation, and (the romanticizing of) authenticity, while they relate primarily to African-American vernacular traditions, are also part and parcel of the long transactional history of white responses to black culture, of black counter responses, and of further countless and often traceless negotiations, tradings, raids and compromises.[9]

We may assume that the jazz saxophonist and clarinetist Milton Mesirow, aka Mezz Mezzrow, was the first white hipster (or in Mailer's term white Negro) in print. Mezz Mezzrow was born in Chicago on November 9, 1899 as the son of a Russian-Jewish immigrant. He remarks in his autobiography *Really the Blues* (1946) that his life time ambition was "racial conversion": "I was going to be a musician, a Negro musician, hipping the world about the *blues* the way only Negroes can."[10] However, he felt that if he wanted to be a "Negro musician" he not only needed to become an African American through learning the culture but also he somehow needed to change his skin colour. As a matter of fact what makes Mezzrow unique in adopting African American music, slang and social modes is that he actually believed that he physically turned black: "search all the histories of personal "negrification" as you will, you'll never turn up another case of a man who after extended immersion in the ghetto came to believe he had actually, physically, turned black."[11]

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[8] Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, New York and London: Routledge, 1989, p.67.
[9] ibid, p.67.
[10] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues* (1946), New Jersey: Carol Publishing Group Inc., 1990, p.18.
[11] Bernard Wolfe, "Afterword to Really the Blues" in *Really the Blues*, p.389.

Mezzrow was imprisoned for the first time when he was sixteen years old, for stealing somebody else's car. This was the place where he started to learn and play jazz as he remarked in his autobiography: "Music School? Are you kidding? I learned to play the sax in Pontiac Reformatory."[12]

> We were Jews, but in Cape Girardeau they had told us we were Negroes. Now, all of a sudden, I realized that I agreed with them. That's what I learned in Pontiac. The southerners had called me a "nigger-lover" there. Solid. I not only loved those colored boys, but I was one of them – I felt closer to them than I felt to whites, and I even got the same treatment they got.[13]

This passage clearly indicates Mezzrow's need to be identified and accepted as black by other people. The political solidarity with African American people, which Mezzrow has, is based on shared experiences of racism and discrimination and, for Mezzrow, this is necessary in order to be acknowledged as an African American. His identification as an African American should not only be accepted by black people but also he somehow needs to be accepted as black by white people who are hostile to African American culture which seems to be an impossible task for Mezzrow to accomplish. Of course, Mezzrow's declaration of racial conversion is the essential turning point in *Really the Blues,* as his transformation can never be completed in the world outside the text. In fact it can only be narrated as a successful performance that is a mythical identity.[14] Gayle Wald writes "Mezzrow stakes the authenticity of his narrative on his ability to compel the reader's belief in the naturalness of his own performance."[15] Wald continues:

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[12] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.3.
[13] ibid, p.18.
[14] See Daniel Stein, "The Performance of Jazz Autobiography" in *Blue Notes: Toward a New Jazz Discourse*, ed. Mark Osteen, *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 37.1/2 (Spring/Summer 2004): 173-199.
[15] Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000, p.72.

> Passing is... a social practice, predicated not merely on the "performance" of identity (that is, on the recognition of identities as socially produced), but on others' ability or willingness to affirm that this performance is also "real": that one "is," so to speak, the identity that one claims to be.[16]

Because of all these needs, Mezzrow employs the blues as the cultural framework for his belonging to the African American community. The representation of the blues in the text is a vital part of Mezzrow's performance of his idealized constructs of African American authenticity, as he needs to come to an understanding of the blues in order to identify himself as a "real" African American jazz musician. Mezzrow discovers the blues while he is imprisoned in Pontiac. The experience he gains in prison allows him to establish authenticity as a jazz performer in spite of his middle-class Jewish background. He writes:

> Night after night we'd lie on the corn-husk mattresses in our cells, listening to the blues drifting over from the Negro side of the block... when somebody would start chanting a weary melody over and over until the whole block was drugg. The blues would hit some colored boy and out of a clear sky he'd begin to sing them:
>
> *Oooooohhhhh, ain't gonna do it no mo-o,*
> *Oooooohhhhh, ain't gonna do it no mo-o,*
> *If I hadn't drunk so much whisky*
> *Wouldn't be layin' here on this hard flo'.*
>
> Those chants and rhythmic calls always struck a gong in me... the white man is a spoiled child, and when he gets the blues he goes neurotic. But the Negro never had anything before and never expects anything after, so when the blues get him he comes out smiling and without any evil feeling... those few simple riffs opened my eyes to the Negro's philosophy more than any fat sociology text book ever could... the colored man doesn't often get sullen and tight-lipped and evil because his philosophy goes deeper and he thinks straight. Maybe he hasn't got all the hyped-up words and theories to explain how he thinks. That's all right. He knows. He tells about it in his music.[17]

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[16] ibid, p.72.

[17] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.3.

Even though his humbleness towards African American people is admirable, he applies here the stereotypical images of "whiteness" and "blackness" in order to support his so-called racial authenticity. On the one hand, Mezzrow romanticizes the image of the black man whose cultural practices are always "natural." On the other hand he criticizes the white man's identity as "unnatural" or "inauthentic," which is reflected in his lack of an understanding of the blues. While he uses this ideological opposition of these two figures to support his performance of "blackness" Mezzrow also invests "positive value in cultural stereotypes of the 'happy-go-lucky' Negro."[18] Similar to his comparison between the attitudes of the white man and the black man, he uses the blues to support his performance of "blackness." Baraka writes:

> The blues is an extremely important part of jazz. However, the way in which jazz utilizes the blues 'attitude' provided a musical analogy the white musician could understand and thus utilize in his music to arrive at a style of jazz music. The white musician understood the blues first as music. But seldom as an attitude, since the attitude, or world-view, was one that was not consistent with the making of jazz.[19]

In the case of Mezzrow, though, the blues is a vital part of his whole performance in his autobiography. It apparently became a fundamental medium for his construction of "blackness" as he believed that "blackness" is essential to successful jazz musicianship. How Mezzrow applies the blues in his textual performance justifies his ambition of being a "real" African American jazz musician and it provides evidence for his perception of the blues not only as a

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[18] Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line*, p.67.
[19] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.153.

style but, as Baraka affirms, as an "attitude." Thus, Mezzrow establishes the blues as a cultural medium of both his own performance of black authenticity and his idiom of resistance to white superiority.

Baraka's distinction between blues and jazz is useful, and it is worth looking at how Mezzrow represents jazz and jazz musicians in his text in order to demonstrate his understanding of African American culture and in particular, African American jazz and its musicians. Throughout the book Mezzrow distances himself from those white people and musicians who did not come to an understanding of African American music, and he does this, as I demonstrated earlier, by using the ideological opposition of stereotypical images of "blackness" and "whiteness" to support the production of his own racially and politically performed identity. Mezzrow criticizes the white musicians who consider themselves jazz musicians:

> I never believed that you had to practice and study hell a lot to play real New Orleans, The secret is more mental than technical. If you want to play real jazz, go live close to the Negro, see through his eyes, laugh and cry with him, soak up his spirit. That's the best way to prepare for a recording; it's what I do. If you're not prepared to do that, then ok, play your own music but don't pretend that it has anything to do with jazz. Make up a new name for what you're doing, just to keep the record straight.[20]

In this particular passage, Mezzrow underscores his version of the mythical potential of jazz, which is a life force close to the human spirit, but this means that he explicitly considers jazz to be a basic and primitive entity rather than considering African American music the creation of particular aesthetic forms as Ellison or Baraka did, in their different ways – significantly when he

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[20] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.353.

confirms in another part of his autobiography that the "real authentic jazz" was "primitive, solid, rocking and weaving."[21]

For Mezzrow, jazz is a music that requires almost no training or education. It is the music that comes out of a black man's soul, as if he was born with it. Scott Saul argues that "Jazz music for Mezzrow gave expression to all those body parts, those organs, that high culture never recognized – not the head and the heart, but the lungs, muscles, tongue, blood, sweat glands, and intestines."[22] According to Mezzrow, jazz was always about rebellion, a rejection of middle-class respectability those "chumps who have to rise and shine each morning, slaves to the alarm clock."[23] For instance, he develops a series of binary oppositions between his sister Helen who is upper-middle class and Jewish and the blues singer Bessie Smith to underline his departure from his upper-middle class roots. He blames his sister for "whitening" Smith's lyrics and as Wald points out contrasts, "his sister's stultifying conformity and philistinism with Smith's 'native' genius."[24] For Mezzrow, a jazz musician represents a rebellious stance against the norm at the standard of the society. For him the jazz musician was "an anarchist with a horn."[25] However, contrary to what Mezzrow assumes about the image of the jazz musicians, for many black musicians such as Duke Ellington, musicianship was just as often a symbol of respectability and an opportunity of social mobility in the African American community.

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[21] ibid, p.323.
[22] Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.42.
[23] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *The Really the Blues*, p.234.
[24] Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line*, p.70-71.
[25] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.234.

One of the aims of *Really the Blues* lies in Mezzrow's championing of the mythical power of New Orleans jazz. Similar to his performance of an African American identity, he presents the world of New Orleans jazz as something that one can only understand if one is an insider. According to him, the only "real" authentic jazz is New Orleans style – and it is superior to the rest because it is primitive, untouched by the whites and has the "true" African American improvisational and communal values – "unlike Chicago, Dixieland, swing, jump or Debussy or Ravel."[26] Thus, Mezzrow needed to become an "authentic" African American New Orleans jazzman in order to speak "the ageless language of New Orleans" and understand the rest of jazz history.[27] In fact, he metamorphoses into a list of New Orleans jazz musicians: "I was Jimmy Noone and Johnny Dodds and Sidney Bechet, swinging down Rampart Street and Basin Street and Perdido Street, down through Storyville, stepping high and handsome, blowing joy and bounce of life through my clarinet."[28] Mezzrow finally becomes "authentic" and "other." Thus, the issues of identity and class dissolve into the autobiography's self-mythology. Mezzrow, then, had the right to reject all other innovations in jazz music and culture such as swing and bebop since he assumed that they did not have the African American collective improvisational qualities and that they lacked a black communal knowledge. He found swing music inauthentic and commercial, as it was the "whitening"

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[26] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.323. Similar to Mezzrow's primitivist approach, many influential writers of the 1930s and 1940s "sentimentally touted the earliest forms of jazz as the most authentic forms, on the assumption that they were its most intuitive forms, least disciplined versions." Lee B. Brown, "Postmodernist Jazz Theory: Afrocentrism, Old and New" in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol.57, No.2, (1999): 236. For instance, in such earlier versions of jazz, Hugues Panassié writes, one can directly feel the "soul of the black musician," Hugues Panassié, *Louis Armstrong*, p.54.

[27] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.322.

[28] ibid, p.322.

version of African American jazz.[29] He refused bebop because it was "frantic, savage, frenzied, berserk – it's agony of spit-up, hacked-up personality. It's got nothing at all common with New Orleans, which by contrast is dignified, balanced, deeply harmonious, highly-spirited."[30]

There is a great irony in this passage reflected in his autobiography as a whole. While Mezzrow demonstrates in detail the changes in African American culture that come with the migration from the South to the North through "jive" language, he ignores the very idea of bebop music, which is attached to those particular African American expressive practices. Mezzrow basically misses an important point that the hipster argot and jive cast were actually identified as the source of modern jazz.[31] In other words, while Mezzrow celebrates jive language and its social and cultural connotations for African Americans, he fails to associate jive language with bebop music and its culture by representing that music as "frantic, unbalanced and savage."[32] Further, paradoxically, while Mezzrow championed New Orleans style against all other innovations in jazz and considered himself one of those musicians in that era – for instance, imagining himself living a dream of collective improvisation, becoming one of those musicians in an entire New Orleans musical community – his beloved New Orleans clarinetist Sidney Bechet rejected him as one of them. Bechet writes in his autobiography *Treat it Gentle* (1960):

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[29] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.327.
[30] ibid, p.327 There is irony lying in this passage, as all the qualities he identifies in modern jazz became the main reason why all other white hipsters associated with it in their oppositional stance against the US social and cultural "mainstream" in the 1950s. Mezzrow's description of bebop is very similar to Jack Kerouac's representation of Modern jazz as "frantic." I will deal with the hipsters in 1950s and Jack Kerouac later.
[31] See Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.206-233.
[32] ibid, p.327.

> [Mezzrow] had a feeling for what he was doing; he had a way of walking *around* what was being done. But still, when a man is trying so hard to be something he isn't, when he's trying to be some name he makes up for himself instead of just being what he is, some of that will show in his music, the idea of it will be wrong.[33]

Mezzrow, by writing *Really the Blues*, helped to establish a hipster ethic and mythology via his own performance of 'blackness' which became a readily available model for post-war white male intellectuals whose later romanticized appropriations of African American culture functioned as an instrument for their development of a critique of the US social and cultural "mainstream." Writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg read Mezzrow's autobiography and the book turned out to be a source of their intellectual and artistic motivation.[34] Allen Ginsberg testified that the experience of reading the book at Columbia University's bookstore in the mid-1940s was to him the first signal of hip culture that preexisted before his generation.[35] Moreover, *Really the Blues* also helped to inspire Norman Mailer's famous or infamous "White Negro" essay of 1957, and one may easily find reworkings of many of Mezzrow's views in the essay such as Mailer's notion of jazz as "orgasm."[36]

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[33] Sidney Bechet, *Treat it Gentle: An Autobiography* (1960), Cambridge and New York: Da Capo Press, (2002), p.168-169. One may find great similarities between Mezzrow's description of the blues and his version of New Orleans jazz. Both styles are described as continuous with the slavery of the past, thus, authentic and essential to the soul of "the Negro." Mezzrow's depiction of these two African American musical expressions is also very similar to black New Orleans musician Sidney Bechet's description of jazz music. In the very beginning of *Treat it Gentle* (1960), where Bechet writes on the roots and the development of jazz music, he goes far back beyond the specific origin of jazz into its indistinct beginning during the slavery period. Moreover, the black man's "way of saying something" goes further back than slavery, "as far back as Africa, in the jungle, and the way the drums talked across the jungle, the way they filled the whole air with a sound like the blood beating inside himself," p.3-4.

[34] Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line*, p.59.

[35] Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.42.

[36] Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line*, p.59.

Before dealing with Norman Mailer's essay and his representation of jazz and African American culture in terms of philosophy of American existentialism (the hipster attitude) it will be useful to look at Anatole Broyard, as he was one of the first critics to bring together jazz, the hipsters and post WW-II subcultures in Greenwich Village.[37] Throughout his life, Broyard was always a controversial character. Even though he was born in New Orleans to parents who were both categorized as African American and raised in a working-class "colored" community, Broyard himself was hesitant to discuss his ethnic background during most of his life. Because of this, he was often accused of being a black man "passing" as white by some critics, who condemned him for not openly supporting African American culture and identity.[38] Significantly, while Mezzrow built his musical career out of his claim of becoming black, Broyard rejected his African American identity to succeed in passing as a white journalist and writer and became a staff book reviewer and essayist for the *New York Times* in 1970s. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his book *Thirteen Ways of Looking a Black Man* (1997), points to the impasse created by binary definitions: "he lived a lie because he didn't want to live a larger lie; and Anatole Broyard, Negro writer, was that larger lie."[39]

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[37] See Broyard's unfinished memoir, *Kafka was the Rage*, New York: Carol Southern Books, 1993.

[38] See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "White Like Me," *New Yorker*, (June 17, 1996): 66-81; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*, New York: Random House, 1997, p.180-215 and Rachel F. Moran, *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance* (2003), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p.158.

[39] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*, p.192. Gates also writes: "Broyard was born black and became white, and his story is compounded of equal parts pragmatism and principle. He knew that the world was filled with such snippets and scraps of paper, all conspiring to reduce him to an identity that other people had invented and he had no say in. Broyard responded with X-Acto knives and evasions, with distance and denials and half-denials and cunning half-truths," p.181.

During his early career, Broyard wrote some articles on African American culture, even though none of them were directly related to the socio-economical conditions of African Americans in U.S. society. For instance, at the end of the 1940s he wrote an intriguing essay, "Portrait of the Inauthentic Negro" in which he directly responded to Sartre's Book *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate* (1948) and identified the types of African American inauthenticity: acceptance of white stereotypes, "minstrelization" and "romanticization."[40] He claimed that the central problem for African Americans was not white racism but "their own authenticity."[41] However, authenticity, in Broyard's early writings, was rather a conflicted term. While Broyard's logic of "authenticity" was very similar to the Sartrean sense of "authenticity" which is the personal acceptance of one's freedom and self-acceptance, he wrote about the "authenticity" of African Americans without any apparent self-consciousness of his own identity.[42] For example, while he apparently imitated the walk and the style of the African American hipster in Greenwich Village, he saw the hipster subculture as a failure to the African American community in his essay, "A Portrait of the Hipster" (1948).[43] Henry Louis Gates jr. brilliantly writes in his article "White Like Me" (1996):

> Society had decreed race to be a matter of natural law, but he wanted race to be an elective affinity, and it was never going to be a fair fight. A penalty was exacted. He shed a past and an identity to become a writer – a writer who wrote endlessly about the act of shedding a past and an identity.[44]

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[40] Anatole Broyard, "Portrait of the Inauthentic Negro," *Commentary* 10, (July 1950): 56-64. See also Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), London: Pluto Press, 1986 and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker, New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
[41] Anatole Broyard, "Portrait of the Inauthentic Negro," p.59.
[42] Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.52-53.
[43] George Cotkin, *Existential America*, Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003, p.196.
[44] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "White Like Me," *New Yorker*, (June 17, 1996): 66. In this respect one may find similarities between Anatole Broyard and James Weldon Johnson's protagonist in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), New York and London: Penguin Books,

In "A Portrait of the Hipster," Broyard describes the hipster as "the illegitimate son of the Lost Generation."[45] In his view, the African American hipster is *nowhere* because he is always the minority, as opposed to those "who owned the machinery of recognition."[46] Thus, in order to define his identity, the hipster draws from and reproduces his "anger." According to Broyard, the hipster originates "a philosophy of *somewhereness*" called *jive*: "to agree or to harmonize."[47] With this philosophy, the hipster develops a language, which helps him "to re-edit the world with new definitions... jive definitions." This new language helps him to discharge his aggression and rage to the mainstream American society "*symbolically*", and the hipster reconciles himself within his new society. Broyard, here, defines the hipster culture as an opposition to the mainstream US society, anticipating Mailer's depiction of the hip\square binary opposition in his essay "The White Negro."

For Broyard, "the language of jive" is the sign of the black man's aggression and it is full of sexual metaphors. He explains that the hipster applied certain types of sexual metaphors into the language to release such aggression/tension, and "gave of himself in aggression of one kind or another, sex was subsumed under aggression, and it supplied a vocabulary for the mechanics of aggression. The use of the sexual metaphor was also a form of irony, like certain primitive

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1990. In the book, The Ex-Colored Man is forced to choose between embracing his black heritage and culture by expressing himself through the African American musical genre ragtime, or by "passing" and living obscurely as a middle-class white man. At the end of the novel, the ex-colored man reveals his feelings about his position: "Sometimes it seems to me that I have never really been a Negro, that I have been only a privileged spectator of their inner life; at other times I feel that I have been a coward, a deserter, and I am possessed by a strange longing for mother's people," p.153.

[45] Anatole Broyard, "A Portrait of a Hipster," *Partisan Review* 15, (January-June 1948): 721. It is worth noting that the hipster is a very masculinist idea, so the idea of an illegitimate son is a powerful one.

[46] ibid, p.721.

[47] ibid, p.721.

people's habit of parodying civilized modes of intercourse."[48] Broyard provides himself with a safe and oddly apolitical path that enables him to write about African American culture as "primitive," as he never deals with the conditions of the African American hipster's "aggression" sufficiently and of the actual social conditions giving rise to them. Rather, he simply deals with the African American hipster ethic to support his own performance of "whiteness."[49] It is also significant to note how Broyard deals with jive language unconstructively in comparison with Mezzrow, who sees it as a response to new historical conditions and possibilities. Broyard's account of the development is strange. The evolution is psychological, and there is no sense of the cultural creativity associated with the language, which has been seen by so many others.[50]

In the essay, Broyard divides the history of jazz into three periods; the blues, jazz and bebop, and he associates these stages with Picasso's works, which are also often categorized into "periods." According to Broyard, the blues is the equivalent of Picasso's "blue period": "it dealt with lives that were sad, stark, and isolated."[51] Jazz was like the early analytical cubism of Picasso, and bebop is the third period, namely "synthetic cubism." For Broyard, bebop represents

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[48] Anatole Broyard, "A Portrait of a Hipster," p.722.

[49] There are also great similarities between Anatole Broyard and Coleman Silk the main character of Philip Roth's book *The Human Stain* (2000). Silk, who is a professor of classical literature at Athena College, is a black man who has been passing for white. The book was made into a film of the same title by Robert Benton in 2003. In the movie the striking line "you are white as a snow, but you live like a slave" invites parallels to Broyard's situation of living a lie.

[50] See Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristic of Negro Expression" in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p.298-311 and "Story in Harlem Slang" (1942) in *Riffs and Choruses: A New Jazz Anthology*, ed. Andrew Clark, London and New York: Continuum, 2001, p.339-347. See also Ben Sidran, *Black Talk*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1971, p.110-111 and Robert S. Gold, *Jazz Talk*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975 for more on black language and creativity. See also James Haskins and Hugh F. Butts, *The Psychology of Black Language*, New York: Hippocrene Books, 1993 and Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986.

[51] Anatole Broyard, "A Portrait of a Hipster," p.724.

the hipster's desire not "to be regarded as a primitive."[52] With the bebop era, "all the best qualities of jazz – tension, élan, sincerity, violence, immediacy – were toned down."[53] The bebop orchestration "has the perfunctory quality of vaudeville music" and the improviser is "the great Houdini."[54]

> [The bebop musician] no longer had anything relevant to himself to say – in both his musical and linguistic expression – he had finally abstracted himself from a real position in society... He got what he wanted; he stopped protesting, reacting, He began to bureaucratize jive as a machinery for securing the actual – really the *false* somewhereness. Jive, which had originally been a critical system, a kind of Surrealism, a personal revision of existing disparities, now grew moribundly self-conscious, smug, encapsulated, isolated from its source, from the sickness which spawned it.[55]

First of all, for Broyard, the African American hipster could only be successful as long as he remained unrecognized. To do that, he needed to be regarded as a "primitive" musician but never accepted as an artist. Broyard attacked the hipster for his self-conscious approach of "abstracting" jazz, but as Saul says "it's difficult to imagine other artists and intellectuals being attacked for modeling a heightened self-consciousness or resorting to "abstraction" in art."[56] While Broyard had been explicitly criticizing the aesthetics of bebop as "bureaucratized" jazz he simply ignores the very idea of bebop's aesthetic challenge to the entertainment principle of swing or, according to his categorization, "the early analytical cubism of Picasso."

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[52] ibid, p.724.
[53] ibid, p.724-725.
[54] ibid, p.725.
[55] ibid, p.726-727.
[56] Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.54. Dave Hickey writes, "I asked myself these questions: Is a painting by Jackson Pollock or a film by Stan Brakhage high art? Yes? Well, if so, could the art of Pollock or Brakhage exist without the imprimatur of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker? Could I have understood it without its being informed by the cultural context of American jazz? Without the free-form exuberance of bebop? My answer: No way, José. And, conversely, could bebop exist without Jackson Pollock and Stan Brakhage? You betcha." Dave Hickey, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, Los Angeles, Art Issues. Press, 1997, p.100.

Secondly, like Hugue Panassié, who was one of the writers who rejected the very idea of bebop as part of the jazz tradition, Broyard failed to understand the social and cultural significance of bebop as a subculture in the African American musical tradition and significantly, in the African American community.[57] Like Mezzrow, Broyard represented both the blues and jazz as violent and primitive and bebop as "meaningless" but it is significant that there is not one single reference to African American life, culture or tradition – rather making an impractical comparison between the history of jazz music and Picasso's periods – in his discussion of black musical history. As I mentioned earlier, according to Broyard the African American hipster was "nowhere" and if he was "somewhere" the hipster was "back in the American womb. And it was just as unhygienic as ever."[58] However, Broyard himself, because of his lack of personal authenticity, was actually "nowhere." As Richard H. King asked: "To whom is Broyard speaking and for whom? To what extent was his essay a self-critique for the benefit of those who knew his own racial biography?"[59]

Defining the hipster, Broyard writes:

> He always wore dark glasses, because normal light offended his eyes. He was an underground man, requiring especial adjustment to ordinary conditions; he was a lucifugous creature of the darkness, where sex, gambling, crime and other bold acts of consequence occurred... Jive music [jazz] and tea [marijuana] were the two most important components of the hipster's life.[60]

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[57] See Hugue Panassié, *Hot Jazz: The Guide to Swing Music* (1934), New York: Greenwood Press, 1970.
[58] Anatole Broyard, "A Portrait of a Hipster," p.727.
[59] Richard H. King, *Race, Culture and the Intellectuals 1940-1970*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004, p.67-68.
[60] Anatole Broyard, "A Portrait of a Hipster," p.723.

The similarities to Ellison's Rinehart are obvious,[61] but this definition also directly helped to inspire Mailer to write his "The White Negro" as one may find many similar descriptions in his essay. Similar to Broyard's depiction of the hipster; Mailer associates his white Negro with marijuana, sex, jazz and the world of violence. He identifies "the white Negro" with the underground world of the hipsters in order to liberate himself from the squares that are "trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society."[62] He creates an ideological opposition in US society as either "one is hip or one is square (the alternative which each generation coming into American life is beginning to feel), one is a rebel, or one conforms..."[63] Thus, in order to rebel against the norms of the white American bourgeoisie, Mailer celebrates the "psychopath" as existential hero, for whom the marginal "Negro" plays a messianic role. According to him, the African American man provides the psychopathic hipster personality because of oppressive social conditions through the centuries. Thus, Mailer, at the very beginning of "The White Negro," portrays African American life as very similar to the account given by Richard Wright in his autobiography *Black Boy* [64]:

> Any Negro who wishes to live must live with danger from his first day, and no experience can ever be casual to him, no Negro can saunter down a street with any real certainty that violence will not visit him on his

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[61] When the unnamed protagonist buys himself a pair of dark glasses, he is mistaken for someone named Rinehart, especially when he adds a wide-brimmed hat to his disguise. The narrator marvels at how a hat and dark glasses enable him to hide in plain sight, and he decides to exploit his newfound invisibility, p.388-400.

[62] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," p.272.

[63] ibid, p.272.

[64] Ralph Ellison, associating Richard Wright's *Black Boy* with the blues, writes, "in that culture the specific folk-art form which helped shape the writer's attitude toward his life and which embodied the impulse that contributes much to the quality and tone of his autobiography was the Negro blues." Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.78. However, similar to Mailer, Richard Wright fails to present the cultural and traditional aspects of African American life in his autobiography. James Baldwin has accused Wright of believing that "in Negro life there exists no tradition, no field of manners, no possibility of ritual or intercourse..." James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone" in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, p.27.

> walk. The cameos of security for the average white; mother and home, job and the family, are not even a mockery to millions of Negroes; as they are impossible.[65]

However, the rest of Mailer's description of African American life is greatly romanticized and fantasized in order to transform the data of African American oppression and discrimination into his idea of existential freedom. Mailer's conception of what it means to be an African American has been roundly rejected by many African Americans.[66]

> The Negro has the simplest of alternatives: live a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger. In such a pass where paranoia is as vital to survival as blood, the Negro has stayed alive and begun to grow by following the need of his body where he could. Knowing in cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasure of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm.[67]

Mailer simply misunderstood the survival mechanisms that African Americans had been forced to develop in white America, as their existence in the face of American racism was in Cotkins' words not a source of "joyous transcendence but a daily grind of humiliation and suffering."[68] In "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" (1961) James Baldwin complains about the romanticism imposed upon African American people and their lives: "I have tried... to convey something of what it felt like to be a Negro and no one had been able to

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[65] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," p.273.
[66] See James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" (1961) in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, p.292. With respect to Norman Mailer and Jack Kerouac's view of African American males, Gary T. Marx writes, "Their conception of what it means to be a Negro probably differs greatly from the experience of most black people," "The White Negro and the Negro White," *Phylon*, Vol.28, No.2, (2nd Qtr., 1967): 175.
[67] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," p.273.
[68] George Cotkin, *Existential America*, p.194.

listen: they wanted their romance."[69] He also criticized the white obsession with the image of the African American man as a "walking phallic symbol."[70] Further, Baldwin saw Mailer's characterization of the black man's sexuality and his ability to achieve a more powerful orgasm because of his closeness to death, as absurd, asking: "Why malign the sorely menaced sexuality of Negroes in order to justify the white man's own sexual panic?"[71] Baldwin saw Mailer's glorification of the orgasm as a way of avoiding the terrors of African American life.[72]

It is clear that Mailer, by writing "The White Negro," re-produces the mythical narrative where African Americans and their culture are perceived as primitive and uncultivated. As Joseph Wenke writes in his book *Mailer's America* (1987): "The White Negro [is] essentially an act of myth-making, a work of fiction."[73] However, what Mailer says of black people is far from new. Eric Lott has reminded us that white people constructed an identity for themselves based on the differences between them and African Americans. Further, his examination of nineteenth-century minstrelsy and the operation of blackface have explained white males' attraction to African American culture as a mixture of desire and fear. Thus, the white men who were attracted to African American people and their culture express their attraction in images that simultaneously revealed their unawareness of African American cultural resources.[74] Mailer simply utilized the knowledge of the historically constructed images of black men for his own

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[69] James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," p.292.
[70] ibid, p.294.
[71] ibid, p.298.
[72] ibid, p.277.
[73] Joseph Wenke, *Mailer's America*, Connecticut: University of Connecticut, 1987, p.71.
[74] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1993.

imaginative purposes. Mailer's essay became a holy bible for the mid twentieth-century white hipsters and the followers of the beat generation, and Andrew Ross uses the essay as an example of how "white intellectuals' projected fantasies of an atavistic Other, each trying to outdo the other in their articulation of a correct white hipness."[75]

According to Mailer's essay, "jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad..." and it directly comes out of African American suffering.[76] However, here one should ask what Mailer means by jazz. Is it modern jazz that reflects African American misery? Why isn't blues used as a more appropriate black expression that mirrors the African American social conditions such as homelessness and joblessness? His description of African American life – "The cameos of security for the average white; mother and home, job and the family, are not even a mockery to millions of Negroes; as they are impossible" would fit the long experience of black people in the South as well as the Northern ghettoes, and as expressed in the blues or later in soul, but Mailer seems not to have found the blues intellectual and interesting enough to be the source of his existentialist hero.

Though there is no explicit sense of bebop musicians as artists in Mailer's "The White Negro," as he never distinguishes between jazz styles or periods, the time when the essay was published, and his activities as an essayist for *The Village Voice* would suggest that he would share the general lionization of the modern jazzman – though he is more interested here in his transgressive potential than

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[75] Andrew Ross, *No Respect*, p.68.
[76] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," p.273.

his artistic context or community.[77] Certainly some of the bebop musicians perceived themselves as artists and not as entertainers and were generally seen as such. The description by Hettie Jones, the white wife of LeRoi Jones in her autobiography *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990) gives us an idea of why Mailer preferred jazz music and culture rather any other African American expression as a stance for his white negro (and may also illustrate Baraka's own attraction, as a member of the same cosmopolitan Village set): "The young black musicians I met didn't differ from other aspiring artists. And jazz music was complicated, technically the most interesting I'd heard, the hardest to play."[78]

Mailer, as a young intellectual, erroneously desired to associate the socio-economic and the racial conditions of African American people with modern jazz musicians and their militant, socially aware and artistically professional stance. What Mailer did not mention was the fact that despite bebop musicians' militant and socially aware posture, the black masses preferred to listen to rhythm and blues rather than bebop. As Scott de Veaux points out in his book *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (1997) "Rhythm and blues, not bebop, became the soundtrack for the urban black experience of the late 1940s and 1950s."[79] This view was endorsed by Gerald Early who argues that there was a polarization between the rhythm and blues celebrated by the "finger-

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[77] Mailer, together with Ed Fancher and Dan Wolf, started to publish *The Village Voice*, which began as an arts and politics oriented weekly newspaper initially distributed in Greenwich Village in 1955. See Lewis MacAdams, *Birth of the Cool: Beat, Bebop and the American Avant-Garde*, London: Scribner, 2001, p.199.
[78] Hettie Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, New York: Grove Press, 1990, p.35.
[79] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, p.26.

popping," "good-timing" black audiences and bebop that attracted the young urban intellectuals.[80]

According to Mailer, jazz represents the African American male's expression of the "quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm" and his medium of communication to tell the world "I feel this, and now you do."[81] From this description one can distinguish Mailer's contribution to the dominant white racial construction of jazz as it lies in his complete romanticization of African American culture and African American life. For Mailer, the only connotation of jazz is an expression of personal emotions such as revealing sorrow and anger. However, Mailer fails to present the communal values in jazz and fails to treat jazz as a cultural and traditional entity. Furthermore, Mailer's representation of modern jazz music and musicians is very similar to Mezzrow's depiction of African American music and musicians: "Maybe he hasn't got all the hyped-up words and theories to explain how he thinks. That's all right. He knows. He tells about it in his music.[82] Like Mezzrow, Mailer simply looked for symbols of his rebellion and found them in African American society by misrepresenting African American jazz music and musicians to fit his own political and cultural needs.

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[80] Gerald Early, *Tuxedo Junction: Essays on American Culture*, Hopewell, New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1989, p.296.
[81] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," p.272.
[82] Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, p.14.

In fact, though, Mailer is not alone in associating black music with existentialism. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* had already presented this idea, and in a later interview in 1964 he asserted that "There is an existential tradition within American Negro life and, of course, that comes out of the blues and spirituals."[83] Shelby Steele has argued that "the source of Ellison's existentialism is not Sartre or Camus, but the Afro-American blues."[84] Until the end of *Invisible Man*, the protagonist exists in the sense that he allows the others to characterize the course of his life and he looks to the world outside for meaning and direction of his life. The invisible man only takes responsibility for his own life when he ends up in an underground cellar, listening to the Louis Armstrong performance of the song "(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue?." The space underground and the example of Louis Armstrong enables the invisible man to free himself from the pressures and constraints of the outside world, the space and the image in which "he is free to redefine himself."[85] Thus, Ellison, in other words, manages to combine a Sartrean sense of existential freedom and the more culturally rooted African American existential tradition by using the blues to explore the metaphor of invisibility.[86]

Responding to Ellison's idea of invisibility, Mailer offers up the following rather strange criticism: "*Invisible Man* insists on a thesis which could not be more absurd, for the Negro is the least invisible of all people in America."[87] In fact, Mailer claims, "most whites can no longer see each other at all... their

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[83] Andrew Geller, "An Interview with Ralph Ellison" (1964), in *C.W.E Bigsby*, ed, Black American Writer, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969, p.167.
[84] Shelby Steele, "Ralph Ellison's Blues" in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, Modern Black Literature, December, 1976, p.161.
[85] ibid, p.161.
[86] See Chapter 2 for a detail discussion of the song.
[87] Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself*, p.432.

experience is not as real as the experience of the Negro."[88] However, Ellison's protagonist is invisible "simply because people refuse to see" him.[89] People only see his "surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except" him.[90] The invisibility that Ellison emphasizes is an existential stance. Thus, one should ask the question here whether Mailer has seen "the Negro" at all, or whether "the Negro" he has been dealing with is a fantasy of his imagination. Further, Mailer not only fantasizes the image of "the Negro" but also, as I showed earlier, he simply misinterprets his music, the socio-cultural functions and structures of the blues and jazz which serve the nature of his existentialist hero.

In *Existential America* (2003) George Cotkin claims that Mailer's "The White Negro" "should be read as a jazz riff..."[91] However; Mailer did not pay attention to the actual music produced by the jazz musicians who are supposed to be the inspiration of his essay. Significantly, there are no references to any jazz musicians in "The White Negro." Instead, he simply applies jazz as an attitude of "really cool cats" in which orgasm is the ultimate and sole aim. Moreover, Mailer constructed jazz musicians to be "tough" hypersexual African American men and similarly he preferred being known as a "tough guy" who served in WW-II rather than introducing himself as a Brooklyn Jew who went to Harvard. Baldwin ironically mentions that the jazz musicians did not accept Mailer as a hipster, even though Mailer expressed himself as one:

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[88] ibid, p.432.
[89] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, p.7.
[90] ibid, p.7.
[91] George Cotkin, *Existential America*, p.192. Cotkin perhaps means that the text should be regarded as a piece of improvisation, a performance rather than a sociological tract.

> And matters were not helped at all by the fact that the Negro jazz musicians, among whom we sometimes found our selves, who really liked Norman, did not for an instant consider him as being even remotely 'hip' and Norman did not know this and I could not tell him. He never broke through them, at least not as far I know; and they were far too 'hip,' if that is the word I want, even to consider breaking through him.[92]

Here, Baldwin ironically illuminates the inauthenticity of Mailer's identity as a hipster. Similar to Mezzrow's rejection by some African American musicians a decade ago, Mailer was denied by the black jazz musicians who were the role model for his white Negro. Baldwin also tells us that when they met they both had to play certain roles, in which they were trapped, as Mailer was more well-known, wealthy and also white, whereas Baldwin knew more about the "periphery" Mailer "so helplessly maligns in "The White Negro" than he could ever hope to know."[93] They played roles in terms of their racial and social differences and "one does not... cease playing a role simply because one has begun to understand it."[94] However Baldwin reminds us that "the really ghastly thing about trying to convey to a white man the reality of the Negro experience has nothing whatever to do with the fact of color, but has to do with this man's relationship to his own life."[95]

Compared to Mailer's "The White Negro," James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues," published in 1957, shortly after Mailer's essay, was much more devoted to the subject. As I showed earlier in the thesis, Baldwin's racial dynamic is more nuanced and his firsthand knowledge of the music much greater than Mailer's as his version of modern jazz, at least, contains African American expression of

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[92] James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," p.272.
[93] ibid, p.270.
[94] ibid, p.270.
[95] ibid, p.272.

the blues. For instance, while Mailer characterized jazz as "the lingua franca of hip" and a source of "personal" freedom and "individual" self-fulfillment (simply his sense of "toughness"), Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" significantly treats jazz as a form of group memory and source of communal values. It is no surprise that "Sonny's Blues" has become the most anthologized jazz short story because of Baldwin's effort to characterize modern jazz as part of the African American musical tradition while Mailer fails to do so.[96]

Like Mailer, Jack Kerouac was attracted to jazz because of its ideological associations with African American culture, but he also employed what Malcolm calls "the behavioral and semiotic aspects" of the music to develop his characteristic style of writing.[97] In other words, while Mailer uses jazz and its culture for his socio-political purposes (rebelling against the social and the political establishment of mainstream U.S. society), Kerouac is attracted to jazz as part of his rebellion against the cultural and literary establishment.[98] As Kerouac argues in his essay, "Essential of Spontaneous Prose" (1953), the writer should allow language to spill out without regard for rules by using jazz as the guiding principle for this spontaneity.[99] Kerouac explains the bond between jazz

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[96] James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," p.48-78.

[97] Douglas Malcolm, "Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.40, No.1, (Spring 1999): 85.

[98] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz*, p.57. See also Mark Richardson, "Peasant Dreams: Reading On the Road," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. 43.2, (2001): 218-242, Richardson writes, "The Beats rejected the modernist aesthetic as productive of art that had become, over the years, esoteric, obscurantist, elitist, safe, sterile, dead. Beat poetics called for rebellion against all forms of authority, especially culturally sanctioned authority, ...It rejected the notion that the artist must distance himself from his material, seeing in it an unhealthy need to control or contain nature, life, people; the Beats preferred to "dig it." p.219.

[99] Jack Kerouac, "Essential of Spontaneous Prose" (1953) in *The Portable Beat Reader*, ed., Ann Charters, New York: Viking, 1992, p.57-58 He writes, "**PROCEDURE** Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing (as per jazz musician) on subject of image. **METHOD** No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid

and the idea of "spontaneous prose" in detail in an interview: "jazz and bop, in the sense of a, say, a tenor man drawing a breath and blowing a phase on his saxophone, till he runs out of a breath, and when he does, his sentence, his statement's been made... that's how I therefore separate my sentence, as breath separations of the minds."[100]

In fact, Jack Kerouac's writing philosophy, as expressed in "Spontaneous Prose," has come under a great deal of criticism in recent years. For instance, according to Douglas Malcolm, Kerouac simply fails to understand the function of the chorus in jazz improvisation.[101] Jon Panish also argues that while Kerouac attempts to recreate "the improvisational nature of the creative process in jazz" and tries to reproduce "the spontaneity of this improvisation in words," he completely ignores an important aspect of jazz creation, which is the significance of an African American musical tradition.[102] For Panish, Kerouac just borrows "*very* selectively" from part of that tradition as he represents jazz improvisation only as "one's emotional life and blowing," but neglects the vital aspect of jazz improvisation that "involves a thorough knowledge of those performers and performances that have come before."[103] Furthermore, Peter Townsend claims that bebop music, which Kerouac celebrated for its "infinite" capabilities, cannot simply be described as opening up limitless possibilities to

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usually needless commas-but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between out blown phrases)," p.57.

[100] Regina Weinreich, *The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac: A Study of the Fiction*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1997, p.9.

[101] Douglas Malcolm, "Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*," p.92.

[102] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz*, p.136.

[103] ibid, p.136 Parish, here, talks about "Signifiyin(g)," the theory of African American music, that insisted on the "compelling cultural and musical continuity... between all the musical genres of the black cultural experience," Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music*, p.10. See also Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*

Kerouac's prose style.[104] Kerouac is just one of many white writers who have invoked jazz as a stylistic influence and who have used it thematically, but any discussion of this would take me beyond the terms of this thesis.[105]

The tendency in discussions of Jack Kerouac's writing style has been to associate his method of spontaneity with only one aspect of post-war American performance culture, significantly bebop. However, it was not bebop alone which contributed to Kerouac's prose. His interest in Buddhism and other spiritual practices also helped him to create an improvisational design for his writings.[106] Moreover, Kerouac never indicates that either his own improvisational designs or the spontaneity in bebop can be made without any training. Of even more significance is the fact that Kerouac's method of "sketching" is developed over many years.[107] Christopher Gair writes that what Kerouac achieved during his career contributes "to the emergence of a multi-racial artistic counterculture structured around opposition to a dominant national narrative stressing conformity and economic individualism."[108] Thus, the

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[104] Peter Townsend, *Jazz in American Culture*, p.118.

[105] For further discussion see, Preston Whaley, *Blows Like a Horn: Beat Writing, Jazz, Style, and Markets in the Transformation of U.S. Culture*, London: Harvard University Press, 2004 and Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

[106] See Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters 1940-1956*, ed. Ann Charters, New York: Viking, 1995, p.448 and 486 Peter Townsend also writes, "The forces pushing the Beats towards a belief in unrestrained spontaneity were numerous; as well as their own pre-existing compositional methods, developed independently of theories about jazz, there were the Zen and other spiritual practices, the uses of hallucinatory drugs, Surrealism, and the work of other writers around them, such as Cassady and Burroughs." Peter Townsend, *Jazz in American Culture*, p.148 Kerouac also was criticized because of his understanding of Buddhism. See James H. Austin, *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* (1973), New York: MIT Press, 1999. Austin writes, "The Zen of which we speak is an ancient sect within Mahayana Buddhism. Not some New Age variant or "beat" imitation in any distorted Kerouac sense..." p.7.

[107] Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2007, p.47. Gair also writes. "Panish seems unaware of the improvised (in terms of phrasing and rhythm) nature of some of Kerouac's other recordings, such as his commentary to the film *Pull My Daisy* (1959), taped in a single session after he had watched the film twice..." p.48.

[108] ibid, p.49.

importance of Kerouac's "Spontaneous Prose" may be not so much as an imitation of the characteristics of bebop music but as a way of using aesthetic form as an opposition to the literary establishment.

Criticisms have been leveled it not only Kerouac's writing style in works such as, "Essential of Spontaneous Prose," but also his knowledge of jazz music. For instance, Kenneth Rexroth said, in a review of Jack Kerouac's novel *The Subterraneans* (1958), "The story is all about jazz and Negroes. Now there are two things Jack knows nothing about – jazz and Negroes."[109] This is not entirely fair, as Kerouac did have close relations with jazz culture during his life. Even in his early years, he wanted to be a jazz journalist, interviewing Count Basie for a student magazine and submitting an article about Lester Young to *Metronome*.[110] Indeed, he was one of the first writers to highlight the significance of Lester Young as a key figure for current tenor saxophone players.[111] Moreover, Kerouac was one of the few white people present at Minton's at the age of seventeen in 1939 and 1940.[112] Among well-known American novelists only Ralph Ellison had a connection with jazz comparable with Kerouac's, despite the fact that Ellison had the advantage of being a jazz player as well as a fan.[113] As Jim Burns puts it "Kerouac's interest in jazz was lifelong and this distinguishes and distances him from most of his

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[109] Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac*, New York: Grove Press, 1990, p.568.
[110] Jim Burns, "Kerouac and Jazz," *Review of Contemporary Literature*, 3.2, (Summer 1983): 33-41.
[111] See Barry Miles, *Jack Kerouac: King of the Beats*, New York: Henry Holt, 1998, p. 25-26 and Thomas Newhouse, *The Beat Generation and the Popular Novel in the United States, 1945–1970*, New York, McFarland, 200, p.49-72.
[112] Lewis MacAdams, *Birth of the Cool*, p.47.
[113] Peter Townsend, *Jazz in American Culture*, p.118-119.

commentators."[114]

However, one should ask here, what does Jack Kerouac believe jazz represents, and how does he represent African American culture and jazz music in his writings? As I discussed earlier, Mailer suggests that the hipster, the alienated white, should identify himself with "the Negro" and look to African American outlaws for models for his rebellion against society. He writes, "the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin of totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries... And in this wedding of the white and the black it was the Negro who brought the cultural dowry."[115] Like Mailer, Kerouac is more interested in the ideology of the African American's "cultural dowry" than "he is in the circumstances that produced it,"[116] and he too is guilty of primitivism and the erasure of African American history, although in more romanticized language than Mailer's. For instance, In *On the Road*, the novel some call the bible of the Beat Generation, one can clearly trace Kerouac's primitivist view of and romanticisation of African American culture and life.[117]

> At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night... but I was so drearily, a 'white man' disillusioned... I passed the dark porches of Mexican and Negro homes; soft voices were there,

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[114] Jim Burns, "Kerouac and Jazz," p.40.
[115] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," p.272-273.
[116] Douglas Malcolm, "Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*," p.94.
[117] Kerouac first published, under the pseudonym "Jean-Louis," a work of fiction entitled *Jazz of the Beat Generation* from a novel in progress he later called *The Beat Generation*. Eventually the book was published as *On the Road* (1957). I am using the edition of Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, New York and London: Penguin Books, 1972. Bruce Cook writes, "It is difficult, separated as we are by time and temper from that period, to convey the liberating effect that *On the Road* had on young people all over America. There was a sort of instantaneous flash of recognition that seemed to send thousands of them out into the streets, proclaiming that Kerouac had written their story, that *On the Road* was their book." Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971, p.6-7.

> occasionally the dusky knee of some mysterious sensual gal; and dark faces of the men behind rose arbours... wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, truehearted, ecstatic Negroes of America.[118]

Kerouac, here, in a manner similar to Mezzrow's stereotypical depiction of a "whiteness\blackness" binary opposition in his autobiography and Mailer's ideological opposition of hip\square in "The White Negro," romanticizes the life of African Americans whose cultural practices are always "natural," "vivacious" and "ideal." On the other hand, the "disillusioned" life of white Americans is stigmatized. Baldwin writes about the Denver episode from *On the Road*, "this is absolute nonsense... I would hate to be in Kerouac's shoes if he should ever be mad enough to read this aloud from the stage of Harlem's Apollo Theater. And yet there is real pain in it, and loss, however thin; and it *is* thin, like soup too long diluted; thin because it does not refer to reality, but to dream."[119]

There is a link between Kerouac's primitivist view of African American life and culture and his use of bebop as he often misrepresents and fetishizes fundamental elements of the music and its musicians in *On the Road*. Kerouac utilizes bebop as a source of personal freedom and self-fulfillment that signifies his alienation and nonconformism. Baraka's warning is useful here: "The important idea here is that the white musicians and other young whites who associated themselves with this Negro music identified the Negro with this separation, this nonconformity, though, of course, the Negro himself had no choice."[120] Indeed, for Kerouac, bebop music and its musicians provide him and the other bohemians with an insider's world of mysterious African American life that differentiates them from "conformist" society, "but [of course] as a

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[118] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.168-169.
[119] James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," p.278.
[120] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.188.

matter of choice."[121] In *On the Road*, for instance, Kerouac associates bebop with Sal Paradise's and his friends' aimless traveling:

> At this time, 1947, bop was going like mad all over America. The fellows at the Loop Blew, but with a tired air, because bop was somewhere between its Charlie Parker Ornithology period and another period that began with Miles Davis. And I sat there listening to that sound of the night which bop has come to represent for all of us, I thought of all my friends from one end of the country to the other and how they were really all in the same vast backyard doing something so frantic and rushing-about'"[122]

Kerouac's ideological characteristic of Bebop is its "madness" and "speeding-up," and this derives not so much from bebop itself, but from his assumptions about the music. Indeed, for Kerouac, Bebop is "frantic," because that madness distinguishes and frees him and his generation from the straight society. Kerouac writes, "all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn..."[123] Madness, indeed, is the philosophy of the Beat Generation, which they find in African American life and music, particularly in bebop. In the beginning of the second part of the book, Dean plays Dexter Gordon's "The Hunt" in Sal's brother's house in Virginia:

> They [were]... listening to a wild bop record I had just bought called 'The Hunt,' with Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray blowing their tops before a screaming audience that gave the record fantastic frenzied volume. The Southern folk looked at one another and shook their heads in awe. 'What kind of friends does Sal have, anyway?' they said to my brother. He was stumped for an answer. Southerners don't like madness the least bit, not Dean's kind.[124]

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[121] ibid, p.188.
[122] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.17.
[123] ibid, p.11.
[124] ibid, p.108.

The iconic status of this recording for the Beats in general is indicated by the use of it in John Clellon Holmes' novel *Go*, where he writes, "The Hunt: listen there for the anthem in which we jettisoned the intellectual Dixieland of atheism, rationalism, liberalism — and found our group's rebel streak at last."[125] Douglas Malcolm argues, "Kerouac is knowledgeable about certain aspects of bop and frequently makes allusions that deliberately test his audience's understanding."[126] While this is true, Kerouac never acknowledges the importance of the context in which jazz has developed, or the music's historical and cultural connection to an African American tradition. The "screaming" would need to be read within the behavioral and aesthetic code of jazz rather than considering it as "madness."[127] According to Gennari, "[jazz] has challenged the norms of audience, shunning formal behavioral codes and audience passivity (what Richard Sennett has called 'silence in the face of

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[125] An influential figure through his essays, which shaped the way many have thought about the Beats, John Clellon Holmes's novel *Go* (1952) can be seen as his fictionalized chronicle of the Beat generation. Holmes' *Go* is full of religious imagery linked to jazz; his use of words such as "testament," "sacrament," "holy," "mystery," "prophecy," "ritual" and "altar" assign a divine quality to jazz. The novel is interesting in having an almost entirely black cast (one of the few white characters being a thinly disguised Ross Russell as the protagonist's record producer). In spite of the black emphasis, as the two epigraphs suggest (one from Melville and one from Charlie Parker) one aim of the book is to reveal the jazz life but also to show it as fundamentally American, though more as Ellison does, and not in the celebratory manner of Ken Burns. The book focuses on the lives of jazz musicians, and seems modeled especially on Lester Young, but while it does have some unusual and perceptive accounts of jam and recording sessions the tendency is for the musicians to be seen as haunted or doomed individuals with little sense of a functioning black community or culture. Nat Hentoff reviewed it perceptively in *Jazz Review*, (Orrin Keepnews also reviewed it scathingly, in an earlier issue) complaining that "He falls into a self-conscious straining for a national (or perhaps cosmic) affirming that is an uncomfortable blend of Thomas Wolfe and Jack Kerouac," but acknowledging it as "an important step toward a fiction that is not wholly the dream world of an innocent buff who thinks, for example, that the jazz world is a microcosm of democracy." *Jazz Review* 2, (February 1959): 41. Holmes also dedicated an entire book, *The Horn* (1958) to the story of a down-and-out tenor sax player named Edgar Pool.

[126] Douglas Malcolm, "Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*," p.109.

[127] Kerouac also writes, "A bunch of colored men in Saturday-night suits were whooping it up in front. It was a sawdust saloon with a small bandstand on which the fellows huddled with their hats on, blowing over people's heads, a crazy place; crazy floppy women wandered around sometimes in their bathrobes, bottles clanked in alleys... The behatted tenorman was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea, a rising and falling riff that went from 'EE-yah!' to a crazier 'EE-de-lee-yah!'... Uproars of music and the tenorman had it and everybody knew he had it. Dean was clutching his head in the crowd, and it was a mad crowd," p.185.

Art')[128] in favor of active, spontaneous response through vocal and bodily participation."[129] Further, Samuel Floyd coins a phrase "Good Critics" or "Self-Criticism" which requires theorizing and situating spectators' responses and participation in the performance within an understanding of African American culture.[130] This self-criticizing process comprises a body of listener's comments such as ""Oh yeah," "Say it," "He's cookin'," and "That's bad."[131] If the audience are unsuccessful in contributing to the jazz performance or do not succeed in reading it with the required knowledge they will fail as critics. Thus, by representing audience's reactions to that particular bebop concert as "frantic," Kerouac merely ignores one of the most crucial aspects of jazz as an African American vernacular expression, which is the performer\audience interaction, and fails as a critic.

As I discussed earlier, James Baldwin links the jazz soloist's expressive individualism to the group's identity. Further, he uses jazz improvisation as a communication too which functions as a form of group memory and communal values within African American culture. In contrast, as Panish puts it, "Kerouac takes possession of and represents jazz improvisation as a progress that is

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[128] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, New York: Knopf, 1978, p.230.
[129] John Gennari, "Jazz Criticism," p.450. See also Bertram D. Ashe, "On the Jazz Musician's Love\Hate Relationship with the Audience" (1998) in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Dagel Caponi, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, p.277-293.
[130] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.229.
[131] ibid, p.229. For instance, in Dinah Washington's famous album *Dinah Jams* (1954), which was taped live in front of a studio audience with Clifford Brown and Max Roach Quintet, we can hear profound response and comment to the Signifyin(g) process from the listeners, with hand clapping, stomping, finger clicking, laughing out load and shouting (such as oh, yeah) to specifically given references to early performers. (During the performance Washington seems to Signify on other names such as her musical influences Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith.) One can clearly distinguish Dizzy Gillespie's sound in Clifford Brown's solos on George Gershwin's "Summertime." In this particular performance "Good Critics" easily recognized the reference (the call) and gave profound response and comment through out the performance.

individualistic, ahistorical and 'naïve'."[132] In *On the Road*, Kerouac describes the relationship between jazz improvisation and the performer\audience interaction with a vague metaphor, "IT." Dean talks about the bebop performance, they saw last night:

> 'Now, man, that alto man last night had IT – he held it once he found it; I've never seen a guy who could hold so long.' I wanted to know what "IT" meant. 'Ah well' – Dean laughed – 'now you're asking me impon-de-rables – ahem! Here's a guy and everybody's there, right? Up to him to put down what's on everybody's mind. He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas, people, yeah, yeah, but get it, and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he gets it – everybody looks up and knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He's filling empty space with the substance of our lives, confessions of his bellybottom strain, remembrance of ideas, rehashes of old blowing. He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it's not the tune that counts but IT.'[133]

Kerouac, again, simply fails to illustrate the significance of the communal nature of jazz music. In fact, for Kerouac, the importance of "IT" in jazz improvisation, is, according to Panish, as an imitation of meaningfulness.[134] He disconnects jazz from its cultural, historical and social contexts by characterizing the jazz musician as an individual soloist but not "as a member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition."[135] Even though, in *On the Road*, Kerouac mentions many names from jazz history, he conceptualizes that particular history based on individual artists rather than the band in which they performed or certain communities in which their characteristic sounds originated.

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[132] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz*, p.110.
[133] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, p.194.
[134] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz*, p.112.
[135] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.234.

In a manner similar to Kerouac's, Ross Russell's use of jazz performance portrays technical virtuosity as a symbol for individual genius. In his book, *The Sound* (1961), Russell offers a description of a jazz performance that consists of a scene of four musicians' struggle to keep up with the demanding tempos, complex rhythms and chord changes of the Charlie Parker-like trumpeter Red Travers:

> They played seein' Red for almost fifteen minutes. During that time no one else took a solo. It was all trumpet, one chorus piled on to the next, variation upon variation, surprise topped by surprise. Bernie's wrist muscles had begun to lock on him and even Hassan looked a little desperate.[136]

Russell simply fails to depict the interaction between Travers and the other performers, and the metaphorical possibilities of improvisational music as a model of interaction rather than individualism. The other players remain static figures throughout Travers' fifteen-minute performance, and this emphasis seems to derive from Russell's understanding of bebop as an individual achievement rather than a collective one. In fact the idea of the freedom of a soloist stretching the limits of the group collaboration was becoming relevant at the time of the publication of the book, but in connection with John Coltrane and free jazz. So it is almost as if Russell is transferring these issues back on to Parker.[137]

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[136] Ross Russell, *The Sound*, New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1961, p.51.
[137] Coltrane and Eric Dolphy specifically confronted critical attacks in their article, "John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Jazz Critics," Don DeMichael, *Down Beat*, April 12, 1962, p.20-23.

Ross Russell was one of the first promoters of bebop and started the Dial Record Company, for which Charlie Parker made some of his early recordings.[138] Russell recorded a number of other important sessions on Dial in the short period in which the label was active, from 1946 until 1949. In addition to Parker, artists featured on Dial included Dizzy Gillespie, Erroll Garner and Dexter Gordon. Russell stopped recording after 1949, and disappeared from the jazz scene for much of the 1950s before returning to his first love, writing. He had published a number of detective stories in pulp magazines in the 1930s, and was a junior reporter for a time, reporting on the indignities facing African American musicians on the road. He served as a radio operator in the US Merchant Navy during the war, and considered a career in script writing on his return to civilian life, but chose to open his record store instead.

In 1961 he published his novel, *The Sound*, whose main character, trumpet player Red Travers, is based on Charlie Parker. However, Russell chose to mirror only "the tumultuous" life of Charlie Parker. There is no doubt that Russell knew Parker well, as he worked with him and recorded some of Parker's classic tunes of the mid-late 40's for his one-man label Dial Records. However, fully understanding the legend of Parker is a more complex task that requires careful research and attention to details mostly found in the interviews of jazz musicians and Parker's friends and family. Parker was a legend among bebop musicians, jazz fans, and hipsters in the post-war period of America, although he was given very little press coverage during his life. Indeed, his friends and fans have been responsible for spreading the legend of Charlie Parker in

[138] The recordings include some of Parker's most famous tunes such as "Yardbird Suite," "Ornithology," "All The Things You Are," "Bird Of Paradise," "Embraceable You," "Now's The Time," "Parker's Mood," "Ko-Ko," "Groovin' High," and "Chasin' The Bird."

different versions of his life given in books, recordings, and films for the past fifty years while Russell's novel is one of the first examples of creating Bird mythology.[139] To the extent that the life and legend of Charlie Parker is reconstructed, what we know about him is not much more than the creation of other people's imaginations. As his wife, Doris Parker told Robert Reisner, "People sit and tell you Bird stories for hours. That is true, but probably half of them never happened, because I've heard people tell me some fantastic stories that, comparing the time and place, I know didn't happen."[140]

In the novel, Red Travers is described by the classically trained white pianist Bernie Rich as "a musical genius." Bernie makes a comparison between Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg and Travers. For Bernie, Schoenberg was "a genius" like Travers because he also "broke all the rules, and made new ones as he went."[141] However, unlike Schoenberg, Travers' musical gift is associated with his racial heritage and connected to the way he lives his life that leads to his self-destruction:

> He breaks every rule in the book. Maybe that's where he gets his inspiration. Then again, maybe he had it with him all along. Look at his sex life. He doesn't run true to form. Junk kills the sex drive in most people. When I was on I didn't care about the most beautiful chick that ever lived. I heard once how in Chicago Red shut himself up in a Hotel suite with a supply of Horse and five women, and just balled for three days and nights! The average junkie has no appetite for food. Look at Red! That man eats like a dockhand. One night I was in the Stage door Delicatessen when he devoured six club sandwiches, one after the other, then gave a counterman hell because he hadn't built them big enough.[142]

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[139] See John Gennari, "Blaxploitation Bird: Ross Russell's Pulp Addiction" in *Thriving on a Riff: Jazz and Blues Influences in African American Literature and Film*, ed. Graham Lock and David Murray, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p.163-184. Gennari examines how Russell's relationship with Parker has mediated later white representations of Charlie Parker.

[140] Robert Reisner, *Bird*, p.172.

[141] Ross Russell, *The Sound*, p.205 .

[142] ibid, p.205-206.

There is no doubt that this description of Red Travers is derived directly from Parker's life. Many of his contemporaries describe him as a man of such enormous appetites and there was a rumor that Parker locked himself in a hotel room with three women, though it was rejected by his wife, Doris Parker.[143] However, Russell's depiction of Parker is a way of romanticizing his stereotypical image. Furthermore, Russell focuses on Parker's emotional response to his victimization as the suffering African American jazz musician. Parker becomes more than a gifted saxophone player, he turns out to be "a psychopath with a magic gift."[144] He is portrayed as if he was a born jazz musician and never needed training or education. Similar to his white contemporaries, such as Mailer and Kerouac, Russell fails to refer to his importance within the African American musical tradition. He represents Charlie Parker as rebellious against the norms of the 'mainstream' American society and producing the mythical narrative where African Americans and their culture are perceived as primitive.

Twelve years after his publication of *The Sound*, Russell looked back at what Charlie Parker *actually* represented and related him to African American militancy rather than representing Parker, as he did in *The Sound*, as a hip jazz musician who plays a messianic role. Russell wrote in his biography of Charlie Parker, "In the mid-Forties there was no Martin Luther King, Jr., no Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, Angela Davis, or Shirley Chisholm, In a sense Charlie was a forerunner of those militant figures of the political arena... If Lester Young was

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[143] Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bebop*, p.174 and Robert Reisner, *Bird*, p.173.
[144] Ross Russell, *The Sound*, p.174.

the first hipster, Charlie Parker was the first angry black man in music."[145] However, one cannot find these qualities in the Parker-like character Red Travers. Russell symbolized Parker as, in Ellison's words, a "thrice alienated" figure – a black musician who is a drug addict and an avant-garde artist in 1961.[146] Indeed, Travers gets angry only if he cannot find heroin. Somehow, for Russell, the image of Parker is changed from the postwar jazznik's hero to the forerunner of African American militancy. This difference is closely linked to the issue of race and its changing perspectives in the social and political spheres during these twelve years in America.

Panish suggests that, "Russell's construction of African American experience in this novel is hollow and primitivistic because it refers not to anything specific to African Americans in American history – for example, racism or their musical tradition – but to the universal experience of the misunderstood and suffering artist and to the existing stereotypes about African American musicians."[147] Panish here summarizes some of the problems in Russell's pulp fiction. However, *The Sound* displays Russell's first-hand knowledge of jazz music and its connection to earlier African American expressive forms such as the blues. In fact Russell develops a construction of the blues that is remarkably similar to that found in Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues*. Mezzrow perceives the blues as the cultural framework for his belonging to the black community and it apparently becomes a fundamental medium for his construction of *blackness*, which, for Mezzrow, is crucial to successful jazz musicianship. Russell also

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[145] Ross Russell, *Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie 'Yardbird' Parker*, London and New York: Quartet Books, 1973, p.258.
[146] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p. 228. Ellison also writes, "For the postwar jazznik, Parker was Bird, a suffering, psychically wounded, law-breaking, life-affirming hero."
[147] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz*, p.63.

views the blues as a sign of *blackness* and associates it to the authenticity of *real* jazz. In Russell's fiction, Jimmy Vann, the big band leader, tries to convince Bernie not to play with Travers anymore: "I found out a long time ago that my skin was the wrong shade. Benny [Goodman] was the greatest single jazz musician our race produced, and he never quite made it either. He was born on the wrong side of the gray issue, too. And now I think we ought to get back to downtown, where we belong."[148] Bernie eventually does not listen to Vann and at the end of the novel Vann reveals why Bernie cannot play like blacks:

> Bernie, you know the measure of a real jazz musician? It's the way he plays the blues. You can't fake it there. Speed and high notes and tricky inventions won't buy you a nickel's worth of blues. All of the old time greats were first of all blues players – Louis and Oliver and Prez. Red was the same way. There was the quality of the blues scale in everything that he played, even the Tin Pan Alley ballads. It comes out in those heartbreak phrases of his. Played right out of the gut. But... you couldn't play Red's kind of music without living in Red's world.[149]

Russell, Kerouac, and other white "Negroes" were attracted to modern jazz probably because of its musicians' *cool pose*. As Lewis MacAdams writes, "Bebop was its music and its attitude was cool. Cool joined the aesthetic to the political."[150] According to Mailer, a "cool cat" simply says, "I dig,"

> [B]ecause neither knowledge or imagination comes easily... if you do not dig you lose your superiority over the square, and so you are less likely to be cool (to be in control of a situation because you have swung where the Square has not, or because you have allowed to come to consciousness a pain, a guilt, a shame or a desire which the other has not had the courage to face).[151]

Similar to Mailer, John Clellon Holmes also writes that what "the wildest hipster" is looking for in his "coolness" (withdrawal) or "flipness" (ecstasy) is

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[148] Ross Russell, *The Sound*, p.214.
[149] ibid, p.285.
[150] Lewis MacAdams, *Birth of the Cool*, p.46.
[151] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," p.283-284.

"a feeling of somewhereness" which is "making a mystique of bop, drugs and the night life."[152] And in his coolness, "there is no desire to shatter the 'square' society."[153] Thus, for the bohemians of 1950s, "coolness" is a celebration of the American underground, and is a rebellious stance against those who have been imprisoned in the "square" society. However, being cool, as an African American concept, is an aesthetic attitude connected to the idea of taking part in the community, and it has roots in the disappointment felt by African Americans in the progress toward social equality during the WWII, as Dinerstein's account of Lester Young makes clear.[154] Baraka also writes, "To be *cool* was, in its most accessible meaning, to be calm, even unimpressed, by what horror the world might daily propose. As a term used by Negroes, the horror, etc, might simply be the deadeningly predictable mind of white America."[155]

By the 1950s, cool became a commodity. One may find the white cool characters in American popular culture such as James Dean in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1954) and Marlon Brando in Laslo Benedek's *The Wild One* (1954), even later Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* speech celebrating "the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved," had become a Volvo commercial.[156] Indeed, as Saul remarks, "the ventriloquism of cool became, in the late fifties, a cultural fixation."[157] It was no coincidence that,

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[152] John Clellon Holmes, "This is the Beat Generation" *New York Times Magazine,* (November 16, 1952): 10. Kerouac also writes, "The Beat Generation, that was a vision that we had, John Clellon Holmes and I, and Allen Ginsberg in an even wilder way, in the late forties, of a generation of crazy" Jack Kerouac, "About the Beat Generation," (1957), published as "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Esquire,* (March, 1958).

[153] John Clellon Holmes, "This is the Beat Generation," p.10.

[154] Joel Dinerstein, "Lester Young and the Birth of Cool," p.259.

[155] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.213.

[156] Lewis MacAdams, *Birth of the Cool*, p.27.

[157] Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.60. Saul compares Kerouac's *On the Road* and Miles Davis' album *Birth of the Cool*, suggest that black and white artists bring different

even though Miles Davis's recordings were released earlier as a set of singles in 1949 and 1950, they were only named *The Birth of the Cool* when re-released in 1957 just after as the "cool phenomenon" was breaking through to American culture at large.[158] *The Birth of the Cool* session influence many talented white musicians such as Gerry Mulligan, Stan Getz, Shorty Rogers, Chet Baker and Dave Brubeck and "cool jazz" or "West Coast jazz," as it came to be called, gained huge popularity all around America.

Amiri Baraka argues that just as the noun "*swing*" became "a commercial popular music in cheap imitation" of a kind of African American music, the term *cool* applied to a vague body of music, which represents "almost exactly the opposite of what *cool* as a term of social philosophy had been given to mean."[159] What Baraka suggests is the significant difference between African American and European American ideas of *cool*, where the distinction "rests in the relationship of individual action to the community."[160] One finds *cool* sound and attitude in Lester Young's music and performance style, even though, in the post-war period, bebop musicians were largely responsible for circulating the

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approaches to the idiom of cool. An example includes the way Kerouac romanticized the *cool pose* in *On the Road*, "There is no *suspicion* here, nothing like that. Everybody's cool, everybody looks at you with such straight eyes and they don't say anything, just look, and in that look all of the human qualities are soft and subdued and still there," p.262.

[158] Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain't*, p.55.

[159] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p. 212-213.

[160] Joel Dinerstein, "Lester Young and the Birth of Cool" (1998) in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Dagel Caponi, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, p.255. Further, one can trace its implications in West African public rituals, music and dance, as coolness is a force of community. Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African Dance" (1966) in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking*, p.72-87. Thompson argues that there is an aesthetic of coolness in West African music and dance. He points out that call-and-response becomes "a means of putting innovation and tradition, invention and imitation, into amicable relationships with one another," and in this sense, it... is cool," p.83.

[160] Joel Dinerstein, "Lester Young and the Birth of Cool," p.253.

word and concept of *cool*.[161] Young re-created the attitude and musical mode of cool by "wearing a silent face and asked for no attention" and "relaxed, cerebral, sophisticated" sound of musical approaches, which was adapted by Charlie Parker and Miles Davis and they took it in different directions.[162] Nonetheless, many of the "West Coast jazz" musicians took the style "because it relied on harmonic invention (the Western element) rather than rhythmic strength" without any reflection of the African American idea of a "mask of coolness."[163] The cool sound became "white," although there were a number of important black musicians who played in a cool manner. Baraka reminds us, "What was not always attained in the case of the white jazz musicians was the fluency of attitude or stance. And as I said before, Negro music is the result of certain more or less specific ways of thinking about the world."[164] Similar to 1950s white intellectuals and the film industry, many of the white cool jazz musicians use the concept of cool; they use the idea of Lester Young and Miles Davis' cool sound, but "their basic approaches are entirely dissimilar," as a rebellious stance against the norms of mainstream U.S. society.[165]

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[161] ibid, p.263 Furthermore, Lester Young also influenced Miles Davis' trumpet sound as he writes in his autobiography: "Man, playing with Prez was something. I learned a lot from the way he played the saxophone. As a matter of fact, I tried to transpose some of his saxophone licks over to my trumpet," Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (1989), London: Picador, 1990, p.35.

[162] Joel Dinerstein, "Lester Young and the Birth of Cool," p.266, Dinerstein writes, "Young's soaring saxophone style was "cool" because he generated excitement without getting excited; he stayed cool," p.250.

[163] Ben Sidran, *Black Talk*, p.122-123.

[164] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People*, p.211.

[165] ibid, p.211.

In his essay, "Keep Cool Man: The Reflection of Jazz" (1951), Anatole Broyard had earlier dealt with the concept of "cool" as a sort of pathology.[166] As in his previous essay, he deals with jazz history, but this time, as if there was a rigid association between particular drug addictions and certain jazz periods, i.e., hot jazz\alcohol, bebop\tea (marijuana) and cool jazz\heroin. He writes, following up his idea of the African American hipster's failure of somewhereness, that "the cool "Negro suggests the *stunned* Negro of slavery. The irony is that coolness is a self-enslavement."[167] However, as Ben Sidran puts it, "the cool posture was not a reflection of passivity but, rather, of actionality turned inward: the active repression of very basic emotional turbulence for fear it would turn outward to mainstream America."[168] Indeed, Broyard failed to distinguish "coolness" as an African American aesthetic accomplishment and a form of resistance to hegemonic U.S. society as did many white contemporaries, white intellectuals and musicians. It was the self-conscious and determined move away from the cool pose that distinguished the next phase of African American political action and it is jazz's relation to this new mood that is the subject of my next chapter.

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[166] Anatole Broyard, "Keep Cool Man: The Negro Reflection of Jazz" in *Commentary* 11, No.4, (April, 1951): 359-362.
[167] ibid, p.362.
[168] Ben Sidran, *Black Talk*, p.111.

You know, Black music is how our lives are, and how we are looking at, and relating to, the outside world. It's just a state of mind.[1]

CHAPTER IV

FREEDOM NOW: THE MAKING AND THE MEANING OF JAZZ IN THE 1960s

This chapter will look at the ways in which the idea of freedom takes on a cultural as well as political resonance for musicians and critics in America in the 1960s. Rightly or wrongly, jazz has always been associated with certain sorts of freedom, whether it was the freedom to improvise or to live an unconventional life, as we have seen in the last chapter, but with the rise of the Civil Rights movement and African American activism the word freedom gained additional resonance. In what follows, I will explore some of the ways in which political and artistic freedoms – and the relation between them – are reconfigured.[2]

The ways in which Cold War diplomacy used the arts, and particularly jazz, to promote an image of America, as the land of unique freedoms has been well-documented lately, but it is an important backdrop to the revisions of the 1960s.

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[1] Jerome Cooper, cited in Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: The Story of the New Jazz* (1977), London: Pluto Press, 1987, p.9.

[2] I am lucky to have some excellent recent studies of the period: Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007; Scott Saul, *Freedom is Freedom Ain't*, 2003 and Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 2002.

Jazz music was presented in the 1950s as a reflection of U.S. national life and American democracy. For example, Voice of America announcer Willis Conover presented jazz as the expression of a political ideology based on the aesthetic of controlled freedom: "Jazz is a reflection of our national life... structurally, it's a democratic music. People in other countries, in other political situations, detect this element of freedom in jazz... they love jazz because they love freedom."[3] The role of Louis Armstrong, for instance, as ambassador and then reluctant critic is well-known and points to the battles for control over the meaning of jazz in the coming decade by musicians and commentators.[4]

While in this chapter I will be dealing with influential artists and activists, I will also be tracing the ways in which, as in earlier periods, the articulation of the ideas and the debates are often shaped and influenced by white critics. One of the significant differences in this period, it could be argued, is that there is a more fully articulated – and diverse black presence in the debates and mediations which surround the music itself, signaled perhaps most clearly in LeRoi Jones' article, published in the heart of the white critical establishment, *Down Beat*, in 1963, on "Jazz and the White Critic."

Freedom was a highly politically charged word in U.S. political and cultural discourse from the mid 1950s until the late 1960s. As Ted Gioia states, "it would be hard, in fact, to find a term more explosive, more laden with depths of meaning, or proclaimed with more emotion during these tumultuous years...

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[3] Edward L. Randal, "The Voice of American Jazz," *High Fidelity* 8 (August 1958): 88-89.
[4] Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*, p.10-48.

freedom was very much something to live for, or, for a few, even to die for."[5] As a concept, freedom was central to the Civil Rights Movement. Following the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which concluded that the policy of separate public schools for white and black children was unequal and unconstitutional, and which helped to give rise to the Civil Rights Movement, the quest for freedom became a repeated motif of political and social life in the US. Indeed, as Richard H. King writes, "the rhetoric of freedom permeated the movement from the beginning."[6]

During the Movement, "Freedom Riders" led the struggle to end segregation on buses and trains.[7] The "Freedom Summer" also known as the Mississippi Summer Project, was a campaign launched in 1964 as an attempt to register African American voters in anticipation of the fall presidential election. The "Freedom Vote" was the name of a similar project in the autumn and winter of 1963-64.[8] The Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) established schools (also called the "Freedom Schools"), where volunteers taught a curriculum which included black history and the philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement. When the Movement was at its peak in the 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his most famous speech "I have a Dream" to over two hundred thousand people on 28 August 1963, and concluded by quoting an old spiritual, representing the

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[5] Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.337.
[6] Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.13.
[7] Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat to a white man, was one of the first "freedom riders."
[8] Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, p.147.

central struggle of African American sad the quest for freedom: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we're free at last!"[9] Indeed, in Richard H. King's words, "the rallying cry of the civil rights movement until the mid-1960s was "Freedom Now!"[10]

In his book, *The Freedom Principle* (1984), John Litweiler points out that, "the quest for freedom appears at the very beginning of jazz and reappears at every growing point in the music's history,"[11] But it could be argued that between the late 1950s and the end of the 1960s, the concept of freedom in jazz gained a more central role than at any other time in the history of jazz. Many jazz musicians, along with giving scores of benefit concerts for the freedom movement, used the word freedom in their album titles such as Sonny Rollins' *Freedom Suite* (1958), Max Roach's *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* (1960), Randy Welson's *Uhuru Afrika\Freedom Africa* (1960), Art Blakey's *The Freedom Rider* (1961), The Jazz Crusaders' *Freedom Sound* (1961), Jackie McLean's *Let Freedom Ring* (1962) and Booker Ervin's *The Freedom Book* (1963). All of these albums were part of the new school of jazz called hard bop, which incorporated influences from other African American musical expressions such as the blues, gospel music, and rhythm and blues. For Scott Saul, "the connection between hard bop and Civil Rights was more, however, than the fact of cultural coincidence,"[12] and he argues that hard bop and its collaborative freedom spoke to the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement, which

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[9] See *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster and Trudier Harris, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.213-214.
[10] Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, p.13.
[11] John Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958*, New York: Da Capo 1984, p.13.
[12] Scott Saul, *Freedom is Freedom Ain't*, p.5.

electrified thousands of African American people into protesting "in a tradition of collective uplift."[13] Saul writes,

> Hard bop musicians seemed to innovate and collaborate on their art in real time, in ways that few citizens could be said to participate in the machinery of their lives... Just as so many political activists in the 1950s and 1960s tried to embody a prefigurative politics... the musicians of hard bop gave voice to a world beyond the Cold War consensus, where everyday people might be virtuosos and provocateurs at once.[14]

In this section I follow Saul in arguing that the meaning of freedom for jazz musicians can only be understood in the context of the rising African American Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. Jazz musicians of this era self-consciously linked political freedom for African Americans with musical freedom, even though none of these jazz albums were part of the slightly later 'free jazz' movement that was more explicitly associated with musical freedom.[15]

Martin Luther King Jr. once stated, "I cannot reach fulfillment without 'thou.' The self cannot be self without other selves,"[16] and one of the SNCC representatives spoke of seeking "a community in which man can realize the full meaning of the self which demands open relationships with others."[17] Richard King also reminds us that the creation of a new free self for an African American "was not the result of individual but collective action."[18] Martin Luther King and SNCC organizers called not only for "negative freedom"

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[13] ibid, p.6.
[14] ibid, p.6.
[15] Terminology is a problem here. Saul deals with a long period of what he calls hard bop, whereas Anderson refers to an overlapping period as 'free jazz.' I deal later with of the complexities of the naming of 'free jazz.'
[16] Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*, Boston: Beacon, 1968, p.180.
[17] Cited in Charles Hersch, "Let the Freedom Ring!: Free Jazz and African-American Politics," *Cultural Critique*, No.32, Winter, 1995-1996, p.101.
[18] Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (1992), p.101. See also Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004, p.127.

(liberal freedom), that is, liberation that comes from the absence of restrictions or release from bondage, freedom *from*, but also "participatory freedom," that is, to suggest that freedom comes when one acts with others to achieve that common purpose. Thus, one of the ultimate goals at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement was to establish the "redemptive community," which reflected the "shared nature of public action against segregation."[19]

Jazz music played a significant role in creating that new African American self because of its already established integrationist sub-cultural nature. Although jazz music remained an essentially marginal form of popular culture and the race relations in mainstream society stayed rather unchanged in general, jazz clubs and other social spaces indeed accommodated various kinds of cross-racial interaction between audience members and musicians, creating significant examples of resistance to segregation and embodying a sense of what King terms "freedom as collective liberation."[20] Therefore, jazz provided a place for the production of alternative and oppositional identities. Nat Hentoff highlights this. "There is... more interracial social equality in jazz than in any other area of American society because more whites and Negroes actually come to know each other as individuals in jazz than they are likely to in their business or social lives."[21] Robert K. McMichael argues that the jazz programmes aired on television between 1960 and 1964 created a tension between jazz's oppositional power (in its representation and actual embodiment of integration) and the racist structure of U.S. society, and provided many observers with unique

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[19] ibid, p.101. See Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958) in *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.
[20] ibid, p.100.
[21] Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, New York: Da Capo, 1975, p.61.

opportunities to recognize their own racial identity and the politics around it.[22] McMichael writes, "the fact that such programs appeared on national television is remarkable because they presented a model of social integration that even Martin Luther King's dream did not imagine: blacks and whites getting together to do something where blacks, not whites, defined the roles and methods and performance standards."[23]

In these respects, we can say that the quest for freedom in jazz between the late 1950s and the early 1960s reflected the mood of the Civil Rights Movement, representing jazz's subcultures of integration, interracial cooperation and a nonviolent spiritual belief in justice. The very idea of jazz was pluralistic, and many jazz musicians explicitly defined their music as a symbol of integrationist freedom within America. Hard bop saxophonist Sonny Rollins talked about jazz and its meaning for freedom:

> *Jazz has always been a music of integration.* In other words, there were definitely lines where blacks would be and whites would begin to mix a little bit. I mean, jazz was not just a music; it was a social force in this country, and *it was talking about freedom* and people enjoying things for what they are and not having to worry about whether they were supposed to be white, black, and all this stuff, Jazz has always been the music that had this kind of spirit, Now I believe for that reason, the people that would push jazz have *not* pushed jazz because that's what jazz means. A lot of times, jazz means no barriers.[24]

Key jazz albums of the time echoed King's emphasis upon pride and self-respect as an individual as well as a member of the community with a distinctive heritage. King called for a nonviolent struggle against segregation in America,

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[22] Robert K. McMichael, "We Insist! – Freedom Now!," p.384-385
[23] ibid, p.384 [my italics].
[24] Sonny Rollins, quoted in Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bop: An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.303.

arguing that, "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor: it must be demanded by the oppressed,"[25] and African American musicians took action to be part of "this psychic freedom," which "could only be purchased with literal or figurative risk of life," using their music as a means of political expression.[26] As Ingrid Monson notes:

> The jazz community reacted in various ways to civil rights events including the performance of benefit concerts, the recording of albums with political themes, attributing political meaning to particular jazz aesthetics, the exploration of African and other non-Western musical and religious ideas, and engaging in highly charged dialogues about race and racism in the jazz industry.[27]

In this context, I will now discuss the reactions of Sonny Rollins and Max Roach with particular reference to their representations of freedom.

In 1957, inspired by his first acquaintance with Ornette Coleman in California, Sonny Rollins made his first trio recording, *Way Out West*.[28] This album was followed by his revolutionary album, *Freedom Suite* (1958), which was also recorded with a trio including bebop drummer Max Roach and bassist Oscar Pettiford.[29] The album, which was recorded for Riverside label, featured four jazz standards and Rollins' composition, the title track. It is worth noting that the interaction between Rollins and Max Roach during the performance of "Freedom Suite" anticipated Ornette Coleman's later famous experimentations with collective improvisation. In a review in *Jazz Review* that, true to the

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[25] Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait?* (1964), New York: Signet Classic, 2000, p.68.
[26] Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, p.100-101.
[27] Ingrid Monson, "Jazz: Chronological Overview," in *African American Music: An Introduction*, ed. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portian K. Maultsby, New York: Routledge, 2006, p.159.
[28] Sonny Rollins, *Way out West*, Contemporary/OJC, 1957. See also Richard Palmer, *Sonny Rollins: The Cutting Edge*, New York and London: Continuum, 1998, p.17-65 for further discussion on Rollins' album *Way out West*.
[29] Sonny Rollins, *Freedom Suite*, Riverside 258, 1958. I am using the CD version of the recordings.

formalist orientation of the magazine, concentrated entirely on the music, Dick Hadlock comments perceptively that "Freedom Suite is a successful jazz composition because it *requires* and *generates* spontaneous collective and individual improvisation."[30] However, "Freedom Suite" is not just revolutionary from a strictly musical standpoint. What made the song so noteworthy, apart from its highly political title, was the statement by Sonny Rollins included on the back-cover liner notes of the original release of the album:

> America is deeply rooted in Negro culture: its colloquialisms, its humor, its music. How ironic that the Negro, who more than any other people can claim America's culture as his own, is being persecuted and repressed, that the Negro, who has exemplified the humanities in his very existence, is being rewarded with inhumanity.[31]

Radical historian and journalist Frank Kofsky asserts that *Freedom Suite* was the first time a political message was so clearly attached to a piece of music by an African American jazz musician.[32] Furthermore, according to Kofsky, the album itself represented "a musical depiction of the Afro-American struggle for liberation from oppression."[33] The significance of the album, for Kofsky, lay not only in the music and Rollins' political comment, but also in the original cover of the album: "The front cover of the album, presumably in keeping with the motif of freedom, displayed a medium-sized photograph of Rollins' face and unclothed upper torso, as if he were posing to have a bust of himself sculpted."[34] Indeed, the picture of Rollins on the album cover was significantly different

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[30] Dick Hadlock, "Sonny Rollins's *Freedom Suite*," *Jazz Review*, (May 1959): 10-11.
[31] Sonny Rollins, *Freedom Suite*, Riverside 258, 1958.
[32] Frank Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, New York and London: Pathfinder, 1970, p.50. Although I agree with Kofsky about the political message of the song, one should also consider Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" (1939) and Duke Ellington's "Black, Brown and Beige" (1943) as significant earlier examples of the political aspects of jazz music.
[33] ibid, p.50.
[34] Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Revolution of the 1960s*, New York and London: Pathfinder, 1998, p.111.

from other album covers of the Riverside catalogue, and it can be considered as a foreshadowing of the "black image" of the late-1960s, expressing the positive value of "blackness" (i.e. "black is beautiful" and "black pride") embedded in the Black Power and the Black Arts Movement.[35]

Freedom Suite was withdrawn by the record company and then re-released in the same year under a new title, *Shadow Waltz*, the title of the second shortest song on the recording. The cover picture was changed and Rollins' statement was deleted from this new reissue. To be fair to Orrin Keepnews, the producer and the part-owner of Riverside, he claims that he pulled the recording because it was not selling well. He changed the title and the cover art "in hopes that it would do better in the new format."[36] However, in its liner notes, Keepnews tried to diffuse the focus by stating that "Freedom Suite" was a reference to "the musical freedom of this unusual combination of composition and improvisation."[37] In an attempt to reduce the social and cultural implications of Rollins' statement and of the album in general, he wrote,

> This suite, then is 'about' Sonny Rollins: more precisely, it is about freedom as Sonny is equipped to perceive it... it is to physical and moral freedom, to the presence and absence of it in Sonny's own life and in the way of life of other *Americans* to whom he feels a relationship. Thus it is not a piece about Emmett Till, or Little Rock, or Harlem, or the peculiar laws of Georgia or Louisiana, no more than it is about the artistic freedom of jazz. But it is concerned with all such things, as they are observed by this musician and as they react – emotionally and intellectually – upon him."[38]

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[35] See Figure: I for the album cover, p.187. See also Samuel A, Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.183-212. The cover of *Way Out West*, with Sonny Rollins dressed as a black cowboy in a desert, also bears radical statements. See Michael Jarrett's essay on the album *Way Out West*, the iconography of its cover photograph and its relation to the myths of the West. Michael Jarrett, "The Tenor's Vehicle: Reading *Way Out West*," in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995, p.260-285.

[36] Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Revolution of the 1960s*, p.112.

[37] See Orrin Keepnews' liner notes for Sonny Rollins' *Freedom Suite*, Riverside 258, 1958.

[38] ibid, [emphases added].

In his book, Kofsky argues that Keepnews was trying to avoid a scandal with his liner notes: "Keepnews went to some lengths to 'explain' that Rollins didn't really mean it after all, ladies and gentleman, and no one should get nervous just because a black musician had seen fit to refer to the persecution and repression of his people on the back of an album cover."[39] This is probably overstating it, and the situation is made more complicated when we consider that, according to Ingrid Monson, Keepnews found the charge that he was censoring Rollins "highly ironic as he had written a good portion of the statement to begin with."[40] So, even here, it seems, at the heart of supposedly free black expression, we once again have a case of a supposedly black voice being mediated – and argued over – by whites in positions of influence. In fact one of the notable elements in this period is the way the debate is shaped and carried on through white critics, like Hentoff and Gitler, to be discussed later in this chapter – another reason why the writings of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka on music are so distinctive and important.

Going back to my original argument, Rollins' declaration that "the Negro, who more than any other people can claim America's culture as his own... is being rewarded with inhumanity" was, in 1958 and is still, a very bold political statement. Rollins' verbal argument is a direct reference to the political freedom of African American people and does not include any connotation of musical freedom of jazz. Indeed, Rollins explained what he really meant to Arthur Taylor in 1971:

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[39] Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Revolution of the 1960s*, p.113.
[40] Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, p.363.

I had written on the back cover of the album about what a drag it was that black people didn't get their due. That was the reason for the suite. I wrote it at a time when I was beginning to get a lot of good publicity, yet when I went to look for a good apartment, I ran into this same old stuff. Here I had all these reviews, newspaper articles and pictures. I can look back on it and see that it was a natural thing we all go through. At the time it struck me, what did it all mean if you were still a nigger, so to speak? This is the reason I wrote the suite. I also wrote a comment on the back-cover liner notes.[41]

Furthermore, one should also ask why Rollins' picture on the album cover was replaced by another picture of him that was very similar to other images that were used by Riverside for the album covers of the time: a standard theme of a jazz musician in smart clothes posing with his instrument?[42] Hazel V. Carby has commented in a more general context that, "the process of imaginatively incorporating black cultural forms into the national community through the figure of the black male produces a number of significant cultural and political contradictions."[43] Carby further demonstrates her point in a discussion of the photographic representations of the singer Paul Robeson's black body, arguing that the broader "historically contradictory elements of race, nation and masculinity," among white Americans.[44] She cites a review of one of Robeson's early concerts, which describes Robeson in terms appropriate to Greek

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[41] Sonny Rollins (1971), ed. Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musicians-to-Musicians Interviews* (1977), New York: Da Capo Press, 1993, p.171-172.
[42] See Figure: II for the album cover, p.187. It is also significant that there were, in fact, very few reviews of *Freedom Suite*, and none of them pointed out the social and cultural implications of Rollins' statement. *Down Beat*, one of the most popular jazz magazines in the U.S., did not review the album at all. When Riverside went into bankruptcy proceedings in 1960, ABC Records purchased the Riverside catalog in the early 1960s. It was then that *Freedom Suite* was re-issued for the third time with highly militant notes by Frank Kofsky. The album is now available on CD under its original title and cover image and with the original statement by Rollins. Today, ironically, Sonny Rollins' *Freedom Suite* is accepted as not only one of his best recordings but also one of the greatest jazz albums of all time by the critics. See Leonard Lyons, *The 101 Best Jazz Albums: A History of Jazz on Records*, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980, p.203 and Alan Leibowitz, *The Record Collector's Handbook*, New York: Everest House, 1980, p.284.
[43] Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men*, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1998, p.45.
[44] ibid p.45.

sculpture, and, she argues, metamorphoses his black body into bronze.[45] Clearly, sculpturing the black body into bronze creates the illusion of resolving the tensions between the reality of racism and the national community, which assimilates all the difference. Likewise, in 1961, James Baldwin criticized the white romanticization of the image of the African American man as a "walking phallic symbol."[46] John Edgar Wideman discusses the notion of the fear of superior black physical prowess that reinforces racist arguments and describes "the racial regimentation of social space and the denigration of the black body as an inappropriate presence in traditions of American sport."[47] Thus, Sonny Rollins' nude black body (even though we just see his unclothed upper torso) on the album cover might be perceived as creating a tension, either as a moral panic about the reality of American racism or a sense of psycho-sexual fear of a "superior" black physical ability, in the wider white society. It is no surprise, therefore, that Keepnews withdrew the album from the market and re-released it with the picture of Sonny Rollins in "respectable" clothes as he might have thought a nude black body, as combined with a bold political message was too threatening for white consumers.

In the 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement was starting to heat up, drummer Max Roach recorded a five-part suite, *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* (1960), dealing with African American history, particularly slavery and

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[45] Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's article titled "The Man with His Home in a Rock: Paul Robeson" was originally published in *New Republic*, March 3, 1926, p.40-44, cited in Hazel V. Carby, *Race Man* (1998), p.49. Shepley writes, "The singer's Negroid features are more marked on stage than off. His nose becomes a triangle of whiteness, his eyes white moons, his skin takes milky lights that turn black into bronze," p.49.

[46] James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," p.294.

[47] Michael Eric Dyson, "Be Like Me? Michael Jordan and the Pedagogy of Desire" in ed. Gena Dagel Caponi, *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking*, p.409.

racism, with the help of lyricist Oscar Brown Jr. and his future wife, former nightclub singer, Abbey Lincoln. The album was released by Archie Bleyer's Candid Records, founded in 1960 specifically to release recordings celebrating the Civil Rights Movement, and including, along with Roach's *We Insist!*, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* (1960), which features Mingus's highly political song "Original Fables of Faubus."[48]

Unlike Sonny Rollins' *Freedom Suite*, Max Roach's *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* left little room for ambiguity of interpretation for critics. The title, *We Insist!*, is a direct reference to Sonny Rollins' title, and the album can be seen as an answer to Orrin Keepnews' liner notes for Rollins' album. The radical cover photo shows three African American men from a Greensboro sit-in, who look the viewer straight in the eye as if they are showing their demand for freedom.[49] Further, Nat Hentoff, who wrote the album liner notes, talks explicitly about the sit-in demonstrations in Greensboro, Martin Luther King's SCLC, the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the support various jazz musicians expressed for the activities being organized by these groups. Indeed, the lunch counter sit-ins inspired Roach to use his music to express solidarity for the freedom movement.[50] The album and its concept offered an explicit political stance, which was a break from the traditional African American musical expression

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[48] Max Roach, *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*, Candid, 1960 and Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*, Candid, 1960. I will deal with Mingus' album in the next chapter.

[49] See Figure: III for the album cover, p.187.

[50] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz*, p.168 and Scott Saul, *Freedom is Freedom Ain't*, p.94. See Joel Dinerstein, "Lester Young and the Birth of Cool" (1998) and Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool Pose: West African Dance" in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking*, p.239-277 and p.72-87 for more on the meaning of cool in African American culture.

that, in Floyd's words, was "a way of saying one thing and meaning another."[51] As Porter and Saul put it, the album was not only "the strongest political statement made by jazz musicians at the turn of the decade," but also it "created a striking musical alternative to the cool pose" of using silence as a mean of protest.[52]

Max Roach's compositions, their titles and lyrics, are also significant. Each of the five songs on the album conveys a political message, and altogether they explore three themes: the African American experience of slavery, the contemporary struggle for the Civil Rights Movement and an empathy with Africa. For instance, "Driva' Man," with lyrics by Oscar Brown, Jr., is about the "white overseer in slavery time who often forced women under his jurisdiction into sexual relations."[53] The second song, "Freedom Day," again with lyrics by Brown, aims to express what slaves must have felt right after the Emancipation Proclamation. Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln and Oscar Brown Jr. directly employed their music to force their listeners to acknowledge a part of American history.[54] The third song from the album, "Triptych: Prayer, Protest, Peace," contains no lyrics. However, the song is a powerful display of emotions by Abbey Lincoln accompanied solely by Roach on drums. During the song, Lincoln sings, screams, cries and moans to convey, as Hentoff's liner notes re-affirm, a historical portrait of the African American struggle for social equality. Lincoln aggressively screams in the second section of the piece, "Protest," and it

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[51] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.85.
[52] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p.167.
[53] See Nat Hentoff's liner notes for Max Roach, *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, Candid 9002, 1960.
[54] ibid

is, in Saul's words, "the most hair-raising ninety seconds of jazz in existence."[55] According to Hentoff's liner notes, the section is a release of "rage and anger," a "catharsis" that represents "all the accumulated fury and hurt and blinding bitterness."[56] Hentoff significantly adds for those listeners who were familiar with debates in the African American community about the philosophy of Martin Luther King's nonviolent protest: "It is all forms of protest, certainly including violence."[57] Nevertheless, the song begins with "Prayer" and ends with "Peace," and in comparison to the avant-gardism of Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane's later approaches, the scream of Lincoln actually sounds in some ways less raw and more musical, and it is interesting that it has become such a focal point of discussion.

Oscar Brown Jr. offers an intriguing alternative route to Roach's, with his attempts at a more popular, though no less political approach, and his song "But I was Cool" offers his own comic commentary on the way that expressions of black anger have been held in by stratagems of control and indirection exemplified by a style or aesthetic of 'cool.' His song consists of a long list of outrages and disasters that occur to him. Each time he reacts with a scream or a wail – what Saul describes as "howls of hilarious grief," but he follows this each time with an upbeat comment – "but I was cool."[58] The overall point of the song is that a cool stance is not enough, because it ultimately destroys rather

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[55] Scott Saul, *Freedom is Freedom Ain't*, p.95.

[56] See Nat Hentoff's liner notes for *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, Hentoff was a civil libertarian and he was trying, in Kofsky's words, "to renounce jazz criticism for greener fields" during his career. Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Revolution of the 1960s*, p.143.

[57] Nat Hentoff, ibid, see also Scott Saul, *Freedom is Freedom Ain't*, p.95and Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Revolution of the 1960s*, p.122-124 for further discussion.

[58] Oscar Brown Jr., *Sin and Soul ...and Then Some*, Columbia CS8377, 1960.

then sustains his dignity, so in this way the song does serve the same ends as Lincoln's assertive scream.

The last two pieces on the album, "All Africa" and "Tears For Johannesburg" confirm a point made about hard bop musicians' positive approach to traditional roots (such as Gospel and the Blues) and the Civil Rights Movement in general, making the connection many felt between the struggle for freedom in the United States and the struggle for independence in African colonies. The songs also seek to emphasize the pride African American people felt for their African heritage. The fact that African American drummer Max Roach is joined by two Afro-Cuban percussionists, Ray Mantilla and Tomas Duvail as well as Michael Olatunji from Nigeria further highlights the "the continuity of black history and culture throughout the Diaspora."[59] Thus, the songs represent a shared assertion about the concept of freedom particular to these ethnic groups.[60]

In my view, Hentoff's interpretation of the protest in "Triptych," which includes the possibility of violence for the African American freedom struggle anticipates the shift in the mood of the Civil Rights Movement by the mid-1960s, described by McMichael as moving "from a feeling of change through interracial cooperation and nonviolent spiritual belief in justice and freedom, to

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[59] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p.167. See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* for further discussion.

[60] Randy Weston's album *Uhuru Afrika\Freedom Africa* (1961) aims also to represent the same shared experience of the quest for freedom. According to Weston, the album "came out during a time when we could see things going down. It was not as bad as it is now, but we could feel it happening. We wanted this to be a symbolic gesture by Afro-Americans, to show our pride that some of the countries in Africa were getting their freedom. This particular album was packaged and put together in 1961. At the time it was a bit unpopular, especially with white people – even white people who were friendly to me." Randy Weston (1968-1970), ed. Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musicians-to-Musicians Interviews*, p.23. It is significant that Weston experienced the same problems Rollins and Roach had during the promotion of this album. See also Ingrid Monson, *Freedom* Sounds, p.147-151.

a more pragmatic analysis of the glacial pace of social change."[61] I will further discuss this shift in the context of the relationship between the separatism of Black Nationalism and jazz later in this chapter. However, at this point, it is crucial to analyze Roach and Lincoln's political views with reference to the quest for freedom in jazz.

Abbey Lincoln is an interesting voice in the history of jazz in her own right. In 1958, *Down Beat* publicized her arrival as a jazz singer after working several years as a club singer. In 1959, by the time of Billie Holliday's death, she was represented as "the pinnacle of jazz vocal artistry as well as the marginalization of African Americans, women, and the artists in American society" by the U.S. media.[62] However, after releasing her own album, *Straight Ahead*, with her husband Max Roach, which I discussed above, Lincoln's career suffered from her political views. She did not record again under her name until 1973. In Porter's words, Lincoln "positioned herself in relation to black female vocalists, especially Billie Holiday, and she explored what jazz singing represented in terms of the limitations and possibilities of female artistry."[63] Ira Gitler criticized Lincoln for failing to live up to Holiday's standards. He wrote, "I dislike propaganda in art when it is a device. Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit* had a social message, but it was art first."[64] It is interesting that Gitler chooses a song that was in fact written by a white man and was completely atypical of the rest of Holiday's output, as Lincoln indicates in her response to him, "Well, then why do you like her so much, because she was really one-sided, Billie sang

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[61] Robert K. McMichael, "We Insist! – Freedom Now!," p.394.
[62] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p.150.
[63] ibid, p.154.
[64] "Racial Prejudice in Jazz, Part I," *Down Beat*, (November 9, 1961): 25.

about "My Man Don't Love Me' and 'My Man's a Drag. My Man, My Man My Man..."[65]

Even though there is no evidence that Roach and Lincoln were members of Elijah Muhammad's separatist group, the Nation of Islam, the critical debate over the Roach and Lincoln albums – they released two more albums, *Percussion Bitter Sweet* (1961) and Lincoln's *Straight Ahead* (1961) – was mostly about their political stance rather than their music.[66] For instance, in his review of *Straight Ahead*, Ira Gitler charged Lincoln with being "misguided" and "naïve" and characterized the singer as a "professional Negro."[67] He writes, "Pride in one's heritage is one thing... but we don't need the Elijah Muhammad type of thinking in jazz."[68] Shortly after Gitler's review was published, the magazine responded to letters written by Lincoln and Roach by organizing a panel discussion with Gitler along with white trumpeter Don Ellis and Argentinean composer Lalo Schifrin, *Down Beat* editors Bill Cross and Don DeMichael, as well as Nat Hentoff, the producer of Roach and Lincoln's albums.

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[65] ibid, p.25.
[66] Eric Porter writes, "Much of the *Down Beat* discussions covered... the question of whether Lincoln's politics constituted black separatism," *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p.177 Ira Gitler was the New York editor of *Down Beat* magazine during the 1960s.
[67] "Racial Prejudice in Jazz, Part I," *Down Beat*, p.25.
[68] ibid, p.26.

During the discussion, Gitler defended the contents of his review, claiming Lincoln "was leaning too much on her Negritude," and was using her identity "to exploit a career."[69] In response, Lincoln asked: "How can I sing as a black woman, as a Negro, if I don't exploit the fact that I'm a Negro?" In defense of Lincoln, Roach also argued that African American people should be able to control their representations and perhaps benefit from them as well: "If anybody has the right to exploit the Negro, it's the Negro. Everybody else up until this point has been exploiting the Negro. And the minute the Negro begins to exploit himself, even if this was so, here comes somebody who says they shouldn't exploit themselves, but who should exploit the Negro? Here's the point: she has a perfect right to exploit the Negro."[70] Lincoln made the final statement and clarified what she would mean by "professional Negro" in response to Gitler's inadequate account. "There was a time when I was really a professional Negro. I was capitalizing on the fact that I was a Negro, and I looked the way Western people expect you to look. I wore ridiculous dresses, and I sang the songs that were expected. I was a professional Negro. I was not an artist."[71] In Lincoln's view a "professional Negro" was a musician who had no control of his\her art and tried to shape him\herself into what white people expected.

Roach and Lincoln took the argument even further, openly speaking about their doubts about whether white critics had a sufficient understanding of the African American experience to write intellectually about jazz and its cultural context. They were the first to claim in print that jazz criticism required an understanding of African American cultural literacy and that black people needed to gain

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[69] ibid, p.26.
[70] ibid, p.36.
[71] ibid, p.36.

power over authorship of jazz criticism. These brief comments of Roach and Lincoln anticipated the efforts of African American intellectuals of the Black Arts Movement, signaled by Amiri Baraka's controversial piece "Jazz and the White Critics" which appeared significantly in 1963 in *Down Beat*. His aim was ultimately to establish a new aesthetic approach, the Black Aesthetic, for evaluating African American art and culture. I will now expand this discussion to include the relationship between Black Nationalism and its writers' representation of jazz.[72]

Despite Martin Luther King Jr.'s achievement as a pivotal figure in the Civil Rights Movement, the philosophy of "the beloved community" and "non-violent direct action" did not become a reality in the jazz community in the 1960s. As Samuel A. Floyd states: "The apparently contradictory stances and actions of the period manifested themselves multifariously, with the philosophies of King and Malcolm X representing contrasting views of the struggle for freedom."[73]

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[72] The similarities between Roach and Baraka's ideas on jazz are not limited to its criticism. Like Baraka, Roach also claimed that jazz music is mostly a black creation and "good" jazz was performed mostly by African American artists. Roach states, "if a guy wants a *good* jazz player, nine times out of ten he stands a better chance of getting him from the black population than from the white because of exposure." Moreover, Lincoln's characterization of all art as propaganda is very similar to what Baraka manifested in his poem "Black Art." While Lincoln asserts, "All art must be propaganda; all art must have an attitude; and all art must reflect the times you live in," Baraka, almost a decade after this statement, writes, "We want 'poems that kill.' Assassin poems, Poems that shoot guns... We want a black poem. And a Black World. Let the world be Black Poem And Let All Black People Speak This Poem Silently or LOUD." Even though, it is still very early to talk about the Black Arts Movement and its separatist ideologies, one should also consider Malcolm X's influence on jazz musicians in this period and later, apparently, on the Black Arts Movement. "Racial Prejudice in Jazz, Part I," *Down Beat*, p.25 and Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, *Black Fire*, p.302-303. See also Addison Gayle Jr., ed. *The Black Aesthetic*, New York: Doubleday, 1971. Addison writes, "The Black Aesthetic, then, as conceived by this writer, is a corrective – a means of helping black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism, and offering logical, reasoned arguments as to way he should not desire to join the ranks of a Norman Mailer or a William Styron," p. xxii.

[73] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.184. Indeed, Malcolm X was very critical of King, calling him at various times a "twentieth-century Uncle Tom" and dismissing him as one of the "ignorant Negro preachers," cited in Louis A. DeCaro, *Malcolm and the Cross: The Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, and Christianity*, New York: New York University Press, 2000, p.179. However, "what united the two phases of the black insurgency, what Martin Luther King

For instance, in the 1962 *Down Beat* panel "Racial Prejudice in Jazz Part II," Abbey Lincoln openly criticized America's conventional notion of integrationism, implying that King's idea of integration occurred only in "white" terms: "Integration in this country means assimilation for the Negro."[74] The collaboration between Max Roach and Oscar Brown Jr. was aborted after releasing the album *Freedom Now Suite* due to Roach's growing sympathy with Malcolm X's separatist philosophies. According to Brown Jr., "I was preaching love, Max thought that Malcolm X had a better solution than Martin Luther King. That was the end of our dispute at the time."[75] Roach agrees that, "Oh yeah, we fought. We never could finish it," but he adds a fascinating reflection on the whole larger enterprise in an interview with Ingrid Monson. The problem is that, "we don't really understand what it *really* is to be free. The last song we did, 'Freedom Day' ended with a question mark ['Whisper say we're free… Can it really be?']."[76]

Certainly the angry voice of Malcolm X which refused to rule out violence against whites, if used in self-defense, was influential with many participants in the freedom movement, including young African American critics as well as young jazz musicians in the beginning of the 1960s. In contrast to King's philosophy, for Malcolm X, "the non-violent leadership of the black Southern ministers was part of the problem not the solution."[77] For instance, in Richard King's words, "The outbreak of urban 'riots' in the summer of 1964 and 1965

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and Malcolm X did share, was the goal of constructing a new sense of self and of black culture." Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, p.5.

[74] "Racial Prejudice in Jazz, Part II," *Down Beat*, (March 29, 1962): 25.

[75] Cited in Steve Voce, "Max Roach: Inventive Percussionist Who Revolutionized Jazz Drumming," *The Independent*, (August 18, 2007): 38.

[76] Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, p.174.

[77] Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, p.176.

suggested that the mood, at least among Northern blacks, was no longer amenable to the ideas of non violence disseminated by King."[78] Malcolm X also believed that African American people did not need to be hybrids, i.e. "existentially balanced between the demands of white and black America."[79] He rejected the pluralist vision of American culture, in this respect, and he refused the very idea that jazz, as a vital element of American culture, is pluralistic.

In the mid 1960s, many young African American intellectuals and jazz musicians started to define their art as a symbol of separatist freedom excluding "white" America. Malcolm X addressed the founding meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAUU) in 1964, challenging the jazz music's established integrationist sub-cultural nature in his speech:

> I've seen black musicians when they'd be jamming at a jam session with white musicians – a whole lot of difference. The white musician can jam if he's got some sheet music in front of him. He can jam on something that's he's heard jammed before. But that black musician, he picks up his horn and starts blowing some sounds that he never thought of before. He improvises, he creates, it comes from within. It's his soul; it's that soul music. It's the only area on the American scene where the black man has been free to create. And he mastered it. He has shown that he can come up with something that nobody ever thought of on his horn.[80]

The arguments of Malcolm X helped Amiri Baraka and other black writers to enter a new discursive space involving proto-Black Nationalist and Afro-centric approaches.

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[78] ibid, p.175-176.
[79] Scott Saul, *Freedom is Freedom Ain't*, p.264.
[80] Cited in Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Revolution of the 1960s*, p.466.

Before the establishment of the Black Arts Movement, Amiri Baraka published a highly controversial essay on jazz and its critics, "Jazz and the White Critic." The essay was revolutionary, not only because it gave the essence of Black Arts Movement's ideology in the context of aesthetic values, but because it inspired many jazz musicians of the decade, helping them to stand against all the negative critiques of their music.[81] In the essay, Baraka addressed the paradox that while jazz is an African American art form and many of its greatest innovators were black American, most of the jazz critics have been white:[82]

> The irony here is that because the majority of jazz critics are white middle-brows, most jazz criticism tends to enforce white middle-brow standards of excellence as criteria for performance of a music that in its most profound manifestations is completely antithetical to such standards; in fact, quite often is in direct reaction against them. *(As an analogy, suppose the great majority of the critics of Western formal music were poor, "uneducated" Negroes?)*[83]

Here Baraka was not criticizing white critics solely on the ground that they were white and the music was black. Indeed, Baraka also carefully pointed out that African Americans who could write about jazz would also have to come from the black middle class, a group which had previously ignored it: "jazz was collected among the numerous skeletons the middle class man kept locked in the closet of his psyche, along with watermelons and gin, and whose rattling caused him no end of misery and self-hatred."[84] Lorenzo Thomas states that Baraka's

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[81] See Lorenzo Thomas, "Ascension: Music and the Black Arts" (1995) in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, p.258. John Coltrane also complained about the criticism of his music. For example, in an interview, when Kofsky asked about the hostility to free jazz amongst the critics, he said, "Oh, man, I never could figure it out! I couldn't even venture to answer it now. Because as I told them then, I just felt that they didn't understand... Well, this could be a real drag to a cat if he figures this is something that he won't be able to cope with and he won't be able to write about. If he can't write about it, he can't make a living at this," Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, p.444-445.

[82] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* p. 11.

[83] ibid, p.11, [emphasis added].

[84] ibid, p.15-16.

criticism involved class identification and was far from radical in its thinking.[85] Although I agree with Thomas here, I would add that Baraka's class differentiation among African American people was very similar to Malcolm X's famous distinction between "house Negroes" who protect their white masters and "field Negroes" who simply resist them.

Baraka felt that white critics often did not approach the music seriously as an art form (or even as a folk art). Indeed, they often treated the music as "if it could be understood far more easily than Western classical music."[86] According to Baraka, it was also crucial to study the social and cultural aspects of jazz – similar to the Western classical music approaches –, as the music would not be understood "without some attention to the attitudes which produced it."[87] Thus, Baraka urged that jazz criticism should focus on the source of the aesthetic embodied in jazz rather than the music's technical virtuosity:

> The music is the result of the attitude, the stance... Once this attitude is delineated as a continuous though constantly evolving social philosophy directly attributable to the way the Negro responds to the psychological landscape that is his Western environment, criticism of Negro music will move closer to developing as consistent and valid an aesthetic as criticism in other fields of Western art.[88]

In writing "Jazz and the White Critic," Baraka proposed a key feature of the Black Arts Movement very early in the 1960s. The content of Baraka's essay

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[85] Lorenzo Thomas, "Ascension," p.266.
[86] Jerry Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual*, New York: New York University Press, 2001, p.115.
[87] Amiri Baraka, "Jazz and the White Critic," p.14.
[88] ibid, p.19-20, for instance, see Ted Gioia's *Imperfect Art: Reflections On Jazz and Mode*, New York: Stanford Alumni Association, 1988. In the book, Gioia shows how, if treated according to Western classical music tradition, jazz can appear as an imperfect art.

implied a future moment in time when the integrationist African American writers would be transformed into Black Nationalists.[89]

Baraka's interpretation of African American music gained broad acceptance amongst future Black Arts writers, especially music commentators such as Larry Neal, James T. Stewart, A.B. Spellman and Ron Welburn.[90] In 1965, two years after his essay was published, there was a significant turning point in race relations in the United States, also influencing Baraka's point of view. In response to some of the perceived limitations of the Civil Rights approaches of the early 1960s, Baraka and other young African American intellectuals made a symbolic break with their integrationist past, moving to Harlem (in Baraka's case from Greenwich Village, and his Jewish wife Hettie Cohen) to establish the Black Arts Repertory Theater School (BART) in March 1965. In February, Malcolm X's assassination and the appearance of the second edition of his autobiography increased his influence on the emerging post-war Black Nationalism. As Baraka wrote in his new 2007 introduction to *Black Fire*, originally published in 1968:

> Remember, Malcolm X had been murdered and most of us in the book were Malcolm's sons and daughters. And this was a period when 'Revolution is The Main Trend In The World Today!' In fact, it was Malcolm's murder that sent many of these artists out of the Greenwich Village and other similar integrated liberal arty 'cool-out' zones to Harlem and other black communities to take up what we felt now are 'responsibility' in the Black Liberation Movement. In New York that was the setting up of the Black Arts Repertory Theater School on W130th St and Lenox Ave in Harlem...We wanted an art that was

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[89] Baraka even claimed that James Baldwin joined the Black Arts Movement in publishing *No Name in the Street* (1972). Baraka writes, "This was the generation that came up after Jimmy Baldwin. Some of us were accused of actually hectoring Jimmy to return from Europe and join the struggle, which he did in a gallant way." (See "No Name In The Street"), Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, *Black Fire*, p.xvii. See also Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, for accusations on James Baldwin's homosexuality.

[90] Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*, p.103.

> Revolutionary. As revolutionary as Malcolm X or the new African revolutionaries."[91]

Although BART fell apart after one year, the ideologies that were constructed within the school helped to establish the Black Arts Movement.

The Black Arts Movement extended from the mid-1960s to the early-1970s. Defining itself in opposition to the Harlem Renaissance or more immediately to Civil Rights integrationism and deeply rooted in black cultural nationalism, the Black Arts writers represented themselves as the artistic wing of the Black Power Movement. Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal viewed Black Art's purpose as the political and cultural liberation of African American people from white racism. The movement also supported the idea of a black art market that was independent of white ownership. African Americans had considerable presence as editors and reviewers, and African American musicians started to run their own record companies.[92]

One of the main projects of the young writers of the Black Arts Movement, along with renouncing the word jazz in favour of "the New Black Music" or "the New Thing" which I will discuss shortly, was to have power over the authorship of jazz criticism and, therefore, be able to reclaim jazz itself as an essential cultural and social expression of the African American community. Larry Neal writes in his essay, "The Black Arts Movement" (1968):

> The two movements [Black Power and the Black Arts Movement] postulate that there are in fact and in spirit two Americas – one black, one white. The Black artist takes this to mean that his primary duty is to speak to the spiritual and cultural needs of Black people. Therefore, the

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[91] Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, *Black Fire*, p.xvii-xix.
[92] Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*, p.163.

> main thrust of this new breed of contemporary writers is to confront the contradictions arising out of the Black man's experience in the racist West.[93]

In this respect, a consequence of Black Power's emphasis on an African American desire for self-determination and nationhood and the need for "the black people to define the world in their own terms," was that the black artist should make the same points in the aesthetic realm. In other words, "one is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics."[94] African American writers should stop operating under "white models" and looking for approval. As James T. Stewart affirmed in "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist" (1968), "the black artist must construct models which correspond to his own reality. The models must be non-white."[95] Although African American scholars as prominent as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., have considered it the "shortest and least successful" movement in African American cultural history, the Black Arts movement fundamentally altered American approaches both towards the function and meaning of literature, as well as the place of ethnic literature in English departments.[96]

Unlike the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals' ambivalence towards jazz and other African American folk arts (apart from the spirituals), the Black Arts writers championed jazz, and particularly free jazz, as a reflection of African American life. As Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. writes, "Jazz was the music of the Black

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[93] Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *The Drama Review: TDR, Vol.12, No.4,* Black Theatre, Summer, (1968): 29.
[94] Ibid, p.29.
[95] James T. Stewart, "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist" in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro- American Writing* (1968), ed. Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, New York: Black Classic Press, 2007, p.3.
[96] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Black Creativity: On the Cutting Edge," *Time*, (Oct. 10 1994): 74.

Arts Movement. The literary figures of the 1960s wrote poetry that celebrated it, others theorized about its value, and most became conversant with the prowess and particular skills of the genre's most notable practitioners."[97] Baraka, for instance, represents free jazz musicians as the poets of Black Nationalism, showing to the world the way in which African Americans can live their "blackness."[98]

What we actually have are two only partly related events. On the one hand, a style of jazz develops which because of its technical stress on freedom from the expected harmonic structures and chord changes, and apparent formlessness becomes called free jazz. On the other hand we have a new demand for an African American music that can express the ideologies of Black Power, and it is through figures like Baraka that these two are brought together. Initially he referred to the music as 'avant-garde' (to be followed by 'the New Thing') and this points to one of the underlying tensions in the relation between revolutionary politics and art. Do they want music, which is leading and educating the people, and will be challenging, or music which is popular and with which they can identify? It is interesting that Coleman's iconic album, *Free*

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[97] Samuel A, Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.185 The Harlem Renaissance was the age of the New Negro, who needed to be, in Alain Locke's words, "a collaborator and participant in American civilization." In other words, the Renaissance had an integrationist stance that ignored "the most important mass movement in black America of 1920s, which was led by Marcus Garvey." The main idea of the Harlem Renaissance was to support the creation of art and literature to "uplift" the African American race in the face of the U.S. society. However, as I argued earlier, many of the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals ignored jazz and its "unsophisticated" world and failed to foresee the importance of this tradition. For discussions of the role of the blues and jazz in the Harlem Renaissance writings, see Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, Samuel A. Floyd ed. *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance*, Tennessee: University Of Tennessee Press, 1993 and Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Furthermore, although the Harlem Renaissance was primarily about African American involvements and it supported the system of black owned businesses and publications, it depended on the patronage of white Americans, such as Carl Van Vechten and Charlotte Osgood Mason, who provided various forms of assistance.

[98] See Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, p.11-21 and p.180-213.

Jazz: A Collective Improvisations (1960), displays Abstract Expressionist artist Jackson Pollock's painting *White Light* on the inside cover – though, whether this is Coleman's or his record company's idea is not clear.[99]

The music was employed as an artistic and sociopolitical response to the economic, racial, and musical climate of jazz and the U.S., as an instance of a break away from the restrictive rules of musical performance with an emphasis on individual expression and collective improvisation.[100] As bass player Ron Carter states in an interview with Art Taylor:

> Freedom music to me represents the younger musicians getting tired of the establishment. The establishment to me is chord progressions and thirty-two bar form. The student radicals are like the freedom jazz players who want to bypass most of the present standards for playing a tune... In 1959, when Ornette Coleman hit New York, he predicted this social change musically... Freedom has its place in music and it is as valid as black power...[101]

The Black Arts writer James T. Stewart also writes in 1968 in his essay in *Black Fire*: "The music that black people in this country created was matrixed to some degree; but it was largely improvisational also, and that aspect of it was non-matrixed. And the most meaningful music being created today is non-matrixed. The music of Ornette Coleman."[102] This philosophy of free jazz as a "non-matrixed" language, separating "the transnational black aesthetic from a European heritage," became the key principle of the Black Art Movements.[103]

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[99] See Figure: IV for the album cover, p.188.
[100] See John Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle* and Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (1975), New York: Da Capo Press, 1994 for the musical analysis of free jazz. For instance, Jost writes of the difference between the traditional jazz and free jazz: "In traditional jazz, the primary purpose of the theme or tune is to provide a harmonic and metrical framework as a basis for improvisation. In free jazz, which does not observe fixed patterns of bars or functional harmony, this purpose no longer exists," p.153.
[101] Ron Carter (1969), ed. Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musicians-to-Musicians Interviews* (1977), New York: Da Capo Press, 1993, p.61-63.
[102] James T. Stewart, *Black Fire*, p.6.
[103] Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*, p.103.

However I should also note that there was not always a consensus among the Black Arts writers and the free jazz musicians, and even less in the wider African American community.[104] Baraka's support for a musical brand of revolutionary nationalist opinion has been much criticized among some of the free jazz musicians.[105] For example, while Baraka championed Cecil Taylor's music, announcing that he was creating an orchestral language "as complete a language as Duke Ellington's,"[106] Taylor himself complained about Baraka's jazz criticism and said in an interview to Gerald Early, "Baraka? Oh, he never knew what he was talking about when he discussed my music."[107] Furthermore, there were also different opinions about jazz among African American musicians. As beginning in the late 1950s, the clubs and the venues for jazz in African American communities gradually declined and jazz eventually failed to match popularity with black audiences of R&B and soul music.[108] Jazz clubs became more and more a white space, where whites comprised the majority of the audience, especially for the free jazz performances in commercial venues. In

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[104] The Black Power Movement was criticized by the NAACP and other Civil Rights organizations. For example, the executive director of the NAACP Roy Wilkins described Black Power: "... the father of hatred and the mother of violence. It is a reverse Mississippi, a reverse Hitler, a reverse Ku Klux Klan." Cited in Van Deburg, *A New Day in Babylon: Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-75*, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.11.

[105] We can assume that Baraka represented the most extreme among the Black Arts writers as he rejected all white critical approaches to free jazz including the radical jazz historian Frank Kofsky, claiming the difference between a white listener like Kofsky and an African American musician like Shepp was "the difference between a man watching someone having an orgasm and someone having an orgasm," cited in John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.283.

[106] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, p.107.

[107] Gerald Lyn Early, "The Case of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka" in *Tuxedo Junction: Essays on American Culture*, New York: Ecco Press, 1990, p.199. Baraka's own attempts to develop a more assertive and 'black' sound in his own performances are traced in William J. Harris "How You Sound??": Amiri Baraka Writes Free Jazz" in Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards and Farah Jasmine Griffin, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p.312-326.

[108] The important roles of soul and gospel music as equally powerful and more popular forms of black political expression was something not fully or easily acknowledged by many Black Power figures. The extent to which revolutionary art needed to be leading and educating the people (avant-garde) or articulating mass sentiments through the entertainment industry remained a thorny issue. See Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*, Berkley and London: University of California Press, 1998.

this respect, African American musicians, who remained within the framework of traditional jazz, generally blamed free jazz musicians for the declining interest of black audiences. Betty Carter criticized free jazz musicians in an interview with Arthur Taylor:

> You can go uptown and ask ten people on the street who Archie Shepp is and they won't be able to tell you. Ninety percent of his audience is white.... Today most of our musicians like Ornette Coleman, avoid black people. When you go to their concerts you don't see any black people there.[109]

One of the most visible spokesmen and exponents of free jazz, tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp, often implied that his radical doctrine of music represented all black free jazz musicians, but this was not accurate, since other African American jazz musicians of the era such as John Coltrane and Albert Ayler had more moderate opinions about their music and politics.[110]

Some of the quite widespread hostile reaction was to the music and some to the political claims associated with it, and in many cases these combined to be off-putting for many. As a result very few scholars and critics engaged with free jazz and it was highly misunderstood. Ekkehard Jost writes of free jazz criticism, "Musicologists who had made names for themselves with penetrating investigations of earlier stylistic areas of jazz either were outspokenly negative toward free jazz, or – since their primary interests belonged to older styles – took hardly any notice of it."[111] Other African American musicians too were

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[109] Betty Carter (1972), ed. Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musicians-to-Musicians Interviews* (1977), p.278

[110] See Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p. 207 and Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership*, New York: New York Review Books, 2005, p.485. Archie Shepp said in an interview to Baraka: "The Negro musician is a reflection of the Negro people as a social phenomenon. His purpose ought to be to liberate America aesthetically and socially from its inhumanity," Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, p.155.

[111] Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz*, p.9.

hostile. As Anderson notes, Leonard Feather used the results of his blindfold test to gather negative reactions, with Ruby Braff, describing Coleman as "utter confusion and madness."[112] Quincy Jones even turned the idea of political freedom back on the performers, with a reference back to the liberation from slavery: "If that's liberty, boy, they're making an ass out of Abraham Lincoln."[113]

One should also differentiate the first wave innovators of the music – Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor and John Coltrane – from the second more radical younger generation of free composers and improvisers such as Albert Ayler, Pharoah Sanders, Archie Shepp, Anthony Braxton and the other musicians from ACCM. As we discussed earlier, Martin Luther King and SNCC organizers called for "participatory freedom," that is, to suggest that freedom could be achieved when one acts with others. The vision of "participatory freedom" contained in the idea of the "redemptive community," was also represented in free jazz performances through the process of polyphonic group improvisation. The first generation musicians challenged the traditional aspects of jazz music, improvising individually and collectively without predetermined thematic material of any kind and rejecting their traditional hierarchical roles within the small group. They created, according to Charles Hersh, "a group of equals, that, in accord with King's idea of the redemptive community, maximized individual expression while maintaining great cohesiveness."[114] On the other hand, for second-generation improvisers and composers, in Hersh's view, "the individuals [were] not integrated into the group as individuals, but [were] subservient to the

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[112] Leonard Feather, "Ruby Braff: Blindfold Test," *Down Beat* 27, (January 21, 1961): 37.
[113] Leonard Feather, "Quincy Jones: Blindfold Test," *Down Beat* 28, (March 21, 1961): 43.
[114] Charles Hersch, "Let the Freedom Ring!," p.98.

group sound like interchangeable parts" and they used their art as a weapon against the white U.S society.[115]

Free jazz is often seen as originating around 1960, at a point when there was still, politically, hope for freedom through integration rather than separatism. Ornette Coleman's third free jazz album for *Atlantic* records, *This is Our Music* (1960), could be perceived as an integrationist response to the problematic question of whose music jazz actually was. The front cover of the album displayed a photograph of Coleman's classic quartet. The black musicians, Don Cherry (trumpet), Ed Blackwell (drums), Ornette Coleman (alto saxophone) and the white bass player Charlie Haden, pose together, as if to claim that the music belongs to the whole nation, that the "our" is a multiracial or integrated entity.[116] Assuming that the choice of a cover featuring three black jazz performers and a white musician in the same photograph to illustrate this title is merely an arbitrary decision, ignores the fact that it is the only *Atlantic* album cover that brings together all of the Coleman Quartet members. It explicitly signified that jazz music did not exist in opposition to the national ideals but, on the contrary, embodied its Americanness. The album is notable not only because of its challenging title and its cover picture's integrationist message but also it is distinguished as Coleman's only *Atlantic* recording to feature a standard, an unorthodox version of Gershwin's "Embraceable You." Coleman's radical treatment of this standard simply exemplifies the new musical revolution in jazz.

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[115] ibid, p.116.
[116] See Figure: V for the album cover, p.188.

In contrast to the first generation of free jazz music's integrationist stance, Baraka explicitly underlined the difference between "white" and "black" jazz – the former as an "imitation" and the latter as "authentic." In a panel discussion organized by *Jazz* magazine in 1966 entitled "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism," Baraka told white pianist Steve Kuhn: "The music you play is the white man's music. If somebody listens to your music and can't tell you're white, it's either because A) they don't know enough about jazz to know you're white, or B) you're imitating black."[117] Indeed, the Black Arts writers deliberately tried to re-establish or even invent ties with their African heritage in order to formulate new cultural identities. In this respect, they represented jazz as a total "black" creation opposing the post-WW-II discourse in jazz writing, which characterized jazz as an American art form.

The idea of jazz as an Afro-centric race music won support among many second-generation experimental musicians, but to rescue it from its established "white" representation, many free jazz musicians rejected the term jazz, as had Duke Ellington before them. Archie Shepp, for instance, felt that "If we continue to call our music jazz, we must continue to be called niggers. There, at least, we know where we stand."[118] The drummer Beaver Harris also asserted, "Jazz itself is only a mixture of all the music before your time. This is the reason why I prefer calling it Black Music because this way you have all of your history back to draw from."[119] In the spirit of the new nationalism and Pan-

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[117] Amiri Baraka, "Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism: A Panel Discussion, Part 7," *Jazz* 5, (October 1966): 41.
[118] Archie Shepp in Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: John Coltrane and Beyond*, New York, Serpent's Tail, 1980, p.23, Shepp also released a tribute album to Malcolm X, *Fire Music*, Impulse!, 1965.
[119] Beaver Harris in Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life*, p.23.

African brotherhood, free jazz improvisers started to perform tributes to music outside the Euro-American tradition, "evoking rather than reproducing directly African and Asian strains."[120] As McCoy Tyner said, "black musicians feel they can better relate to Africa... because a lot of musicians are realizing that this is where the roots of the music really come from, as far as this music is concerned."[121] For instance, in Ronald Radano's view, for The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), founded in 1965, by pianist/composer Muhal Richard Abrams, pianist Jodie Christian, drummer Steve McCall, and composer Phil Cohran, "spiritualism celebrated African notions of community and rituals" and was represented as a metaphor "for a brand of collectively improvised music that exceeded the constraints of harmony."[122] The "spiritualism" was, indeed, an important concept for the Black Arts writers in defining their new aesthetic formulation, the Black Aesthetic.[123]

This syncretic interest in using other forms, though, also extended to European modernism, which does involve a certain irony. Radano also carefully points out that "with free jazz, black music and modernism achieved a level of structural syncretism, in which likenesses from both musical worlds encouraged stylistic

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[120] Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*, p.110. For example, John Coltrane recorded many modal works as a tribute to cultures beyond America, such as "India" and "Africa."
[121] McCoy Tyner interview by Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Revolution of the 1960s*, p.408.
[122] Ronald Radano, "Jazzin' the Classics: ACCM's challenge to Mainstream Aesthetics," *Black Music Research Journal* 12, No.1, (1992): 90.
[123] See Albert Ayler's *Spiritual Unity*, ESP, 1964 and Sun Ra's *Heliocentric Worlds, Vol.1 and 2*, Calibre, 1965. See also Ajay Heble, *Landing on the Wrong Notes: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice*, New York and London: Routledge, 2000, p.117-141. See Josef Jarab, "Black Aesthetic: A Cultural or Political Concept?" *Callaloo*, No.25, (Autumn, 1985): 587-593; Reginald Martin, "Total Life is What We Want: The Progressive of the Black Aesthetic in Literature," *South Atlantic Review*, Vol.51, No.4, (November, 1986): 49-67 and Allan Shields, "Is There a Black Aesthetic?" *Leonardo*, Vol.6, No.4, (Autumn, 1973): 319-323 for further discussion on the Black Aesthetic.

merging."[124] Indeed, the first generation of free jazz musicians were familiar with contemporary classical concert music,[125] and Cecil Taylor's conservatory training and Coleman's lessons with Gunther Schuller are evidence of this. However, Baraka perceived this "New Black Music" as "spiritual," which "has much in common with older Black-American religious forms," negating the proposed cross-fertilization between European avant-garde music and free jazz.[126] Parallel to this, Ian Anderson claims that the Black Arts writers "refined a mythology that cast musicians in a priestly role, reinforcing timeless values of communal support and individual transcendence shaped by an African past."[127] Here it is equally important to recognize that, parallel to Black Arts writers' perceptions, African American musicians had intentionally directed their music to their African roots and in that sense they were conscious enactors of such a myth.[128] As McCoy Tyner said in an interview, "you're going to find musicians who are going to delve into areas similar to the Third Stream area. I couldn't say what they're going to come up with; but this is the way I feel – I feel that's the

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[124] Ronald Radano, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.111-112.

[125] Earlier jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker were also familiar with Western classical music.

[126] Amiri Baraka, "The Changing Same," in *Black Music*, p.191. Larry Neal also writes, "The only thing which is fundamental to good art is its ritual quality. And the function of ritual is to reinforce the group's operable myths, ideals, and values." Cited in Ezekiel Mphahlele, "The Function of Literature at the Present Time: The Ethnic Imperative," *Transition*, No.45, 1974, p.50. Originally published in *Negro Digest*, No.17, (January, 1968): 35.

[127] Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*, p.115.

[128] W.E.B Du Bois was one of the first intellectuals to claim such connection between African Americans and their African roots. He wrote, "As I face Africa I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than I can explain? Africa is, of course, my fatherland. Yet neither my father nor my father's father ever saw Africa of knew its meaning or cared overmuch for it. My mother's folk were closer and yet their direct connection, in culture and race, became tenuous; still, my tie to Africa is strong... [b]ut one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory... the badge of colour relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage *binds* together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa." W.E.B Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay towards an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940), London and New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987.

way I'm looking towards, in direction of Africa."[129] Baraka, in one of his highly controversial essays, "The Changing Same," underlines the Movement's desire to merge the experimental free jazz with the African American masses' first choice of Rhythm and Blues through their African roots:

> Although, to be sure, too often the 'unswingingness' of much of the 'new' is because of its associations, derivation and even straight-out imitation of certain aspects of contemporary European and white Euro-American music... But the significant difference is, again, direction, intent, sense of identification... 'kind' of consciousness. And that's what its about; consciousness... at its best and most expressive, the New Black Music is expression, and expression of reflection as well. What is presented is a consciously proposed learning experience. It is no wonder that many of the new Black musicians are or say they want to be 'Spiritual Men,' or else they are interested in the Wisdom Religion itself, i.e. to rise to spirit... they are interested in the *unknown*. The mystical.[130]

John Coltrane's music and persona played a critical role in redefining the concept of spirituality and in the discovery of what Baraka called the new black consciousness. A.B. Spellman maintained that "A man like Coltrane was playing about something consciously black, no matter how abstract his formulation may be."[131] Baraka called Coltrane in the dedication to his book *Black Music* (1967), "the heaviest spirit."[132] The music Coltrane produced during the last three years of his life represented, in Miles Davis' words via Quincy Troupe, "the fire and passion and rage and anger and rebellion and love that [black people] felt, especially among the young black intellectuals and revolutionaries of that time."[133] Indeed, Coltrane recorded three important albums in the last three years of his career, which in conception and title all

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[129] McCoy Tyner interview by Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Revolution of the 1960s*, p.409.
[130] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, p.187-188.
[131] A.B. Spellman, "Revolution in Sound: Black Genius Creates a New Music in Western World," *Ebony*, (August, 1969): 86.
[132] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*, p.8.
[133] Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles*, p.276.

implied his strong religious and spiritual motivation, *A Love Supreme* (1964), *Ascension* (1965), and *Meditation* (1965). Significantly, *A Love Supreme* became his most successful album, selling half a million copies in five years and helping Coltrane to become a "jazz messiah" to African American's "cultural liberation."[134] Saul argues that "*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* were perhaps the most resonant conversion narratives of the 1960s, stories in words and music about the pursuit of spiritual perfection, each testifying in its own way to the rewards of a straight life and to a global vision of black culture and liberation."[135]

I would add that particularly *Ascension* has a central importance for Coltrane's philosophy of music that was also parallel to his philosophy of life. The album is a continuous forty-minute performance with ensemble passages and without breaks, and is in Floyd's words, "an 'energy' piece that approaches free jazz."[136] On the album, Coltrane's eleven-piece group was integrated in contrast to Coleman's *Free Jazz* album, where Coleman's band separated into two quartets, and group ensembles alternated with solos, and took up about equal space. As Floyd states, "this emphasis on cooperation and community was reflected also in other social, musical, and political arenas."[137] Indeed, the session brought

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[134] There are many writings about the legacy of John Coltrane as iconic figure. Michael Harper's book of poems *Dear John, Dear Coltrane* is just part of what has almost become a genre. See Kimberley W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African- American Modernism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p.113-186. Harper writes in the poem "A Love Supreme," "Why you so black?/cause I am/why you so funky?/cause I am/why you so black?/cause I am/why you sweet?/cause I am/why you so black?/cause I am/a love supreme/a love supreme." See also Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Creation of John Coltrane's Classic Album*, London: Granta Books, 2002.

[135] Scott Saul, *Freedom is Freedom Ain't*, p.248. The figures of Malcolm X and John Coltrane were so powerful that Kofsky wrote their names for President and Vice-President for the 1964 election. Frank Kofsky, "Interview: John Coltrane," in *Giants of Black Music*, p.23.

[136] Samuel A, Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.190.

[137] ibid, p.190.

together the first wave innovators, represented by Coltrane's classic quartet (McCoy Tyner, piano, Jimmy Garrison, bass and Elvin Jones, drums) and the younger second generation of free jazz musicians (Pharaoh Sanders, tenor saxophone, Archie Shepp, tenor saxophone, Dewey Johnson, trumpet and Marion Brown, alto saxophone), as well as hard bop musicians Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), Art Davis (bass), and also Danish alto saxophonist John Martin Tchicai, which signifies Coltrane's attempt at intertwining various musical cultures and eras under one roof of universalism and spiritualism.[138]

Although Coltrane admired Malcolm X and some of his controversial attitudes, he expressed few openly political opinions, and never gave unequivocal answers when pushed on controversial current issues of Black Nationalism.[139] For instance, his response to Frank Kofsky's questions about the relationship between his music and Malcolm X's ideas was simply "I think that music, being an expression of the human heart, or of the human being itself, does express just what *is* happening."[140] Further, when Kofsky asked his opinion about the phrase, "the New Black Music," Coltrane calmly assured him that he did not like using phrases to classify his music.[141] In this respect, although music

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[138] Freddie Hubbard and Art Davis also worked with Coltrane in his earlier works; see Coltrane's modal jazz albums. Coltrane was the one, who introduced the second-generation free jazz musician Archie Shepp to his record company Impulse!

[139] When Kofsky asked "Were you impressed with him?" Coltrane responded, "definitely. That was the only time. I thought I had to see the man, you know. I was living downtown, I was in the hotel, I saw the posters, and realized that he was going to be over there so I said, well, I'm going over there and see this cat, because I had never seen him. I was quite impressed." John Coltrane in Frank Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s* (1998), p.418 Indeed, Coltrane was sensitive to current issues of African American struggle. He recorded the song "Alabama," which is a tribute to three black children killed in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church of Alabama on 15th of September 1963 and also appeared in the benefit concert for Baraka's Black Arts Repertory Theatre School in 1965. For a detailed account of musicians' involvement in rallies and concerts see Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds,* and for Coltrane's activities see p.303.

[140] John Coltrane interview by Frank Kofsky in *Giants of Black Music*, p.25.

[141] ibid, p.25.

theorists returned to Baraka's and the other Black Arts writers' emphasis on the attitude behind his improvisation, the spiritualism in Coltrane's music was not only about black consciousness and awareness, but the music itself, the universal sound that he achieved. Indeed Coltrane hardly took the same separatist position as the Black Arts writers did, even though they depicted him as spiritual leader of their struggle. As his wife Alice Coltrane states,

> I asked him what it was that he was doing in music. These are his exact words: he said, 'I am looking for a universal sound.' At that time I didn't understand him fully, but I think what he was trying to do in music was the same thing he was trying to in his life. That was to universalize his music, his life, even his religion. It was all based on a universal concept, all-sectarian or nonsectarian. In other words, he respected all faiths, all religious beliefs. In music it was the same way too, because he had such a combination of concepts and ideas, some interwoven each other.[142]

I have tried to explore in this chapter the interweaving of political and artistic conceptions of freedom and how they were develop and contested. African American musicians and intellectuals in this period employed the concept of freedom to explore communal as well as individual expression, combining different characteristics of African American tradition and culture as well as elements from Africa and Europe. While hard bop and the first wave of free jazz musicians maintained the vision of the Civil Rights Movement, free jazz of the mid-1960s represented a more radicalized position against the integrationism of the early 1960s.

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[142] Alice Coltrane interview by Pauline Rivelli in *Giants of Black Music*, p.122-123.

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I am trying to play the truth of what I am. The reason it's difficult is because I'm changing all the time.[1]

CHAPTER V

CHARLES MINGUS [RE]PRESENTS CHARLES MINGUS: MINGUS AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF RACE

Charles Mingus, Jr. was one of the outstanding composers, bandleaders and bass players of the twentieth century.[2] As a bassist, he performed with some of the most significant jazz musicians including Louis Armstrong, Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell and Max Roach.[3] Even though Mingus has often been associated with specific "schools" of jazz such as hard bop and funky jazz (or soul jazz) in the jazz literature, he composed and recorded in a variety of jazz styles, ranging from New Orleans jazz to free jazz.[4] As Ekkehard Jost writes, "In fact, it is doubtful

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[1] Nat Hentoff, *Jazz is* (1976), London: W. H. Allen, 1978, p.160.

[2] Mingus was born in Nogales, Arizona, on April 22, 1922. After his mother died, and a few months after Mingus was born his family moved to Watts, Los Angeles, which was then a strictly segregated city. There was zoning and restricted housing and, although Watts was a predominantly black neighborhood, there were also a Chinese, Japanese, Mexican and white population. His first instrument was a trombone. Although, he gave up playing trombone later on, he became the only post-Duke Ellington composer to show a real sympathy for the instrument during his career. Then he played cello in his youth before switching to bass for primarily racial reasons, since during the 1930s and 1940s, it was almost impossible for African Americans to succeed as classical musicians, and cello was not considered a jazz instrument at that time. See Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, New York: Oxford Press, 2000 and Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (1982), London: Paladin Books, 1985.

[3] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, p.416-424 and Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life* (1961), New York: A Da Capo Press, 1975, p.166.

[4] Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, p.10-11; Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz*, p.35-44 and Salim Washington, "'All the Things You Could be by Now': *Charles Mingus Presents Charles*

whether any other musician has ever had quite the same amount of direct access to so many different kinds of jazz."[5] Indeed, what makes Mingus exceptional as a composer lies in his ability to use any or all the jazz styles and meld them simultaneously in his compositions.[6] As Nat Hentoff writes, "None of Mingus' compositions can be easily compartmentalized as belonging to any one 'school' of jazz. Mingus is his own faculty and student body."[7] In fact it has become a standard approach to stress his eclectic approach. One of his biographers Gene Santoro remarks, "He was not part of any movement. Like Groucho Marx, he would never join any club that would have him as a member. He made his own history. He was Charles Mingus."[8] While not denying his eclecticism and assertiveness, expressed in his verbal statements as well as his music, I also want to explore in this chapter his intense awareness and respect for a tradition, which he can be seen as consolidating as well as extending. (In this way he presents an interesting contrast to the more recent conservative consolidations of Wynton Marsalis).

Most of Mingus' compositions reflected an admiration and deep analytical knowledge of the jazz musicians who came before him, and a number of his songs directly invoke jazz legends, such as "Open Letter To Duke," "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" (for Lester Young), "Reincarnation of a Lovebird" (for Charlie Parker) and "Jelly Roll."[9] These songs are in fact tributes to the musicians as

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Mingus and the Limits of Avant-Garde Jazz" in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p.27-50.

[5] Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz*, p.35.

[6] See Sue Mingus and Boris Kozlov, *More than a Play-Along: Charles Mingus*, New York: Jazz Workshop, 1999 for detailed musical analysis of Mingus' compositions.

[7] Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, p.165.

[8] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, p.178.

[9] Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um* (Columbia Records CK 65512) May 5, 1959.

historical and stylistic inspirations.[10] For example, in his tribute to New Orleans jazz pianist and composer Jelly Roll Morton, Mingus reportedly asked trombonist Jimmy Knepper to play his chorus in "vintage style and shift gears to bebop."[11] As well as jazz, Mingus was exposed to a tremendous variety of music including Western classical music. He admired particularly Debussy, Ravel and Richard Strauss.[12]

However, Mingus' main musical influence came directly from the African American cultural tradition, and he infused many of his works with the attributes of slave work songs and spirituals, blues, and gospel in a celebration of that musical tradition. This can be seen as a continuation of Ellington's attempts to honour and incorporate an African American musical tradition in *Black Brown and Beige* (1943). Mingus' compositions were deeply influenced by his social, political, and racial views. He used his music as a tool to fight the wickedness of segregation during his whole career as a composer. However, in Hentoff's words, "Even Jim Crow, as furious as it made him, did not turn him into a separatist. Mingus could actually see, somewhere ahead, generations that, like jazz musicians, listened to individual voices."[13]

Other fuller recent studies have also focused on his politics and in particular on the complex relation of aesthetic and political freedom. In a study analyzing post World War II social contexts, jazz in the struggle for civil rights, and

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[10] See Todd. S. Jenkins, *I Know What I Know: The Music of Charles Mingus*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2006, p.2-3 for the full list of songs, in which Mingus paid homage to jazz pioneers.
[11] Sue Mingus and Boris Kozlov, *More than a Play-Along*, p.41.
[12] Nat Hentoff, *Jazz is*, p.164 and Brian Priestley, *Mingus*, p.6-10.
[13] Nat Hentoff, *Listen to the Stories: Nat Hentoff on Jazz and Country Music*, New York Da Capo Press, 2000, p.70.

Mingus' personal experiences as an African American, Desmond King asserts that the racial and political presence in Mingus' work was unavoidable.[14] However, King states his point too strongly when he concludes that Mingus' political stance was also about rejecting white musicians' contribution to jazz music (we only need to look at his choice of personnel), and I want to show that it is often quite difficult exactly to match up his artistic and political views, even though they are deeply intertwined.

Salim Washington has focused on Mingus' career between 1959 and 1964 and his role in shaping the landscape of jazz avant-gardism and music with explicitly political and symbolic ideals associated with absolute freedom. His argument, which has wider implications, is that within the African American context, we need to think of the avant-garde not so much as a one-off rejection of the forms of earlier art (as in European modernism) but as a continuing commitment to radical change, which involves political as well as merely formal dimensions. This means that, as in Mingus, the work can be profoundly avant-garde while not rejecting, but building on and respectfully transforming the tradition, something missed by critics who saw the rebellion of the avant-garde solely in terms of form.[15] Scott Saul, looking particularly at the role of Mingus' Jazz Workshop shows how Mingus understood freedom "not as freedom from coercion... but as a sphere of musical action governed by the

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[14] Desmond King, "'The World's Against Me As A Black Man": Charles Mingus and Segregated America," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol.13, No.1, March 2000, p.54-76.
[15] Salim Washington, "'All the Things You Could Be By Now'," p.27-50. These years were important for Mingus as they were when he experienced his greatest critical acclaim and most rewarding commercial accomplishments, producing such successful albums as *Blues and Roots* (1959), *Mingus Ah Um* (1959), *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* (1960), *Money Jungle* (with Duke Ellington, 1962), and *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (1963).

push and pull of the Workshop dynamic."[16] Thus, Mingus' workshop symbolized a radical alternative to post-WWII understandings of freedom, to reveal, in Saul's view, "a dark side to the Civil Rights dream of struggle and deliverance."[17]

In another study relating artistic and political views, Charles Hersch points to the development of what he calls polyphonic improvisation in Mingus, no less than in Ornette Coleman as a means of reconciling the individual freedom of the improvising and innovative soloist with the sense of the needs of the collective, expressed in Martin Luther King's idea of the redemptive community.[18] In the light of these recent studies, I will demonstrate how Mingus' life and works (his compositions, autobiography and his liner notes to his albums) challenged issues of race in U.S. politics and cultural life and constructed an alternative understanding of conceptions of the value and the place of jazz music.

Throughout his life, Mingus' determination to resist and react against segregation and racism became a part of his compositional stance. Although in the early stages of his career he studied classical music and took bass lessons from Herman Rheinschagen, one of the former members of the New York Philharmonic, the most important spur to Mingus' musical development was the church music he had heard when he was a child.[19] When Hentoff asked about his musical development in an interview, Mingus answered:

> A lot of my music came from church. All the music I heard when I was a very young child was church music. I was eight or nine years old before

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[16] Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, p.159.
[17] Scott Saul, "Outrageous Freedom," p.389.
[18] Charles Hersch, "Let Freedom Ring," p.97-123.
[19] Nat Hentoff, *Jazz is*, p.163.

> I heard an Ellington record on the radio... The blues was in the Holiness churches – moaning and riffs and that sort of thing between the audience and the preacher. My sister and I had a trio, and we used to play in the Methodist church occasionally.[20]

Indeed, Mingus wrote a huge number of songs recalling and drawing on the blues and gospel that he heard as a child at Holiness church meetings, some of which have become his most popular pieces, such as "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting," "Better Git Hit in Your Soul," "Haitian Fight Song," "Slop" and "Moanin' (as opposed to the version made popular by Bobby Timmons a year earlier)."[21] Along with the church music he had heard when he was young, the key influence on Mingus' music was indeed Duke Ellington. In Mingus' own words, "When I first heard Duke Ellington in person I almost jumped out of the balcony. One piece excited me so much that I screamed."[22]

In order to answer why Ellington was a major inspiration for Mingus, we should look at Ellington's own musical transformation during the 1930s, when we can see significant changes in his music and political views. He started to compose works that according to Gennari "resonated strongly with the New Negro program of racial uplift, historical consciousness, and artistic progress."[23] Furthermore he started to write articles about his music and jazz in general, which was indeed a revolutionary attempt by an African American musician to represent himself/herself rather than being represented by the white critics of the time. In his 1939 article for *Down Beat*, (one of the few instances of an African

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[20] Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, p.161 and *Jazz is*, p.163. The official church of the Mingus' family was the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It was his stepmother who took Mingus to Pentecostal church.

[21] Todd. S. Jenkins, *I Know What I Know*, p.2. See Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um* (Columbia Records CK 65512) May 5, 1959 and *Blues and Roots* (Atlantic 7567-81336-2), February 4, 1959.

[22] Nat Hentoff, *Jazz is*, p.164.

[23] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.50.

American musician actually being heard in his own unedited voice in jazz critical circles) headed "Duke Says Swing Is Stagnant," Ellington complained that jazz was not regarded as "serious" music, and made clear his ambition to turn jazz into African American concert music.[24] He asserted that African American jazz musicians should create a body of music that reflected black people's experiences and consciousness rather than just entertaining the African American audience.

> We are not interested primarily in the playing of jazz or swing music, but in producing musically a genuine contribution from our race. Our music is always intended to be definitely and purely racial. We try to complete a cycle.[25]

Ellington here refuses the label of jazz by representing his compositions as "purely racial" music and this may seem to be a very strong statement. However Ellington also aimed to represent African American-rooted music a part of the U.S. musical repertoire. In Ellington's case, "to complete a cycle," of course, required a creative response to the challenge of Paul Whiteman's symphonic jazz, which was in Gennari's words "a hybrid of American popular music and European compositional and performance techniques leavened by the 'sweet' sound of violins."[26] In line with his ideas on the new possibilities of African American music, on 23 January 1943, Ellington premiered *Black, Brown and Beige* in Carnegie Hall. This was dedicated to the story of African Americans, and the place of slavery and the church in their history and it began a series of

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[24] Duke Ellington, "Duke Says Swing Is Stagnant" *Down Beat* 2, (February 1939): 16-17, reprinted in Mark Tucker, ed. *The Duke Ellington Reader*, p.135.
[25] ibid, p.135.
[26] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.45 and Paul Allen Anderson. *Deep River*, p.259. Ellington in fact expressed his admiration for Paul Whiteman, John Gennari, p.45.

concerts ideally suited to present his longer compositions.[27] However, the new changes in Ellington's music should not be considered as his abandonment of jazz music.[28]

In 1944, when some critics compared his music to the compositions of classical composers such as Bach, Ravel and Stravinsky, Ellington responded that his songs must strictly be classified as "yours truly."[29] Although he admitted that he owed a great debt to the classical composers, he writes, "I am not writing classical music, and the musical devices that have been handed down by serious composers have little bearing on modern swing."[30] Although Ellington could not avoid the terms altogether, he rejected labels and classifications like jazz and swing because of their association with the limitations imposed by race. His rejection of labels indeed extended to his musical output.[31] In 1944, Ellington wrote that the music must also be communicative and "hit home to the people who hear it."[32] He continued,

> Swing is my beat. Not jazz in the popular sense of the word, which usually means a chatty combination of instruments knocking out a tune. Swing, as I like to make it and play it, is an expression of sentiment and

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[27] Duke Ellington: Black, Brown and Beige (1943-1945) (Duke Ellington, Vol. 9) Naxos 8.120809. For a later reconstruction, Duke Ellington and his Orchestra Featuring Mahalia Jackson, *Black, Brown and Beige* (Columbia Records 468401 2), February 1958. For a brief description see Mark Tucker, ed. *The Duke Ellington Reader*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 153-185. Although, Jackson was a gospel singer and refused to sing in jazz clubs or to work with jazz bands, she made an exception for the Duke Ellington Orchestra. When asked why, she explained that she did not view Ellington's musicians as a jazz group, but as "a sacred institution," Derek Jewell, *Duke: A Portrait of duke Ellington*, London: Elm Tree Books, 1977, p.108.

[28] See John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.43-59 for the criticism on Duke Ellington's new music and his response to the music critic John Hammond.

[29] Duke Ellington, "Certainly it's Music," *Listen*, IV\12, (October 1944): 5-6, reprinted in Mark Tucker, ed. *The Duke Ellington Reader*, p.246 and Derek Jewell, *Duke*, p.24.

[30] ibid, p.246.

[31] Eddie S. Meadows, *Jazz Research and Performance Materials*, New York and London: Routledge, 1981, p.xxviii.

[32] "Duke Ellington: 'Swing Is My Beat, *Listen*, IV\12, (October 1944), reprinted in Mark Tucker, ed. *The Duke Ellington Reader*, p.249.

> ideas – modern ideas. It's the kind of music that catches the rhythm of the way people feel and live today.[33]

In Ellington, Mingus found an example of a musician extending the possibilities of jazz as a form and portraying the complexities of African American life in sound. Mingus, with his small combos managed to achieve the level of a highly creative fusion of individual talents and also of old and new styles that Ellington reached with an orchestra.[34] With his big bands, he borrowed the ensemble format of Ellington and reoriented African American musical traditions, pushing them to new forms.[35] Like Ellington, he also produced longer compositions with narrative themes related to the historical experience of African Americans, for instance in his composition for eleven instruments, *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (1963), or in *Epitaph* (1989).[36] Similar to his musical hero Ellington, Mingus developed a musical vision that often highlighted experimentation and challenges to the musical boundaries of jazz.[37] However, he tried to avoid being overshadowed by Ellington and his legacy:

> I wrote the original compositions and the melodies, but the background riffs were usually things like Duke had written. I wanted it like that. I wanted to tell Duke I love him, that's all. But I never copied anything exactly because I've got to be careful about getting tied to his shoestrings. Much as I love him, I don't write like Ellington, because in the '40s I found something else of my own.[38]

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[33] ibid, p.249. See also Edward Kennedy, "Duke" Ellington, "Music is 'Tops' to You and Me... and Swing is a Part of It," *Tops*, 1938, p.14-18, reprinted in Robert Walser, ed., *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.106-111.
[34] Nat Hentoff, *Jazz is*, p.162.
[35] Desmond King, "The World's Against Me As A Black Man" p.55.
[36] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, p.49. Charles Mingus, *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (Impulse IMP 11742), January 20 1963 and *Epitaph* (Columbia Records C2K 45428), performed and recorded posthumously in 1989 under the direction of Gunther Schuller. See also Scott Saul, *Jazz and the Making of the Sixties*, p.196-198 for further discussion.
[37] Like Ellington, Mingus' approach to jazz composition constantly changed during his musical career.
[38] Originally published in Peter Goddard, *Performance Review*, CMC. I quoted in Nichole T. Rustin, "Cante Hondo: Charles Mingus, Nat Hentoff, and Jazz Racism," *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 2-3, 2006, p.324.

Similar to Ellington, Mingus managed to establish his own agenda for a conversation about his music and African American music in general, which was indeed a constant concern for him. While working with the Red Norvo trio at the Blackhawk in San Francisco in 1951, he wrote to the *Down Beat* columnist Ralph Gleason about the challenges he faced as an African American practitioner of jazz in the early 1950s. While he was trained in both jazz and classical idioms, he tried to give jazz a cultural legitimacy equal to that of Western classical music.[39] In the early stages of his musical career, he maintained a romantic approach to his music and creativity. In fact, between 1946 and 1955, his compositions strongly mirrored his early universalistic ideals and his desire to link his compositions to other forms of artistic expression such as European classical music.[40] Moreover, by using instruments such as the cello and the flute, which were less characteristic of the jazz range of sounds, he produced textures that sound remarkably European.[41]

Indeed, Mingus' early approach was more characteristic of "Third Stream," a style that the critics later dismissed as a feeble white version of jazz in which the musicians were required to incorporate a variety of Western musical aesthetics.[42] However, as Eric Porter writes, Mingus "recognized that categories such as 'jazz' and 'classical' were constructs informed by racialized ideas about virtuosity and genius that in turn contributed to inequality in the music

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[39] For instance, in a letter to Gleason, Mingus even compared Charlie Parker to Brahms. Chopin, and Tchaikovsky.

[40] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p.105. His knowledge of classical music also became a source of pride for Mingus, who considered himself more serious than other jazz musicians and often challenged them to prove their technical skills. See Nat Hentoff, *Jazz is*, p.157.

[41] For instance in the compositions of "Story Of Love" and "Half-Mast Inhibition."

[42] Scott Saul, *Jazz and the Making of the Sixties*, p.154.

business."[43] He saw the limitation of jazz as a label and recognized that racial inequality played a significant role in the American music industry and shaped the careers of many African American musicians. "Music," Mingus claimed in 1960, "is a language of the emotions; it is a test of life... Everybody reacts to music in a different way and everyone should be able to make it on his own – play and write the music the way he feels it."[44] Moreover, for Mingus, "If he is going to be really great, he must learn to be himself. He is always with others, but most of all, he is alone. He must stand alone."[45] While claiming jazz was the expression of an artist's "inner self," Mingus saw that jazz was also a commodity created by the American music industry. Therefore, Mingus "rebelled at too narrow a definition of jazz" and its association with the limitations imposed by race.[46] Rather he regarded classical music and jazz as the same, in that they were both music, but the marketing and the promoting strategies were completely different.

Mingus had an ambivalent attitude towards his role as a jazz musician. While during his entire career he represented jazz as a site of African American accomplishment, and centered it within an African American cultural identity and history, he often objected, as Ellington had earlier at points in his career, to being described as a jazz musician: "Don't call me a jazz musician... To me the word 'jazz' means nigger, discrimination, second-class citizenship, the whole

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[43] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p.107. Mingus wrote, "those who have always separated the two into jazz and classical will finally see that it's all one music we're playing and what they've been buying is just the confusion out of the separation of the two," p.104.
[44] Quoted in liner notes to Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* (Candid CCD79005) October 20, 1960
[45] ibid
[46] Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, p.161 and Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p.103

back-of-the-bus bit."[47] Mingus here associates the terms "jazz" and "Nigger" to underline the effect that racial inequality had on the music industry, because he knew that while jazz music could be a source of African American pride, the term could reflect a restricted view of black capabilities. Further, although he was more vocal politically than many of his contemporaries, he felt disconnected from the black community.

For instance, while hard bop and free jazz were associated with "blackness" and many of the most significant figures of these movements, such as hard bop drummer Max Roach and free jazz saxophone player Archie Shepp, used their music as an expression of their sense of racial pride and to make strong racial statements, Mingus' sense of race was always complicated because of his physical appearance. Both of Mingus' parents were biracial, his father was half-white, half-black, and his real mother was half-black, half-Chinese.[48] As a result, Mingus had exceptionally light skin, which, for the young boy growing up in racially mixed Los Angeles, resulted in an early experience of problems with "the colour-line." In other words, he was fully aware of discrimination from all sides. As a child, he simultaneously became the target of darker-skinned African Americans, and was humiliated by whites. In Santoro's words, "Since he was yellow, he had to be louder, harder, angrier about being black."[49] Mingus' own complex and evolving relation to his musical and racial heritage has also to be seen in the context of changes in the political and cultural climate of the 1950s and 1960s, when Mingus was particularly active and influential

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[47] Brian Priestley, *Mingus*, p.149

[48] Todd. S. Jenkins, *I Know What I Know*, p.5; Brian Priestley, *Mingus*, p.14-15 and Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, p.452.

[49] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, p.31. See, p.31-33.

both as a musician and a composer, and it is worth focusing on some specific aspects of this.

In September 1951, Mingus left Red Norvo's trio in New York and started to collaborate with East Coast based African American musicians who influenced the direction of his music and ideas. This included performing intermittently with Charlie Parker, who had a great impact on Mingus' life and music. In 1952, he co-founded Debut Records with Max Roach, who became an associate in his critique of U.S. music industry practices. Although the company recorded only between 1952 and 1957, it was his first significant attempt to escape the effect that racial inequality had on the music industry, and the commodification of jazz. Indeed, as early as 1953, he started to protest publicly and explicitly: "impresarios bill these circus artists as jazzmen because 'jazz' has become a commodity to sell, like apples or, more accurately, corn."[50]

In the same *Down Beat* interview, he also complained about his lack of steady employment and argued that jazz artistry had become the possession of white "copyists," who had gained greater critical and financial rewards than African American musicians such as Charlie Parker and Jimmy Blanton.[51] These comments and his attempt to establish an independent record label were significant, and provide us with a useful trajectory here. As I argued earlier, during the 1950s the ideals of integration and democracy were central to jazz culture's identity, and, jazz critics, most of whom were white and liberal ideologically, viewed jazz culture as a barometer of the U.S. national character.

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[50] Nat Hentoff, *Down Beat*, (May 6, 1963).
[51] ibid. See also Brian Priestley, *Mingus*, p.103.

Indeed, as Ronald Radano argues in *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique* (1996), this discourse, jazz as a symbol of a "colour-blind" society, reached its highest expression in State Department-sponsored tours of American jazz musicians overseas, which reinforced the post-WW-II idea that the U.S.A was a raceless, classless country.[52] Furthermore, while most white critics represented jazz culture as a respectable expression of American democracy, they often removed jazz from its African American referent. For the most part, due to white jazz critics' own liberal outlook on race, they persisted in imagining jazz culture as fundamentally "colour-blind."[53] In other words, many white critics who held liberal views often paid lip service to the idea of racial equality in jazz, while neglecting the racism and economic disparity in the music industry. For them, the music was probably all that mattered and racism and segregation were always out there, but not institutionalized within jazz culture itself, despite the reported problems between black and white musicians working together in bands.[54] For example jazz critic Leonard Feather perceived jazz as an expression of American freedom and democracy and focused on the problem of cultural authenticity and the importance of inter-racialism in jazz in his writings (this was also the case for many white critics at the time). Feather claimed in *The Book of Jazz* (1957), "It would seem to be an inescapable fact that some of the most valuable jazz of recent years has been produced by interracial teams."[55]

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[52] Ronald Rodano, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p.12-16.
[53] See John Panish, *The Color of Jazz.*
[54] See Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, p.46-60.
[55] Leonard Feather, *The Book of Jazz* (1957), New York: Horizon, 1965, p.51-52.

Leonard Feather invented the "Blindfold Test," originally for *Metronome* in 1946 and then transferred the feature to *Down Beat* in 1951. This involved Feather asking jazz musicians to identify the performers and rate on a five star scale the record they heard. Feather saw the results as supporting his ideal, the "colour-blind" nature of jazz, as the participants often made mistakes and could not identify the musicians on the recordings. Nor could they guess the skin colour of the anonymous musicians. Charles Mingus participated in Feather's "Blindfold Test" in 1955, just before Charlie Parker's death. With his comments, Mingus pointed out the importance of the impact of race on black musicians' job opportunities and railed against the dishonesty and inequalities in the jazz world where the skin colour of the musicians actually mattered, but during the test, Mingus misidentified the white alto saxophone player Dave Schildkraut as Charlie Parker. When Feather played Parker's "Cosmic Rays," Mingus gave him an ironic answer:

> If that wasn't Bird, I quit... You know what's funny? Now I know that Bird was progressing still. The other cats were the ones that were standing still and making Bird sound old, you know? Bird isn't just playing the riffs on here, the way his imitators do. You know how he used to be able to talk with his horn, the way he could tell you what chick he was thinking about? That's the way he's playing here. How many stars? FIFTY![56]

Although, in the early 1950s, Mingus tried to win economic rewards and critical acclaim through his hybrid musical vision and celebrated Stan Kenton's potential to go beyond the limitations of jazz, Mingus, in 1955, having identified the drummer Shelly Manne's playing during the test, comments on his progress since leaving Kenton's band. He also criticized Dave Brubeck, Paul Desmond

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[56] Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of the Encyclopedia of Jazz.* New York: Bonanza Books, 1962, p.480.

and Lee Konitz, who had been rewarded both financially and critically, while many African American jazz musicians were still struggling to find jobs in the music business. He repeated his earlier claims that jazz music had become the possession of white "copyists," who had gained greater critical and financial rewards than African American innovators of the music. Mingus responded to Lee Konitz's song "Bop Goes the Leesel,"

> This makes me mad, because it's not jazz, and people are calling this kind of beat jazz. Dave Brubeck gets the same beat. And it's leading Lee to think this is swing, because Desmond has made it like that, and they call it swing... It's like five dead men, this record. No stars, man. They shouldn't ever have released it. Not release it – they shouldn't even *play* like that!
>
> I think these cats hate jazz, but for some reason they've convinced the public that this is jazz. I don't know what to do about it, unless cats like Bird and Diz – well it's too late for Bird – change their music and call it something else. Cause if they play jazz, I don't play jazz, neither does Pettiford![57]

It is true that while many African American musicians struggled to find steady jobs in the business, *Time* magazine estimated Brubeck's income as $100,000 a year in 1954.[58] On the other hand, some of Mingus' comments during the Blindfold Test were in fact harsh and unfair to white jazz musicians like Brubeck and Konitz. His definition and categorization of jazz could be interpreted as racist, and he withdrew from this position, retracted many of his comments and apologized to Brubeck later in the same year.[59]

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[57] ibid, p.480.

[58] Peter Loeb, "The Man on Cloud No.7," *Time* 64, (November 1954), p.67-76. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,857657-4,00.html>>

[59] "It seems so hard for some of us to grow up mentally just enough to realize there are other persons of flesh and bone, just like us, on this great, big earth. And if they don't ever stand still, move, or 'swing,' they are as right as we are, even if they are as wrong as hell by our standards. Yes, Miles, I am apologizing for my stupid 'Blindfold Test.' I can do it gladly because I'm learning a little something. No matter how much they try to say that Brubeck doesn't swing – or whatever else they're stewing or whoever else they're brewing – it's factually unimportant. Not because Dave made Time magazine – and a dollar – but mainly because Dave honestly thinks he's swinging. He feels a certain pulse and plays a certain pulse which gives him pleasure and a

However, in my view, most of Mingus' comments came out of his frustration about the prevailing jazz discourse of the time and the way critics downplayed the effects of racism and economic inequality on the careers of African American musicians. Mingus was aware that the American music industry played a significant role in shaping the careers of African American musicians, and, with these comments, he simply stood against the demands of the market and jazz criticism and tried to shape and reshape the 1950s jazz discourse. In fact, he managed to establish his own agenda: that jazz culture operated in a real world in which racism, segregation and inequality were institutionalized in every particular aspect. Mingus did a second, less controversial blindfold test in 1960, with which I will be dealing later in this chapter.

In 1954, Mingus established his own working-band, "The Jazz Workshop," a group that enabled young jazz musicians to have their new works performed in concert and on recordings. It also became the name of his self-founded record label and his music-publishing imprint until his death in 1978. Scott Saul sees The Jazz Workshop as "the main vehicle for Mingus' challenge to dominant conceptions of freedom."[60] Motivated by the growing civil-rights climate of the mid 1950s, Mingus started composing music with a politically charged consciousness in works such as "Pithecanthropus Erectus" (1956), a composition that foreshadowed later developments in avant-garde and free jazz. Ekkehard Jost identifies the most significant innovations for what follows as "his treatment of form and tempo, and his approach to collective

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sense of exaltation because he's sincerely doing something the way he, Dave Brubeck, feels like doing it," Charles Mingus, "An Open Letter to Miles Davis," *Down Beat*, 30 November 1955. <<http://www.mingusmingusmingus.com/Mingus/miles_davis.html>>

[60] Scott Saul, "Outrageous Freedom," p.389.

improvisation."[61] The album *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (1956) was Mingus' first as a band leader for a major label, Atlantic Records and the album has been celebrated by some critics as Mingus' single most important record – even as his "musical and political landmark."[62] He employed the title track to comment on the current state of U.S. race relations, describing it as a "jazz tone poem" which depicts musically:

> My conception of the modern counterpart of the first man to stand erect – how proud he was, considering himself the "first" to ascend from all fours, pounding his chest and preaching his superiority over the animals still in a prone position. Overcome with self-esteem, he goes out to rule the world, if not the universe; but both his own failure to realize the inevitable emancipation of those he sought to enslave, and his greed in attempting to stand on a false security, deny him not only the right of ever being a man, but finally destroy him completely.[63]

As affirmed in this summary of the composition's narrative, his intent was to use it as a metaphorical portrayal of the African American struggle for equality. As Saul writes, "Mingus' plot was indebted to a long tradition of African American moderns, from Frederick Douglass to Ralph Ellison, who questioned the myth of 'progress' from the standpoint of the slave."[64]

"Pithecanthropus Erectus" depicts in Mingus' own words "Man's Evolution, Superiority Complex, Decline and Destruction," and the tension between these movements probably mirrored Mingus' unsolved inner musical conflict between his universalism (his desire to unite jazz and classical music as one universal

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[61] Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz*, p.39. See also Saul, who identifies what he calls "plastic form, as well as the use of tempo changes and emotional immediacy," *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, p.162-165.
[62] Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, p.188.
[63] Charles Mingus, liner notes to *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, 1956.
[64] Scott Saul, "Outrageous Freedom," p.411.

language) and African American compositional traditions.[65] Moreover, the album was extremely significant, because, while it confirmed Mingus' arrival as an outspoken critic of the status quo, it, especially the song, "Pithecanthropus Erectus," also signified a fully-realized version of Mingus's political aesthetic and shift in compositional identity. He directly blamed "the white man" for his errors in the handling of other parts of the human race and his false sense of superiority over oppressed people.[66]

The musical scheme of the composition, like its text, is clearly divided between the figurative oppressor and those who challenge his domination. It alternates between phrases of controlled, composed material, demonstrating Mingus' inspiration from German chromaticism (especially Richard Strauss' famous tone-poem *Also Sprach Zarathrustra*) and unrestrained, improvised settings. The piece is divided into three sections: A, B, A, C. The music of the A section is precisely composed, which features slow ascending, chromatic lines, quick crescendos and decrescendos and sudden rests. Each instrument is carefully scored to create a Western orchestral sound. We may assume that this section reflects Mingus' attempt to unite jazz and classical music as one universal language. The white man, who holds himself above all other creatures, is suggested in the melody of the A section and the sixteen-measure phrase structure of this section probably represents the figurative oppressor's control

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[65] Charles Mingus, liner notes to *Pithecanthropus Erectus* and Sue Mingus and Boris Kozlov, *More than a Play-Along*, p.29.

[66] Mingus also had an alternative version: "I had this imagination going... Since the white man says he comes from the evolution of animals, well, maybe the black man didn't. The white man has made so many errors in the handling of people that maybe he did come from a gorilla or a fish and crawl up on the sand and then into the trees. Of course, evolution doesn't take God into consideration. I don't think people learned to do all the things they do through evolution." Sue Mingus and Boris Kozlov, *More than a Play-Along*, p.29.

over other creatures, in which the pre-composed music and specific harmonic progression regulate the direction of the performance.

The B section of the composition conflicts with the controlled compositional features of section A and is dedicated to feverish bursts of collective improvisation. The formerly enslaved masses are embodied in the polyphonic textures of this section. Mingus uses elements of freer improvisation and faster tempos in the melodic lines in the design to convey the oppressed masses' restlessness. Rhythmically, the section adopts jazz's signature common-time swing feel with the drums sounding a customary repeating pattern of a quarter note and the sound of the section is dominated by the blues scale and blues inflections. Finally, the extreme chaotic nature of the C section, which Brian Priestley compares to Ellington's "jungle-style," and which in the 1920s carried explicitly "African" and "primitive" associations, the animalistic sounds and screeches which we hear from Jackie McLean's alto saxophone, signifies the decline and destruction of the white man at the hands of the furious, unleashed masses.[67]

Saul writes, "The German idiom of *geist* was transformed into the register of African American 'soul,' a spiritually both gritty and exalted, both deeply psychological and deeply collective."[68] While many of Mingus' early compositions were an attempt to blend the elements of jazz and Western classical music, with the later sections of "Pithecanthropus Erectus," he began to be less interested in this compositional approach. Instead Mingus increasingly

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[67] Brian Priestley, *Mingus*, p.82.
[68] Scott Saul, "Outrageous Freedom," p.415.

relied on musical components of African American vernacular traditions such as gospel and the blues and allowed his improvisers greater freedom in section B and the C of "Pithecanthropus Erectus." Mingus explains in the LP sleeve-notes:

> My whole conception with my present Jazz Workshop group deals with nothing written. I "write" compositions – but only on mental score paper – then I lay out the composition part by part to the musicians. I play them the "framework" on piano so that they are all familiar with my interpretation and feeling and with the scale and chord progressions to be used. Each man's particular style is taken into consideration, both in ensemble and in solos. For instance, they are given different rows of notes to use against each chord but they choose their own notes and play them in their own style, from scales as well as chords, except where a particular mood is indicated. In this way I can keep my own compositional flavor in the pieces and yet allow the musicians more individual freedom in the creation of their group lines and solos.[69]

Mingus utilized an important characteristic of jazz music, individual interpretation and spontaneity, and by doing so, distinguished jazz composition from classical music:

> Jazz, by its very definition, cannot be held down to written parts to be played with a feeling that goes only with blowing free. A classical musician might read all the notes correctly but play them without the correct feeling or interpretation, and a jazz musician, although he might read all the notes and play them with jazz feeling, inevitably introduces his *own individual* expression rather than what the composer intended. It is amazing how many ways a four-bar phase of four beats per measure can be interpreted.[70]

Thus, for Mingus, if jazz were to challenge the authority of classical music, it would have to look to its own elements and resources for its musical power.

Pithecanthropus Erectus was one of the first jazz albums that expanded on the achievements of bebop and offered new possibilities to go beyond the limitations of jazz composition. As much as Mingus admired Charlie Parker (with whom he recorded at the famous 1953 Massey Hall Concert for his own

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[69] Charles Mingus, liner notes to *Pithecanthropus Erectus*.
[70] ibid.

Debut label), in his desire to break away from the limitations of bebop, he never allowed his young players to copy their idol. For instance, Mingus hired Jackie McLean, a 24-year old alto saxophonist, during the recording of *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, and McLean confirmed that Mingus helped him to find his own musical personality by repeatedly telling him, "I don't want Charlie Parker, man, I want Jackie."[71]

For Mingus, bebop represented both the possibilities and the limitations of jazz. On the one hand, musicians like Parker and Gillespie signified black musical accomplishment. On the other hand, because so many young jazz musicians stuck only with the language of bebop and worked out their individual styles through personal explorations within the central modern tradition, they often could not contribute any new ideas to the African American musical tradition. That was probably why Mingus kept reminding the listeners in interviews that his music was beyond the trajectory of bebop: "I remember, Fats Navarro telling me, 'That's not it, Mingus; that's what they *used* to do.' Well, I'm not going to worry about that sort of thing any more. I'm going to be *me*. If Bird were to come back to life, I wouldn't do something just because *he* did it. I'd have to feel it too."[72] In his second Blindfold test, Mingus, although he openly expressed his dislike of Ornette Coleman's new music, celebrated Coleman's break from the language of Parker and his abandonment of many of the traditional jazz forms, arriving quickly at something that was to be called free jazz:

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[71] A. B. Spellman, *Four Jazz Lives: Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, Herbie Nichols, Jackie McLean* (1966), Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, p.216.
[72] Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, p.167 and *Jazz is*, p.165.

> Now aside from the fact that I doubt he can even play a C scale in whole notes—tied whole notes, a couple of bars apiece—in tune, the fact remains that his notes and lines are so fresh. I'm not saying everybody's going to have to play like Coleman. But they're going to have to stop copying Bird. Nobody can play Bird right yet but him. Now what would Fats Navarro and J.J. have played like if they'd never heard Bird? Or even Dizzy? Would he still play like Roy Eldridge? Anyway, when they put Coleman's record on, the only record they could have put on behind it would have been Bird.[73]

Mingus even entitled one of his compositions "If Charlie Parker Were a Gunslinger There'd be a Whole Lot of Dead Copycats" as a way of expressing his frustration with Parker's imitators.[74]

It was not in "Pithecanthropus Erectus" that the change in Mingus' compositional and political stance became fully evident, but "Haitian Fight Song," where he signaled a return to the roots of African American music, particularly the blues and gospel. The song was originally recorded in 1955 and Mingus re-recorded it for the album *The Clown* in 1957, but it remained unreleased until 1961. In the liner notes to *The Clown*, which included the second recording of "Haitian Fight Song," he explained that it "could just as well be called *Afro-American Fight Song*... I can't play it right unless I'm thinking about prejudice and hate and persecution, and how unfair it is. There's sadness and cries in it, but also determination. And it usually ends with my feeling: 'I told them! I hope somebody heard me'."[75] Of course, the new musical movement called hard bop, the jazz style that lies on the borderline between jazz

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[73]<<http://www.mingusmingusmingus.com/Mingus/blindfold.html>>

[74] Charles Mingus, *Mingus Dynasty*, (Sony B00000|150) November 1, 1959. In liner notes to *Mingus Ah Um*, Mingus compared Parker to Beethoven and Stravinsky and wrote about Parker and his imitators: "The followers who supposed Bird's greatness lay in his melodic patterns copied them without realizing that if Bird played something as diatonic as a C scale on his horn, he could play it millions of different ways with millions of different meanings. These sham copies have distorted Bird's beauty and greatness. I wonder how he felt, hearing copies of himself all over America."

[75] Liner notes to Charles Mingus, *The Clown* (Atlantic Jazz 7567-90142-2) February 13, 1957 [emphasis added].

and African American popular music traditions such as rhythm and blues, motivated Mingus to move away from his earlier approach of uniting jazz and classical music as one universal language.[76]

If the songs, "Haitian Fight Song" and "Pithecanthropus Erectus," represented Mingus' transition towards a style expressing his political engagement, then the albums *Blues and Roots* (1958) and *Mingus Ah Um* (1959) proclaimed the arrival of his most popular and economically rewarding compositional identity – one in which he came to build on African American folk and popular traditions. Mingus' use of call-and-response and enthusiastic vocals in such compositions as "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" and "Better Git It In Your Soul," revealed the influence of the gospel church (foot-stomps and handclaps) as well as the blues and bebop. Mingus wrote in the liner notes of the *Blues and Roots* LP that he wanted to respond to the critics who said he didn't swing enough and to show critics his ability to produce different types of compositional practices that characterized the era:

> A year ago, Nesuhi Ertegun suggested that I record an entire blues album in the style of "Haitian Fight Song"... because some people, particularly critics, were saying I didn't swing enough. He wanted to give them a barrage of soul music: churchy, blues, swinging, earthy. I thought it over. I was born swinging and clapped my hands in church as a little boy, but I've grown up and I like to do things other than just swing. But blues can do more than just swing. So I agreed.[77]

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[76] Between 1952 and 1955, Mingus's music strongly reflected his universalistic ideals. One dominant feature throughout his compositions is the presence of multi-textured melodies. This technique is more characteristic of the later "third stream," in which the musicians sought to incorporate a variety of European aesthetics. Clearly influenced by his early musical experiences on the west coast, Mingus integrated actual material from the classical repertoire into his performances. Mingus' song, "Eclipse" (1953), is the most revealing of Mingus's universalistic ideals, both in its lyrics and orchestration. See Paul Tanner and Maurice Gerow, *A Study of Jazz*, Edited by Frederick W. Westphal, Dubuque: WM. C. Brown, 1964, p.63.

[77] Linear notes to Charles Mingus, *Blues and Roots* (Atlantic 7567-81336-2), February 4 1959.

Although Mingus managed to give some of the most ecstatic blues ("Moanin" and "Cryin Blues"), gospel ("Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting") and Dixieland ("My Jelly Roll Soul") to the jazz world, these albums can also be considered as Mingus' attempts to respond to the demands of the music market, as hard bop had had its heyday by the late Fifties.

However, although hard bop was the most popular style of jazz of the era, it eventually failed to match the popularity of Rhythm and Blues with African American audiences.[78] Thus, the reason for Mingus starting to compose more popular tunes has nothing to do with the economic demands of the market – he was always scornful of such demands – but it could be more plausibly interpreted as part of his engagement with actual political events in America and his sense of involvement with the Civil Rights agenda. Interestingly, at the same time that Mingus had established himself with the reputation of being "Jazz's Angry Man," he was gaining some success and financial reward, which in turn helped him in a small measure to support his more radical position as an aggressive spokesman of jazz.

In general, hard bop was bitterly attacked by many white jazz critics because of its apparent rage and celebration of blackness.[79] I should add that many of the critics were often guilty of confusing the musicians' personal attitudes or political stances with their music. Here, I do not mean that their judgments were always wrong or that some of the musicians' attitudes were beyond criticism; but the inadequacy of much of this criticism could be found in the reasons

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[78] Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, p.142.
[79] David H. Rosenthal, "Hard Bop and Its Critics," *The Black Perspective in Music*, Vol.16, No.1 (Spring, 1988: 24.

supporting these judgments (calling the movement regressive, self-conscious, monotonous, and contrived) or sometimes the total absence of reasons.[80] In Hentoff's words, "It is too simple to hear their music as only hatred – or joy or lust – as only orgasm."[81]

In 1959, working for the first time for Columbia Records, Mingus recorded his famous/infamous song "Fables of Faubus," which draws its title from the events of September, 1957, when the Governor of Arkansas, Orval E. Faubus, aroused widespread fury by calling in the National Guard to stop black children from integrating Little Rock's Central High School.[82] Mingus originally intended to include lyrics denouncing Faubus for his stance against desegregation. However, Columbia did not allow him to include his inflammatory lyrics, and the piece was recorded solely as an instrumental. The lyrics finally appeared on *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* (1960), an album produced on Hentoff's more independent Candid label, under a different song title, "Original Faubus Fables."[83] That version opened with Mingus and drummer Dannie Richmond singing: "Oh Lord, don't let them stab us! Oh Lord, don't let them shoot us! Oh Lord, don't let them tar and feather us! Oh Lord, no more swastikas!" before engaging in a dialogue:

[All:] Oh Lord, no more Ku Klux Klan!
[Mingus:] Name me someone who's ridiculous
[Richmond:] Governor Faubus
[Mingus:] Why is he so sick and ridiculous?
[Richmond:] He won't permit integrated schools.
[All:] Then he's a fool!

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[80] See Martin Williams, *The Art of Jazz*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p.233.
[81] Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life*, p.140.
[82] Charles Mingus, Mingus Ah Um (CBS 450436 2), May 1959.
[83] Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* (Candid CCD79005), October, 1960.

[All:] Boo! Nazi Fascist supremacists\Boo! Ku Klux Klan!

[Mingus:] Name me a handful that's ridiculous
[Richmond]: Faubus, Rockefeller, Eisenhower
[Mingus:] Why are they so sick and ridiculous?
[Richmond:] Two, four, eight

[All]: They brainwash and teach you hate![84]

It is not difficult to understand why Columbia executives preferred to shy away from releasing these lyrics. The lyrics were indeed politically explicit, attacking not only Governor Faubus, but also Rockefeller and even the President, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Columbia probably feared the effect on sales to the more cautious white jazz audience, as Columbia was also Dave Brubeck's record company. As I discussed earlier, Mingus, with "Pithecanthropus Erectus," "Haitian Fight Song" and even the 1955 "Work Song," did purposefully use titles with political resonance, showing he was engaged and politically informed about Civil Rights protests and anti-segregation initiatives. However, it was with "Fables of Faubus" or "Original Faubus Fables," that Mingus actually wrote explicitly political lyrics: "I just write tunes, and put political titles on them. 'Fables of Faubus' was different, though – I wrote that because I wanted to. And Dannie made up the words."[85] He said that the lyrics "seemed to fit right in."[86] At the same time as producing more popular tunes compared to his earlier compositions, he became more directly involved with the ongoing Civil Rights movement and gave more radical speeches about segregation and racism in the

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[84] Liner notes to Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*,1960.
[85] Brian Priestley, *Mingus*, p.204.
[86] Nat Hentoff, Institute of Jazz Studies interview, p.11. There are other Mingus compositions with a politically pertinent title, such as "Remember Rockefeller at Attica," "Meditations on Integration," "Prayer for Passive Resistance," "Remember Rockefeller at Attica," "Free Cellblock F," "Tis Nazi USA," and "Don't Let Them Drop the Atomic Bomb on Me."

U.S. Without a doubt, we can associate Mingus and his stance with other jazz's spokesmen/women of the era like Sonny Rollins, Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, whose political activities have already been argued in this thesis.

There are significant differences between the two versions of "Fables of Faubus" other than the lyrics. First of all "Original Faubus Fables" was recorded by a quartet – the *Mingus Ah Um* version was an octet – with Eric Dolphy on alto saxophone, Ted Curson on trumpet, and Dannie Richmond on drums. This second version was also more abstract, emphasizing freer group improvisation, which shows Dolphy's obvious influence on Mingus' music. It was more complex than the first recording, based on a long form and featuring several tempo changes and greater chromaticism during each musician's solo section. The most striking moment is probably when the spiritual, "Wade in the Water," is quoted in Curson's solo. In the background, Mingus and Richmond's voices can also be heard singing the melody.[87] Interestingly, the significance of this part has not been mentioned in the research done on Mingus so far. The spirituals were celebrated as an expression of the generative vitality and creativity of the African American heritage. As Mellonee Burnim writes, "Negro spirituals and gospel music are the religious music genres actually created by and for Blacks themselves and which therefore reflect African American musical genius."[88] Indeed, they also signified the African American struggle for freedom, and were much more widely used by those involved than

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[87] The Mingus Big Band later made a recording of "Fables of Faubus" for their album *Gunslinging Birds* (Dreyfus B000001ZTC), July 17, 1995, and in the background, the pianist Kenny Drew, Jr. can be also heard playing Confederate tunes of the civil war, like "Take Me Home to Dixieland" and "My Eyes Have Seen the Glory." Johnny Griffin also recorded "Wade in the Water" for Riverside in 1960.

[88] Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby, *African American Music*, p.493.

other forms like jazz or blues. Mingus had been interested in the spirituals as a source of compositional practices for some time, and according to Santoro, "Haitian Fight Song" and "Work Song" came out of the spirituals he had heard from his wife Celia Mingus.[89] The pianist Mal Waldron mentions Mingus' awareness of the spirituals: "With things like "Work Song," we were going into the area of traditional music. We were going into the background of black people in America, into their experiences in life. Mingus was trying to portray that in his music, so he chose worksongs and other things of that order."[90]

Therefore, Mingus' spiritual reference reveals how he perceived his music as an articulation of African American struggle, and also as an organic part of the African American tradition. Furthermore, this reference demonstrates how carefully Mingus composed, despite the improvisational nature of his compositions. Thus, this quotation from a spiritual indicates both Mingus' awareness of the links between cultural heritage and politics, and his compositional process of layering musical associations, calling to mind similar techniques in Ellington. While Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln were more likely to make a connection between the struggle for freedom in the United States and the struggle for independence in African countries with their music, Mingus tried to portray the musical history of African Americans from slavery to the Civil Rights movement. Indeed, although Mingus often expressed contradictory statements about making music, he refused the idea of using African themes in jazz performances, choosing instead to situate his music in an African American context. Mingus said in 1961, "There is a lot of talk about

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[89] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, p.116.
[90] ibid, p.116.

Africa today. But African music belongs in Africa. *American music*, which is what we play, belongs with *people who have a feeling of freedom and like to play together without discrimination.*"[91]

After several sessions with Columbia and Candid, Mingus returned to Atlantic and produced another soul jazz album *Oh Yeah* (1961). Mingus did not play bass, but substituted Doug Watkins, while he accompanied the group on piano and contributed bluesy vocals to several tracks. In 1963, he recorded two significant albums for Impulse: *Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus* and *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady.*[92] *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* especially can be considered one of the greatest achievements in orchestration by Mingus or any composer in jazz history, and sold approximately 10,000 copies.[93] Mingus intentionally designed the six-part ballet as his "magnum opus," and – as is implied by his famous inclusion of liner notes by his psychologist Dr. Edmund Pollack – the album is as much an examination of Mingus' own "tortured psyche," as it is a conceptual piece (conceived for an eleven-piece band) about love, peace and freedom.[94] Pollack writes, "He cannot accept that he is alone, all by himself, he wants to love and be loved. His music is a call for acceptance, respect, love, understanding, fellowship, freedom – a plea to the white man to be aware."[95]

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[91] Dan Morgenstern, "Rotating with Satchmo and Miles," *Metronome*, (June 1961): 20.
[92] Charles Mingus, *Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus* (Impulse IMP 11702), January 1963 and Charles Mingus, *The Black Saint and the Lady Sinner* (Impulse IMP 11742), January 20 1963. *Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus*, featured re-recordings of his best-known compositions: "Haitian Fight Song" was renamed "II B.S."; "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" became "Theme for Lester Young"; and "Better Get Hit in Yo' Soul" was recorded for the third time after versions on Columbia and Atlantic.
[93] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, p.211.
[94] Edmund Pollack, liner notes to *The Black Saint and the Lady Sinner.*
[95] Ibid.

Saul argues that this album signified a change in Mingus' music – the album sustained modal improvisation throughout the eleven-piece ensemble – and in his political stance. He writes, "At the same that Mingus shifted musically, he also shifted in programmatic intent: the cosmic drama of the first man and the masses yielded to a transcendental romance with explicit liberationist message and racial hue."[96] Saul, citing Brian Ward's book *Just My Soul Responding* (1998), associated the change in Mingus' political attitude with the shifting context of the music industry. As blacks and whites started to listen to the same artists such as Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley and Sam Cooke, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw a crossover between white and black music in the new idiom of Rhythm and Blues, which reflected the predominance of the integrationist vision of Martin Luther King.[97]

However, although Saul is correct when he talks about the optimism in Mingus' views on political and social issues and his overwhelming need for love, his call for acceptance and love was not unconditional. It is difficult to say whether the move towards integration was partly a result of the breakthrough of Rhythm and Blues and Soul musicians to the white audience but it was still too early to talk about such integrationist motives for the business world of jazz. Despite his own realization and appreciation of Rhythm and Blues, Mingus was always skeptical about the power and manipulation of the music industry:

> I feel that society doesn't want the best - I mean, Madison Avenue, for instance, doesn't want the best to sell because they can't overcrowd the field. It would be a monopoly as to who made money if the more trained musicians, or the more serious people, were pushed one-half as much,

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[96] Scott Saul, *Jazz and the Making of the Sixties*, p.193.

[97] ibid, p.194. Ward writes, "The piebald black charts and playlists of black-oriented radio in the late 1950s and early 1960s reflected the pervasive, if guarded, optimism of a very different moment in black America's struggle for freedom," p.142.

> one-tenth as much... Plus they use other gimmicks: I was reading where people booed Little Richard. Well, see, I know there's a possibility that somebody could hired twenty guys to 'Boo,' and people are like ants or birds – they follow the leader... I mean, Madison Avenue doesn't fool me... if you're that strong a man to stick to your guns and believe in music the way you believe in it, they're *afraid* of you the same as they're afraid of Martin Luther King.[98]

Mingus' autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog* (1971), is another significant but problematic source for understanding how he challenged and criticized the American music industry's practices.[99] In his autobiography, Mingus developed his critique of the economy of the music industry through a series of imaginary dialogues with his friend, the trumpeter Fats Navarro, who is presented as a musician with a critical perspective on the music business. For instance, in one of these dialogues, Navarro tells Mingus, "Jazz is big business to the white man and you can't move without him. We just work-ants. He owns the magazine, agencies, record companies and all the joints that sell jazz to the public. If you won't sell out and try to fight they won't hire you and they give a bad picture of you with that false publicity."[100] This conversation expresses Mingus' resentment at being deprived of rights and control over his own intellectual

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[98] Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, p.103.

[99] Charles Mingus and Nel King, *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus* (1971), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975. Mingus originally entitled his autobiography *Half Yaller Nigger* or *Half Yaller Schitt-Colored Nigger*, addressing his multiracial ethnicity. He changed its title because "he was pretty sure that no white man would let him use any of those words in print," Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus, Mingus*, p.4. For further studies on jazz autobiographies see Krin Gabbard, "How Many Miles? Alternate Takes on the Jazz Life," *Thriving on a Riff*, p.184-203; Daniel Stein, "The Performance of Jazz Autobiography," *Improvisation in Jazz Writing*, SAMLA, 2003.
<<http://www.cwru.edu/affil/sce/Texts_2003/Stein.htm>>
Kevin McNeilly, "Charles Mingus Splits, or, All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 27:2 (1997): p.45-70; Christopher Harlos, "Jazz Autobiography: Theory, Practice, Politics," *Representing Jazz*, p.131-166; William H. Kenney III, "Negotiating the Color Line: Louis Armstrong's Autobiographies," *Jazz in Mind*, Jazz History, Culture, and Criticism Series, Ed. Reginald T. Buckner and Steven Weiland, Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991, p.38-59 and Kathy Ogren, "'Jazz isn't Just Me': Jazz Autobiographies as Performance Personas," *Jazz in Mind*, p.112-128.

[100] Charles Mingus and Nel King, *Beneath the Underdog*, p.188.

product as well as illustrating the relationship between the musicians and the promoters as the relationship between slaves and masters. Indeed, Mingus compares black jazz musicians to "sex slaves" because of the way they were exploited by the music industry: "Those people own the backbone and some of everything else in this country – even this chump Mingus's profession, which might be said to make whores out of musicians."[101]

In particular, his characterization of himself as a pimp and his more general employment of pimping as a metaphor in the autobiography is designed to underline the inequalities in the music industry. Although Mingus claimed that he actually operated as a pimp during the 1940s, it was never confirmed by any of his wives and friends. His last wife Sue Graham Mingus writes in her memoir that Mingus was in fact influenced by the pimps he saw when he was a kid in Watt and applied these memories, either real or imagined, to his autobiography.[102] Of course, Mingus' presentation of himself as a highly sexualized pimp in his autobiography can also be read as, in Porter's words, "a parody of Beat generation conceptualizations of African American musicians."[103] *Beneath the Underdog* indeed challenged the primitivist myth Mingus found endemic to jazz culture and can be seen as a response to Mailer's essay "The White Negro" in which African American men are represented as a fantasy of primitive sexuality.[104] Santoro also confirms that Mingus was aware of Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.[105]

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[101] ibid, p.267.
[102] Sue Graham Mingus, *Tonight at Noon: A Love Story*, Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002, p.66.
[103] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, p.139.
[104] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro."
[105] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, p.79.

However, Mingus' references to pimping in his autobiography also contain another level of meaning. As well as parodying or critiquing white attitudes, the use of pimping is also Mingus' reference to an important aspect of African American cultural practice, which Robin D. G. Kelly has referred to as the "pimp aesthetic." In his controversial *New York Times* article on Miles Davis, Kelly writes that, "Pimps in African-American culture and folklore are more than violent exploiters of women. They are masters of style, from language and the stroll to the clothes and the wheels," adding that pimps have also been known for their "storytelling ability."[106] In a similar way, Mingus explained how it was stylish being a pimp: "They pose and twirl their watchchains and sport their new Cadillacs and Rollses and expensive tailored clothes. It was like the closest thing to one of our kind becoming president of USA."[107]

In another study, Cecil Brown offered a historical explanation for why the black pimp was significant for African American culture. Brown writes that during slavery, the black man watched the white man sexually abuse black woman without being able to do anything about it. After emancipation, the situation was reversed. Because most of the prostitutes needed to be protected against their clients as the courts refused to view prostitutes as legitimate victims, many African Americans were hired to live in brothels, providing physical protection and performing services such as repairing the house and serving the guests.

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[106] Robin D. G. Kelley, "Miles Davis: The Chameleon of Cool; A Jazz Genius in the Guise of a Hustler, *New York Times*, May 13, 2001. Billie Holiday described her prostitution, and Miles Davis, Louis Armstrong, and Jelly Roll Morton who claimed to have invented jazz, also recounted their pimping, see Philip Pastras, *Dead Man Blues: Jelly Roll Morton Way Out West*, Berkely and London: University of California Press, 2001, p.17; Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles*, p.376; Laurence Bergreen, *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life*, New York: Broadway Books, p.102; Billie Holiday and William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues*, New York: Doubleday, 1956, p.14 and David Yaffe, *Fascinating Rhythm*, p.150-183.

[107] Charles Mingus and Nel King, *Beneath the Underdog*, p.3.

Brown writes, "The black man had control of women, and the white man came to the black pimp for his satisfaction. The pimp looked on the white man, the "trick, as his "client," an inferior position in a business transaction."[108]

Although the pimp became a negative figure for whites, for most African American men the pimp developed into a hero, at least to the extent that he represented black success, and a certain sort of freedom. Indeed, Blaxploitation films such as Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) and Gordon Parks, Jr.'s *Superfly* (1972) transformed this African American cultural and folkloric character into a revolutionary one. Mingus, in an interview with Mike Dean, talked about his attraction to pimping as a way of life: "Well, that's like being a president. Because, first of all, you'd be abnormal to not like a Cadillac and Rolls-Royce, in Watts..."[109] However, though the status and the image of being a pimp was desirable for Mingus, he ultimately rejected it because the act of pimping required him to sacrifice other people's feelings and love, although this was a position where he could have controlled his commerce: "But I began to look at the human beings involved... if I send a girl into streets and tell her I love her, I got to live with myself. So a pimp is something I could never be."[110] In his autobiography, Mingus also writes, "To be a pimp, one would have to lose all feelings, all sensitivity, all love. One would have to die! Kill himself! Kill all feeling for others in order to live with himself."[111]

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[108] Cecil Brown, *Stagolee Shot Billy*, London: Harvard University Press, 2004, p.88-90.
[109] Originally in Interview with Mike Dean, BBC-TV, August, 1972, I cited in Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, p.44.
[110] ibid, p.44.
[111] Charles Mingus and Nel King, *Beneath the Underdog*, p.212.

This act of taking on the role of the pimp and then rejecting it seems to symbolize Mingus' own disgust at the traps of the American music industry. Although being a pimp was one of the most promising ways to reach economic wealth for black people, Mingus was aware that pimping was another indication of the Jim Crow economy similar to the way that the African American jazz musicians were exploited in the white music industry. As I argued earlier, Mingus tried to distance himself from the music business in establishing his own company. In 1964, Mingus said for his own label, the Jazz Workshop, that, "this will be the first American company to make a step to give justice to all employed."[112] Mingus challenged the inequality in music with this statement, even though many of his attempts ended in failure. In his autobiography, there is an important section where he writes about his fantasy of a revolution to be carried out by prostitutes:

> I wonder if I could hypnotize all the prostitutes of the world so they'd run into the streets nude to rape every man in sight! Whores, off with the clothes of our leaders! Today! All over the world! If they run cut off where their balls should be. Save this sick world, oh ye priceless whores.[113]

If the jazz musicians were the prostitutes, then pimps were the equivalent of the business entrepreneurs who abused the jazz musicians and took advantage of their intellectual properties. With this imagined *revolution*, the roles are indeed reversed. The prostitutes, who were exploited by the pimps, turn into revolutionaries who take control of the political and economical power. While Mingus' rejection of pimping overlapped with his earlier declaration, in which he refused to mistreat his employees who work for his record company, the revolution he envisaged for the prostitutes cannot be separated from his idea of

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[112] Nat Hentoff, liner notes to Jazz Artists Guild, *Newport Rebels* (Candid SMJ6187), 1960.
[113] Charles Mingus and Nel King, *Beneath the Underdog*, p.282.

establishing an independent power base that would handle his recordings as well as the other jazz musicians' albums and their distribution.

Of course, Mingus never wanted to destroy the commercial qualities of jazz music. Rather he only sought justice for the musicians who worked within the American industry. In 1964, *Playboy* magazine hosted a meeting of jazz composers, critics, and promoters. Nat Hentoff conducted the debate between Charles Mingus, Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, Dave Brubeck, Ralph J. Gleason, Gerry Mulligan, Stan Kenton, George Russell, and Gunther Schuller. The Summit captured the controversial mood of the era, ranging over subjects as diverse as racial authenticity, the Civil Rights movement, the Cold War, performance venues, jazz musicians' accountability, artistic innovation and segregation. During the summit, Mingus suggested that, "If musicians could get some economic power, they could make money and be artists at the same time."[114] He wanted to play his music to "the kids" and "the working people" rather than for "promoters who want to make money for themselves out of jazz."[115] He insisted that the government should support jazz. Mingus wished "the government was more hip at home, and would support it in America as they promoted it overseas," foreshadowing the establishment of the Jazz at Lincoln Center (though he probably did not envisage it in the form of Marsalis' management).[116] While Ulanov and Feather, the chief proponents of "Crow Jim," were mostly concerned with reverse racism in the jazz world, Mingus tried

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[114] Originally published in "The Playboy Panel: Jazz – Today and Tomorrow," *Playboy*, February, 1964, p.29-31, 34-38, 56, 58, 139-141, and reprinted in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
[115] Robert Walser, *Keeping Time*, p.278.
[116] ibid, p.278.

to draw attention back to the "Jim Crow" that existed in the jazz industry.[117]

> Well, until we start to lynching white people, there is no word that can mean the same as Jim Crow means. Until we own Bethlehem Steel and RCA Victor, plus Columbia Records and several other industries, the term Crow Jim has no meaning. And to use that term about those of us who say that this music is essentially Negro is inaccurate and unfeeling. Aren't you white man asking too much when you ask me to stop saying this is my music? Especially when you don't give me anything else?[118]

One may assume that Mingus, with this statement, foreshadowed the ideologies of the Black Power movement of the mid 1960s. Indeed, one of the major reasons the Black Power movement was dedicated to promoting Black ownership of Black cultural products was so that they could project a history that African Americans could feel proud of and that would in a sense restore both their historical and contemporary image for African Americans. However, in making this argument, although Mingus claims that jazz was still essentially an African American music, he suggested that genuine social integration was the only way to change inequalities. He was an integrationist rather than a separatist. He clearly refused the prevailing discourse of the time and engaged directly with those white critics who downplayed the effects of racism and economic inequality on the careers of African American jazz musicians.

Don McGlynn's documentary, *Charles Mingus: Triumph of the Underdog* (1997), begins with Mingus cursing his plight as an outsider: "I am Charles Mingus, half black man," he says, "not even white enough to pass for nothing but black. I am Charles Mingus, a famed jazzman, but not famed enough to

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[117] Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of the Encyclopedia of Jazz*, p.83-86.
[118] Robert Walser, ed. *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, p.289.

make a living in this society."[119] This statement was in fact the summary of Charles Mingus's complicated life and views. Mingus, by attempting to place his works at the center of American politics and rejecting the destructive segregationist order in the jazz industry, became a unique contributor to the American musical scene as well as the world's musical scene.

[119] Charles Mingus, *Triumph of the Underdog*, Dir. Don McGlynn, Shanachie Entertainment, 1997.

I want to say more on my horn than I ever could in ordinary speech.[1]

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to talk about Ken Burns' documentary, *Jazz*, which was broadcast on PBS in 2001 and released on DVD later that year with a five CD box set and a book. The documentary stands as Burns' most ambitious project and probably the most successful one as it had a significant public impact.[2] However, while Burns has produced what is probably the most visible representation of the history of jazz, the project has generated many questions, and demonstrates the continuing relevance of many of the concerns of this thesis regarding who has the power to represent jazz and tell its story.

This thesis has itself, implicitly and explicitly suggested a narrative of jazz in the period under examination, but it has also focused on the recurrent pattern of white critical debates and representation punctuated by various forms of African American expression (music, talk and writing). Here with Burns' film we have a new variation – an account narrated by an authoritative (black) voice (the actor

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[1] Eric Dolphy, Quoted from Robert Levin's liner notes to *Eric Dolphy In Europe, Vol. 1* (Prestige 7304).

[2] A *USA Today* article reported that halfway through the screening of the ten episode series, the sales of related merchandises had already reached fifteen million dollars. The documentary also gained between three and four million spectators for the whole nineteen hours. See "Ken Burns, the Brand: A Marketing Boomlet: Sales of Videos of Ken Burns's Documentaries, Companion Books and CDs Have Earned Over $600 Mil in Retail Revenue," *USA Today*, (31 January 2001) and Garry L. Hagberg, "On Representing Jazz: An Art Form in need of Understanding," *Philosophy and Literature* 26, (2002): 188-198.

Keith David), reading Burn's script, but with regular important interventions from a key African American jazz musician, Wynton Marsalis. Here then, we surely have a breakthrough and an advance on the situation described in my earlier chapters, but in fact there are still problems. To return to my film clip of Parker we could say that jazz is still not allowed to do the talking because it is made to fit a nationalist and ultimately conservative narrative.

Burns' narrative of jazz history has many ideological overtones. His construction of jazz as "America's music" and his argument that jazz musically embodies American ideals of democracy is closely related to Wynton Marsalis' prominence in the project. Burns asserted numerous times that jazz is "the purest expression of American democracy: a music built on individualism and compromise, independence and cooperation."[3] Of course, the choice of describing jazz as American or African American is perhaps inevitably an ideological one, and I have shown how the Black Arts Movement had offered an alternative prism for representing jazz during the 1960s and 1970s by positioning it as the embodiment of the black aesthetic rather than emphasizing its Americanness. Although Burns and Marsalis retain a deep commitment to the concern for race that is inspired by Amiri Baraka's music criticism in the first place (throughout *Jazz* is the story of race and race relations in the United States), the Black Arts writers, including Baraka, are not represented at all in the film, though many jazz scholars from different backgrounds are, such as Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch, Gary Giddins, and Nat Hentoff.[4] There is, therefore, a

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[3] *Jazz*, dir. Ken Burns, Florentine Films, 2000, 10 DVDs.

[4] Figures like Eric Lott, Ronald Radano, and Krin Gabbard, who might also challenge Burns' representation of jazz, are left out of the documentary, and perhaps more significant for my

degree of effacement, going on, despite the fact that, as Anderson writes, "Wynton Marsalis has benefited more than he or the jazz establishment cares to admit from the efforts of black nationalists such as Baraka... to disrupt traditional interpretations of jazz and its place in American culture."[5]

Jazz is particularly committed to documenting the biographies and talent of those commonly recognized as the music's masters. Radano writes, "repeatedly we are told that Armstrong, Ellington, Charlie Parker, Clifford Brown, and Sonny Rollins (but especially Armstrong and Ellington) are great without explaining the nature of that greatness. The greatness is simply there, for all of us to witness. They verge on saying, 'just listen! Can't you hear it?!'."[6] When the film attempts to explain their "greatness," Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, who are indeed the pivotal points of the documentary, are continuously compared to the classical musicians in terms of their musical creativity. Armstrong is directly compared to Bach repeatedly, and Ellington to Mozart and Stravinsky. Further, Ellington is celebrated as a musician who "erased the color line between jazz and classical music." However, it is a strange notion to explain the seed of African American creativity within the context of European-based classical standards of judgment. While Burns claims to present jazz within the context of an African American cultural tradition at the very beginning of the documentary, he repeatedly compares jazz musicians to European classical composers.

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argument so is Amiri Baraka, as well as many jazz musicians themselves who could argue their own case eloquently.

[5] Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*, p.198.

[6] Ronald M. Radano, "Myth Today: The Color of Ken Burns Jazz," *Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noir* 3:3 (2001): 48.

In his preface to the 460-page book of the documentary, Burns writes, "our study of jazz offers the explosive hypothesis that those who have had the peculiar experience of being unfree in a free land might actually be at the center of our history."[7] However, Burns does not really tell us what this "peculiar experience of being unfree" in America is, while only implying that racism can be overcome simply by the determination of a "strong individual." As Charles Hersch writes, "racism is portrayed by the narrative, but only as an obstacle overcome by strong individuals."[8] Although some commentators have criticized the documentary for politicizing jazz by overemphasizing race, *Jazz*, on the contrary, minimizes the structural significance of race and rejects the political meaning of the music altogether. To give an example, like America itself, Burns argues, jazz took the voices of various people (Creole, black, white, rich, poor, etc.) and synthesized them into America.[9] However, Burns sees only one sort of political implication related to music, that of ultimate consensus and, thus, minimizes the continuing role of race in jazz culture. Instead of seeing the history of jazz as a reflection of American democracy, one might also perceive it as a critique of that myth, stressing the African American quest for a freedom and equality which have *not* been delivered under American democracy. Therefore we can only accept Burns and Marsalis' argument on the relationship between jazz and democracy, if we acknowledge jazz as the soundtrack of the very paradoxes and contradictions underlying American democracy and its

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[7] Indeed, jazz, in the view of Wynton Marsalis, is what "democracy is all about." See, Garry L. Hagberg, "On Representing Jazz: An Art Form in Need of Understanding," *Philosophy and Literature* 26, (2002): 188-198 for a critique of representing jazz as reflection of an idealized American democracy.

[8] Charles Hersch, "America Without Dissonance: Ken Burns's *Jazz*, *Polity* Volume XXXIV, No.1, (Fall, 2001): 110.

[9] ibid, p.110. See also Vivien Ellen Rose and Julie Corley, "A Trademark Approach to the Part: Ken Burns, the Historical Profession, and Assessing Popular Presentations of the Past" in *The Public Historian*, Vol.25, No.3, (Summer, 2003: 49-59.

failing promises of *freedom*, and this would involve presenting a continuing flux rather than celebrating a finished story and an achieved (American) synthesis.

In *Jazz*, Burns and Marsalis champion Duke Ellington (one of the strong individuals in the documentary) as a symbol of their "idealized" America, and employ his image throughout the documentary. Burns quotes Ellington:

> I contend, Duke Ellington once said, that 'the Negro is the creative voice of America, is creative America, and it was a happy day... when the first unhappy slave landed on its shores.' Ellington saw as clearly as anyone that African American history is not at the periphery of our culture but at the center of it, the ironies and paradoxes of which helped to create jazz in the first place and which suggest the redemptive future possibilities of this great but flawed republic for all of us.[10]

Burns simply minimizes that side of Ellington which rejected the term jazz in favor of "Negro" music. Indeed, Ellington also asserted that, "our music is always intended to be definitely and purely racial."[11] Although Ellington himself was inconsistent, sometimes calling his music "Negro" and other times using the term jazz to describe his music (he often labeled his music "truly yours"), he literally used his music to demonstrate the African American struggle to achieve identity. Playing a dissonant chord on the piano, Ellington said in an interview: "That's the Negro's life. Hear that chord. That's us. *Dissonance is our way of life in America. We are something apart, yet an integral part.*"[12]

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[10] *Jazz*, dir. Ken Burns.
[11] Duke Ellington, "Duke Says Swing Is Stagnant," p.135.
[12] Quoted in Ajay Heble, *Landing on the Wrong Notes: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice*, New York and London: Routledge, 2000, p.20 [emphasis added].

In his *Times* review of the documentary, Ben Ratliff articulates perhaps the strongest rejection of Burns' narrative:

> The film's heroes of the last 40 years are Dexter Gordon... and, of course, Wynton Marsalis. The "avant-garde'" is summed up by bits about the Art Ensemble of Chicago, which is almost ridiculed by the process of editing, and Cecil Taylor, the only musician in the film to be disrespected by one of its talking heads.[13]

The final episode, "A Masterpiece by Midnight," skims over a wide range of jazz styles from 1960 to 2000 in its argument, and while the nine episodes (seventeen and one-half hours) cover the first half of the century, such styles as hard bop, free jazz, and fusion are compressed in one segment. While Burns discusses the proto-jazz trumpeter Buddy Bolden vividly, talking about his musical innovations as if there were any recordings of him (there are no recordings of Bolden, just conflicting accounts and one photograph), Charles Mingus appears in the film for only two and a half minutes in the final episode.[14] In this segment, Burns, while acknowledging the importance of Mingus, who is presented as the figure who ranks up there with Duke Ellington as one of jazz's greatest composers, gives continuing coverage to the classicism of Ellington and Armstrong. Burns does not explain why he is a great composer, or anything about the development of his unique compositional style. In this short segment, while acknowledging only two of his compositions (one of them is "Fables of Faubus" that I discussed in Chapter 5), Mingus is simply represented in terms of his well known stereotyped image, jazz's angry man. Indeed, in compositions like "Pithecanthropus Erectus," he did use dissonance

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[13] Ben Ratliff, "Fixing, for Now, the Image of Jazz," *The New York Times*, (January 7, 2001) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/07/arts/fixing-for-now-the-image-of-jazz.html>> Ratliff refers to the scene where Cecil Taylor plays one of his compositions, the voice-over says, "Cecil Taylor once said that since he prepared for his concerts, the audience should prepare too." The film straightaway cuts to Bradford Marsalis, who remarks, "That's a total self-indulgent bullshit, as far as, I'm concerned." (Episode 10: 24:00-24:19).

[14] Burns does not mention Sonny Rollins's *Freedom Suite* in the documentary at all.

to portray anger and conflict over American racism, but Burns' documentary, despite the fact that it claims to tell the story of race and race relations in the United States, ironically, does not choose to reveal how Mingus used his music to criticize inequality and to create alternatives that interrupt racial hierarchies. Instead, Mingus's role as a social activist through his music vanishes.

Burns' documentary builds a case for free jazz as an anti-musical movement in the history of jazz,[15] and in the final part of the last episode, Marsalis can therefore be presented as a hero, who saves jazz from "the catastrophe of free radicalism, restoring it to its prior swing-inflected glory."[16] Indeed, today many conservative jazz critics pay little attention to free jazz, as most do not approve of its untraditional techniques, and would rather have it not considered jazz at all, seeing it rather as the anti-jazz.[17] Free jazz falls outside of the periphery of Marsalis' jazz canon – "I've talked to Ornette about his notion of free jazz. I don't understand it. I think it's chaos."[18] According to Marsalis, free jazz is chaos and chaos is "always out there; it's something you can get from any fifty kids in a bandroom."[19]

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[15] Steven F. Pond, "Jamming the Reception: Ken Burns, *Jazz*, and the Problem of 'American Music," *Notes*, Vol. 60, No.1, (September 2003): 11-45.
[16] Ronald M. Radano, "Myth Today," p.48. In the abstract to episode 10, we find "Both Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington pass away during the 1970s, and to some, jazz seems to die with them. But just when things seem most desperate, Dexter Gordon returns from Europe, and proves that there is still an audience for mainstream jazz, and a new generation of musicians, led by the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, emerges, eager to express themselves within the music's great generation.
[17] Jekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz*, p.31.
[18] Cited in Gregory V. Thomas, "The Canonization of Jazz and Afro-American Literature," *Callaloo* 25.1, 2002, p.297.
[19] ibid

Of course, Marsalis is aware that there is a great difference between the sounds "you can get from any fifty kids in a bandroom" and the sounds he hears from Coleman's music, and must be aware that most of the free jazz musicians define their music within the jazz tradition that Marsalis has celebrated and consolidated since the 1990s. For example, in a 1968 interview, Archie Shepp told Nat Hentoff that, "We all need deep relationships to the masters – Pres and Bird and the like – who led the way. That's one thing our group has, that sense of relationship."[20] DeVeaux writes, "Much more quickly than the apologists for bebop, [free jazz musicians] openly claimed the whole of tradition as the source of their legitimacy."[21] Therefore, we can explain, (assuming that Marsalis is aware of what free jazz really is), Marsalis' dismissal of free jazz in his account of the history of jazz, by citing Anderson, "since the canon is a product of personal judgments, its keepers dismissed the parts of jazz history they found distasteful."[22] Shepp, Coleman, Taylor and other free jazz musicians most certainly know the history of jazz and its traditions as well as Marsalis, since neither the jazz tradition nor the struggle over its possession is a recent creation.[23]

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[20] Nat Hentoff, "Archie Shepp: The Way Ahead" in *Giants of Black Music*, p.119.
[21] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," p.502.
[22] Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music*, p.184.
[23] Here Baraka's importance should be mentioned again as he proposes a historical continuum within the African American musical tradition, representing Coleman, Coltrane and Taylor's music as "new shapes" to that black American musical tradition. See Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* p.104-112. Henry Louis Gates argued in *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988) that "Signifyin(g)" (the parenthetical 'g' is for differentiating the concept from the standard English one "Signifying"), narrative strategies that comment on tradition and revise enduring "tropes," in the manner of West African oral culture, dominate African American literary tradition. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. has proposed a similar vernacular theory of African American music, one that insists on the "compelling cultural and musical continuity... between all the musical genres of the black cultural experience." So this means that African American music almost has to be aware of tradition even at its most innovative form. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music*, p.10. For further discussion see John P. Murphy, "Jazz Improvisation: The Joy of Influence," *The Black Perspective in Music*, Vol.18, No.1\2, (1990): 7-19 and Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Ring Shout! Literary Studies,

Indeed, one instrument of this reconstruction has been the activities of the Lincoln Art Center. Wynton Marsalis along with Albert Murray, and Stanley Crouch have largely concurred on how to tell jazz history in recent years. They have been labeled "neoclassicists" because they contend that "true" jazz consists mainly of the styles that developed up to the time of the 1960s. DeVeaux writes,

> What distinguishes the neoclassicist attitude is not so much its habit of retrospection, but rather its heavy-handed attempt to regulate the music of the present through an idealized representation of the past. History is a roll call for past masters, from King Oliver to Thelonious Monk, and the responsibility of the modern musician is to create music that lives up to and extends this legacy. All else – free jazz and fusion alike – is falsity and charlatanism."[24]

There is an irony in the fact that they can also be seen as black nationalists, in that their canon is almost exclusively black, and they have been criticized for this, even though they may seem light years from the Black Aesthetic of the 1960s. The neoclassicist attitude on jazz is far from new as the Lincoln Art Center's modern jazz establishment is in many ways a product of the previous *jazz wars* (what is or what is not jazz music), which are discussed in the previous chapters. Indeed the most visible battle of the *jazz wars* was fought over Burns' documentary, which kept closely to the Murray/Crouch line, since Murray and Crouch are both deeply influential on Marsalis' thinking. They both support Ralph Ellison's stance, representing jazz as a form of art and a key metaphor for American culture, throughout which African American experience is diffused.[25] Ellison is well known for his dislike of free jazz, and this openly in

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Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry," *Black Music Research Journal,* Vol.22, (2002): 49-70.

[24] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," p.504.

[25] Ellison and Murray placed African American culture, specifically the blues and jazz, at the centre of American morality and history to demonstrate the universal relevance of their experience, and Marsalis follows this line of argument. In a 1990 *Callaloo* interview, when asked his views on the black aesthetic Marsalis rejected it "No, I think that the question is how can we incorporate the achievement of Afro-Americans into the American aesthetic." Judith Tick with Paul Beaudo, in *Music in the USA: A Documentary Companion*, Oxford and New

his 1958 letter to Murray: "These cats have gotten lost, man. They're trying to get hold to something by fucking up the blues, but some of them don't even know the difference between a blues and a spiritual."[26] In fact Marsalis is decidedly Ellisonian in his attitude when rejecting free jazz: "[free jazz musicians] don't really deal with music from a technical standpoint at all. So the level of sophistication that you hear in Louis Armstrong's playing you'll never hear in avant-garde style."[27] However, the reasons for Marsalis' disapproval of free jazz lie not only in its unconventional technique but also in its militant rhetoric of race, as free jazz is often associated with the Black Nationalist politics of the 1960s. In other words, free jazz is entirely missed by Marsalis, most probably, because it complicates his narrative of jazz as a national form committed to idealized versions of democracy and freedom.

Marsalis' own credibility as a formidable classical performer and recording musician played an important role in helping to legitimize jazz in the eyes of the music conservatories. Marsalis' attempts to put jazz on an equal *social standing* with Western classical music has been recognized with prestigious awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for composition in 1997.[28] And the museumification of the jazz tradition, which Marsalis, Murray and Crouch implicitly advocated, was also extremely important in terms of raising awareness of its significance.

York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.769. For a critique of Ellison and Murray's approach, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "King of Cats," *The New Yorker* (08.April.1996): 70-76. Gates writes, "In Murray's hands, integration wasn't an act of accommodation but an act of introjection. Indeed, at the heart of Murray and Ellison's joint enterprise was perhaps the most breathtaking act of cultural chutzpah since Columbus claimed it all for Isabella. In its bluntest form, their assertion was that the truest Americans were black Americans," p.70.

[26] Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray*, ed. Albert Murray and John F. Callahan, New York: Vintage Books, 2001, p.193.

[27] Cited in Gregory V. Thomas, "The Canonization of Jazz," p.297.

[28] In 1997 Marsalis became the first jazz musician to win the Pulitzer Prize in music for his album, *Blood on the Fields*, on the subject of slavery.

However, the Lincoln Art Center's educational establishment remains fixated on training students mostly in the New Orleans/swing/bebop-based musical vocabularies that prevailed for a limited period of jazz history, excluding practically everything else.[29] Marsalis does not illuminate the standpoint of many of the current generation of players who tend to see upholding jazz tradition and respecting free jazz as well as fusion as non-contradictory.

Since J.A. Rogers wrote his essay on jazz in 1925, critics, scholars, musicians and fans from different cultural and ideological backgrounds have waded into different jazz wars, debating *what jazz really is and whose music it is* and the interpretations of these commentators and their ideologies are always important in our understanding of jazz. Archie Shepp said in 1968, "The underlying symbolism of jazz has always been black, and so have been the great innovators." But he added that it is the music for *anybody*, "if they're honest enough to receive it." Shepp explained what he meant by the honesty: "It's an honesty that's necessary not only in jazz, but with regard to the most crucial problem in America – the racial problem."[30]

This thesis has explored the ways in which the story of jazz in the period has been told within a situation of social inequality, in which the voices and views of musicians have often seemed less important or influential than their commentators. One of the main objections to Burns, the most recent example of this inequality of the power to represent, is his tendency to reduce jazz to just

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[29] Jazz at Lincoln Center's 2006-2007 season did finally include a concert called "Fusion Revolution" featuring Joe Zawinul, one of the key figures in Miles Davis's Jazz-rock fusion period and co-founder (with tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter) of the particularly popular fusion band Weather Report, a band that went unmentioned in Burns' film.

[30] Nat Hentoff, "Archie Shepp: The Way Ahead," p.120.

one countervailing story, so perhaps to counter this we can take an example or model from the actual practice of jazz musicians, and consider the importance of improvisation, interplay and dialogue. To achieve this jazz musicians, importantly, need to be good and responsive listeners, as well as jazz 'talkers,' and it is perhaps more attention to the dialogue and listening that take place in jazz that will allow us to tell a more complex and nuanced story than that provided by Burns.

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